

# UNHCR MOROCCO

Responding to the protection needs of an increasing number of refugees and asylum seekers in [Morocco](#).

## KEY FIGURES

As of 1 March 2022



**18,248** Persons of Concern registered with UNHCR



**9,342** Refugees

**8,906** Asylum seekers



**\$9.5 million** required to respond to protection needs in Morocco  
Morocco is currently **12%** funded

The number of people under UNHCR's mandate in Morocco increased by 87% since the beginning of the pandemic. UNHCR requires USD 9.5 million to respond to the protection needs of refugees and asylum seekers in Morocco.



Diane, refugee from Central African Republic with her two kids in Rabat, Morocco. Photo: ©M'hammed Kilito



## OPERATIONAL CONTEXT

In 2018 and 2019, the Western Mediterranean route overtook the Central Mediterranean route as the first entry point to Europe. The route through the Canary Islands has also been increasingly used to reach Europe since 2020. In response, Morocco has worked towards reducing the number of illegal departures from its coasts towards Europe and dismantling smuggling and human trafficking networks. While Morocco remains a place of transit, trends confirm that it is also gradually becoming a destination for refugees and asylum seekers.

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, UNHCR's population of concern has been growing rapidly with a significant increase of socio-economic vulnerability and protection needs. **Between January 2020 and 31 December 2021, the number of people under UNHCR's mandate in Morocco nearly doubled from 9,756 refugees and asylum-seekers to 18,248.** In two years, the number of refugees increased by 40% while the overall number of asylum seekers has almost tripled. Refugees originate primarily from Syria (54%), other Middle Eastern countries (16% - Yemen, Iraq and Palestine) and sub-Saharan countries (25% - Central African Republic, Ivory Coast, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sudan and South Sudan). With an average recognition rate of 20%, UNHCR has evaluated that by the end of 2022, the number of refugees in Morocco will increase from 9,756 to 11,000 with an increasing proportion of households needing humanitarian assistance.

The National Strategy for Immigration and Asylum (NSIA), launched in 2014, remains the national framework under which UNHCR operates to support the establishment of a national asylum system. Under the SNIA, refugees have been given facilitated access to national services such as education and primary health centers. Pending the adoption of the asylum law, UNHCR continues to register new asylum applications and conduct refugee status determination (RSD), before referring eligible cases to the Office of Refugees and Stateless Persons (BRA). In 2022, while closely working with national institutions and civil society to build capacity locally, UNHCR plans to continue delivering protection services to the increasing number of refugees in Morocco such as multipurpose cash assistance, support access to secondary and tertiary healthcare, education, socio-economic integration opportunities, referrals for victims of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), psychosocial assistance, and provision of legal support for the issuance of civil documentation.



Bassel, well-digger, Syrian refugee in Azrou, Morocco. Photo: ©M'hammed Kilito

## THE COVID-19 CRISIS

To this day, the COVID-19 pandemic has continued to impact Morocco. In September 2020, a study conducted by Morocco's High Commissioner for Planning (HCP) on the socio-economic impact of the crisis highlighted refugees' and asylum seekers' precarity in the first 4 months of the pandemic. Two years later, the crisis continues to disproportionately affect refugees and asylum seekers in Morocco. Most refugee households

live in urban settings and operate in the informal sector, aggravating the impact of the crisis on their access to livelihoods. In many instances, loss of livelihoods has increased food insecurity, ability to meet most basic needs and children's education. In 2022, considering the increasing number of refugees and asylum seekers in Morocco compounded by the protracted COVID-19 situation, protection needs will continue to grow.

## WORKING WITH PARTNERS

In addition to working very closely with its partners: Fondation Orient-Occident (FOO), Association Marocaine de Planification Familiale (AMPF), Organisation Marocaine des Droits Humains (OMDH), Association Marocaine d'Appui à la Promotion de la Petite Entreprise (AMAPPE) and Conseil National des Droits de l'Homme (CNDH), UNHCR also engages with a variety of national actors and civil society. In Oujda, Tangier, Casablanca and Fes-Meknes UNHCR has established Protection Working Groups (PWGs) to better identify and protect refugees

and asylum seekers. These groups are composed of civil society organizations (CSOs), institutional partners, regional human rights commissions and UN agencies. In 2021, these PWGs continued to operate both physically and remotely throughout the year which ensured timely referrals and efficient delivery of humanitarian assistance. UNHCR also works with up to 90 partners in Morocco including national and governmental institutions, academics, CSOs and international actors.

