

TUNISIA

31 January 2022

Key figures

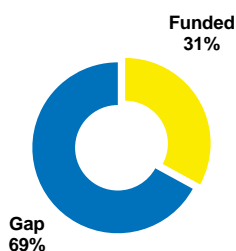
9,508 people of concern to UNHCR (asylum-seekers & refugees)

20 individuals profiled within mixed movements in 2022.

591 refugee and asylum-seeking households received cash assistance during January 2022.

Funding

USD **8.5 M** required in 2022



USD **2.6 M** received as of 8 February 2022

Operational Context

As of 31 January, Tunisia recorded over 900,000 cases of COVID-19, as the percentage of the population being fully vaccinated reached 60%, according to the Ministry of Health. Refugees and asylum seekers are included in the vaccination campaign and 344 of them were fully vaccinated at the end of 2021, as verified by UNHCR partner Tunisian Refugee Council (CTR), although the estimated number of refugees and asylum seekers having started vaccination programme is much higher (over 3,000 individuals). Soaring infection rates in recent weeks periodically hampered UNHCR's delivery of services during the month, though all activities have resumed as normal as of 24 January 2022.

As UNHCR began its 2022 programming year, partnership agreements were renewed with the Tunisian Refugee Council (CTR), the Arab Institute for Human Rights (AIHR) and the Tunisian Association for Management and Social Stability (TAMSS), covering the full spectrum of protection, assistance, advocacy and capacity-building activities. The 2022 programme will be implemented together with governmental and civil society entities, and in line with the objectives of the Global Compact on Refugees, building on achievements in 2021. The uncertain political landscape in both Tunisia and Libya are expected to further shape the operational context in Tunisia for the coming year.

Operational Response

During the month, UNHCR provided emergency assistance to 137 individuals rescued at sea from boats in distress departing from Libya. UNHCR assistance included core-relief items, counselling on asylum services and procedures, and profiling for persons seeking asylum in Tunisia.

Throughout 2021, UNHCR secured over 60 exemptions for overstay penalties issued against refugees and asylum-seekers who entered the country irregularly or had overstayed their visa. The exemption allowed refugees and asylum-seekers to regularize their presence in the country and access residency procedures. Moreover, ten refugees and asylum-seekers obtained residency permits in the second half of the year.

On 27 January, a mental health and psycho-social support (MHPSS) training was held for all CTR protection and MHPSS staff, with the support of specialized staff from UNHCR's MENA Regional Bureau. The training was specifically focused on preventing and responding to threats of self-harm/suicide by people of concern to UNHCR.

On 6 January, UNHCR conducted a group counselling session for newly arrived unaccompanied children hosted in Zeitoun shelter in Zarzis, in addition to visits and individual counselling conducted twice weekly. The session aimed at explaining asylum procedures in Tunisia, UNHCR's mandate and services available. UNHCR also worked to identify and follow-up on persons with specific needs and/or vulnerabilities in order inform on the operation's child protection response, which is based on social inclusion, healthy development and expression, in addition to building positive relations with the host community.

During the month, UNHCR launched a Child Protection Working Group covering the north of Tunisia, together with other national and international stakeholders active in the sector, in order to improve coordination and collaboration on the response to prevent child protection risks such as family separation, child labour, exploitation, gender-based violence and psychosocial distress. The first meeting of the new working group is due to take place in February 2022.

The Regional Development and Protection Programme for North Africa (RDPP NA) enters phase V (2022 – 2024)

Between 2019 - 2021, over 8,000 people have been registered with UNHCR Tunisia, a figure seven times higher than the total registered population at the end of 2018. The diversity of registered population also broadened, from 20 to 45 nationalities. The identification of people in need of international protection is complicated by the steady mixed population flow entering Tunisia along the Central Mediterranean migratory route. Additionally, many cases are particularly complex in nature with acute protection and safety concerns. As such, these represent a vital part of UNHCR protection work in the country.

Since 2019, **the Regional Development and Protection Programme for North Africa (RDPP NA) has been supporting UNHCR Tunisia in improving management of population flows and access to Refugee Status Determination (RSD)** in the context rapid increases in new arrivals seeking international protection.

In 2019 and 2020, 21 Tunisian officials—including members of parliament and local ministries—conducted study visits to Sweden, France and Greece, who host a growing number of refugees and asylum-seekers, in order to observe local asylum frameworks and management of population flows and learn from good practices relating to local inclusion of refugees.

Moreover, RDPP NA supported UNHCR Tunisia in building a team of local RSD officers to process asylum claims in an effective and timely manner, following a comprehensive training over several months. Thanks to their hard work and dedication, **1,857 overall asylum claims were processed**: 404 in 2019, 530 in 2020, and 923 in 2021.

At the start of Phase V of the programme (2022 – 2024), the support of RDPP NA continues to be vital for UNHCR Tunisia, given the increasing trend in arrivals which is likely to continue for the coming months. UNHCR intends to capitalize and build on the accomplishments from the previous phases and maintain its capacity to process asylum claims in a timely manner while ensuring high quality standards.

RDPP NA is funded by the European Union (DG HOME) and co-funded by the Italian Ministry of Interior, who also leads on a consortium of 13 EU member states participating in the programme. UNHCR Tunisia is grateful for their ongoing generous support.



Left: UNHCR staff conduct RSD interviews in Medenine in 2019, Right: Tunisian officials participate in a study visit to Greece in 2020 ©UNHCR

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