## OPERATIONAL RESPONSE AND FUNDING NEEDS

In line with the fluctuating epidemiologic situation, Morocco has taken for the last two years a set of public health measures which continue to evolve. A national health response plan which included all individuals living in Morocco was rapidly developed. In support of, and in complement to, the measures taken by the Government of Morocco, UNHCR has adapted its operational posture to respond to the increasing specific protection and assistance needs of refugees and

asylum seekers. In 2022, UNHCR and its partners will continue to work actively to ensure refugees' and asylum seekers' continuous access to services both physically and remotely. UNHCR's response plan will continue to support the implementation of the National Strategy for Immigration and Asylum in the spirit of the Global Compact on Refugees and in view of the second Global Refugee Forum in 2023.

### ■ Access to asylum procedures

Albeit against the backdrop of a continuing pandemic situation, registration and Refugee Status Determination (RSD) procedures have been maintained throughout 2021, both in-person with prior appointment and remotely. In 2021, UNHCR registered 5,560 new asylum applications and conducted RSD for up to 1,000 asylum seekers.<sup>1</sup> UNHCR continued conducting missions throughout Morocco in order to renew UNHCR's asylum seeker and refugee certificates. All recognized cases are referred for review to the Bureau des Réfugiés et des Apatrides (BRA) in charge of issuance of national refugee cards. UNHCR participates in the Commission's hearings as an observer and introduces the cases. Hearings by the Commission were suspended at the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis and resumed in July 2021. Hence, only 74 refugee cases were reviewed by the BRA in 2021.

Significant challenges are being faced in terms of access to national documentation. The waiting period for asylum seekers to access registration and RSD has increased due to both the COVID-19 crisis and the increasing number of asylum seekers in Morocco (up to 8 months for vulnerable asylum seekers). A significant feature of this overall increase has been the registration in 2021 of up to 1,000 Sudanese asylum seekers, out of whom 850 were registered between June and December 2021, many with a high presumption of eligibility. UNHCR needs USD 544,000 to maintain registration and RSD capacity and ensure timely access to quality asylum procedures. Lack of funding and staffing capacity will lead to an increase of procedures waiting time, further delaying access to key protection services.

<sup>1</sup> All 2021 achievements will be verified as part of the 2021 Global Report process that will be concluded by mid-2022.

## ■ Health

With its medical partner AMPF, UNHCR facilitates the referral of refugees to public primary health care centers in which services are delivered free of charge. Through its medical programme, UNHCR ensures refugees' access to specialized healthcare services including mental health and psycho-social support (MHPSS). In 2021, the health program assisted over 6,365 refugees. Throughout the year, UNHCR and its medical partner adapted services to ensure continuous access to healthcare. Refugees with chronic illnesses were supplied with medicines in AMPF's centres or directly at their homes. In total, 7,684 primary consultations were carried out, along with 10,887 specialized medical consultations and over 600 psychological therapy sessions. The Government of Morocco reaffirmed in 2021 the inclusion of refugees,

migrants and asylum seekers in the vaccination campaign during a session of the Groupe de Travail Migration Asile (GTMA), co-chaired by UNHCR and IOM. UNHCR is working with national institutions and civil society to ensure the effective inclusion of refugees and asylum seekers. So far, UNHCR has verified the vaccination of 1,500 refugees. With the growing number of refugees in Morocco, the number of refugees with chronic illnesses (over 600 individuals) and overall medical needs have increased. In 2022, UNHCR needs USD 1,160,680 to provide refugees with adequate healthcare. Lack of funding will directly impact UNHCR's capacity to cover the costs of essential medical needs which will highly reduce refugees' well-being.

## ■ Cash assistance

UNHCR contributes to the basic needs of most vulnerable refugees (specific needs and socio-economic situation) through cash assistance based on assessments carried out with FOO. In 2021, more than 2,100 households amongst the most vulnerable benefited from financial assistance (up to 1000 families each month). In 2021, exceptionally and in a spirit of solidarity in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, every refugee registered with UNHCR—along with most vulnerable asylum seeker—benefited from COVID-19 cash assistance. Two

distributions were organized in May and December for over 4,753 families. In 2022, UNHCR needs to support an increasing number of refugee households with high socio-economic vulnerabilities. UNHCR requires USD 1,765,500 to cover the humanitarian needs of 1500 vulnerable refugees in Morocco. Lack of resources will lead to further prioritization and hundreds of refugees are at risk of not receiving essential cash assistance, including highly vulnerable refugees.

## ■ Education

Since the introduction of the National Strategy for Immigration and Asylum In 2013, refugees, asylum seekers and migrants have been given free access

rate of refugee children in primary school stood at 90 per cent, and 95 per cent in secondary school, for the academic year 2020/2021. In 2022 UNHCR will continue

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