

Tunisia

September 2021

Refugees and asylum seekers in Tunisia **originate mainly from the Middle East, sub-Saharan and the horn of Africa**. Most reach Tunisia by land or air from neighbouring countries, and **within mixed movements** by sea or land to/from Libya and Algeria.

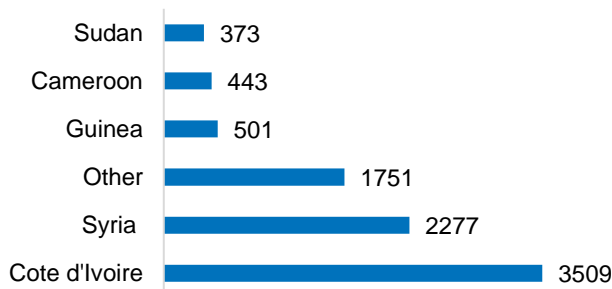
Tunisia has yet to adopt a national asylum system. UNHCR is the sole entity responsible for conducting registration and **Refugee Status Determination (RSD)**. The unpredictable political and socio-economic situation provides **limited durable solutions** for most refugees and asylum seekers.

UNHCR collaborates closely with national and local authorities to **improve access of refugees and asylum seekers to basic and social services**, and to ensure their socio-economic inclusion.

POPULATION OF CONCERN

by country of origin

Total: 8,854

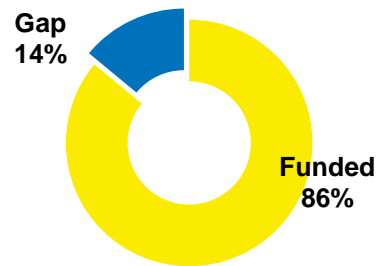


As of 30 September 2021

FUNDING (AS OF 28 SEPTEMBER 2021)

USD 9.6 M

requested for the Tunisia operation



COVID-19

Infection rates surged over the summer months in 2021, placing Tunisia among Africa's worst COVID-19 outbreaks. Tunisia's government adopted general prevention measures including curfew, limitation on movements and targeted lockdowns. A vaccination campaign began on 13 March 2021 and was accelerated during the summer. Over eight million vaccination doses have been administered as of 30 September 2021. Refugees, asylum seekers and migrants are being included in the vaccination campaign thanks to coordinated advocacy, and UNHCR is supporting them to register through the vaccination platform. So far, 164 refugees and asylum-seekers have been vaccinated. Moreover, UNHCR Tunisia continued its support to healthcare structures, government institutions, local authorities and civil society through distribution hygiene and medical material, as well as installation of Refugee Housing Units (36 so far) for patient screenings at hospitals. Moreover, remote protection services were established with increased capacity via telephone. Psychosocial support and communication with communities was scaled up across Tunisia, with five 24-hour hotlines and Facebook pages created. Presence of dedicated medical personnel was put in place in UNHCR-run shelters, and more than 7,500 hygiene kits and personal protective equipment were distributed in 2020/2021 to refugees and asylum-seekers.

Working with Partners

Together with the Tunisian Government, **UNHCR ensures international protection and the delivery of multi-sectorial assistance to persons of concern.** UNHCR works with the Ministries of Justice, Education, Health, Social Affairs, Women, Family, Childhood and the Elderly, and the Vocational Training and Employment (among others) to enable refugees and asylum seekers to enjoy essential rights and basic services, and to ensure their inclusion in social and economic programmes. In 2020, UNHCR signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Tunisian Ministry of Social Affairs and a Partnership Agreement with the Tunisian Union for Social Solidarity (UTSS), with the aim of enabling persons of concern to access social services. Moreover, UNHCR maintains positive collaboration with state entities at the local level—particularly in the south—where the highest number of refugees and asylum-seekers are hosted.

In the framework of the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR), UNHCR is strengthening collaboration with several municipalities hosting large numbers of refugees and asylum-seekers, in order to ensure their inclusion in the local services provision and facilitate integration in urban areas.

UNHCR collaborates closely with the UN Resident Coordinator and other UN Agencies, including IOM, UNICEF, WHO, WFP and humanitarian actors for a coordinated and effective response.

The following partners implement specific sectors of activities:

- **Arab Institute for Human Rights (AIHR)** – capacity building and advocacy on international protection and asylum issues, including in the context of mixed populations movements and legal assistance.
- **Tunisian Association for Management and Social Stability (TAMSS)** – livelihoods and self-reliance activities, support for accessing employment, including vocational training and wage employment to ensure socio-economic inclusion.
- **Tunisian Refugees Council (CTR)** – profiling of new arrivals; reception and shelter management; multi-sector assistance (food vouchers and non-food items, cash assistance); support for healthcare and education; individual case management and community-based protection; protection and prevention against gender-based violence (GBV); child protection; psychosocial support; assistance to persons with specific needs; counselling and recreational activities in the context of mixed population flows.

UNHCR is a member of the United Nations Country Team (UNCT) in Tunisia and contributes to the planning and operationalization of the next five-year Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) that constitutes the foundation of the UN's collaboration with the Tunisian Government for the period 2021 - 2025.

Operational context

UNHCR established its presence in Tunisia in 1963 following the Algerian war, and in 2011 signed an agreement with the Government to address the large number of refugees and asylum seekers coming from Libya. Since the end of 2018, the Operation has observed increased arrivals from West and the Horn of Africa. Starting from 2020, a growing number of Ivorian nationals who entered Tunisia by air—in possession of a three-month tourist visa—have approached UNHCR seeking international protection. At the same time, Tunisia hosts refugees and asylum-seekers fleeing conflicts across the Middle East, primarily from Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Palestine.

In the aftermath of Libya's 2011 revolution, the push for a more inclusive and equitable society emerged in Tunisia, primarily as a way to resolve current political and economic challenges. This need is at the core of the Government's Development Plan 2016 – 2020, and among the priorities for achieving the 2030 Agenda.

UNHCR activities are aligned with these objectives, aiming to establish a national protection system able to guarantee human rights and to achieve the socio-economic inclusion of refugees and asylum seekers.

Main Activities

Protection

- In the absence of a formal national asylum system, UNHCR carries out **registration of refugees and asylum-seekers** and **Refugee Status Determination (RSD)**, to ensure that persons of concern are identified and documented. This helps to prevent arbitrary arrest, detention and *refoulement*. In 2017, UNHCR introduced biometric enrolment to improve the quality of data collected and to avoid fraud.
- UNHCR conducts **extensive capacity-building programmes** with members of parliament, state agents, civil society, journalists, lawyers and judges **on the principles of international protection and refugee rights** in order to create a *de facto* protection space for persons of concern. Moreover, UNHCR trains border officials **on the principles of international protection and refugee rights in the context of mixed population movement**, in order to ensure that border management takes into consideration the protection needs of refugees and asylum-seekers.
- UNHCR prepared and signed a **manual of referral procedures and coordination** for refugees and asylum seekers who survived human rights abuses in collaboration with Human Rights National authorities.
- UNHCR uses a participatory approach to enhance **community-based protection**, building links between different service providers and increasing engagement with refugee communities. UNHCR's partner CTR works to develop safe spaces and promote communication with affected communities, in order to better identify and refer people with specific needs or at heightened protection risk (i.e. survivors of sexual and gender-based violence and unaccompanied or separated minors).
- UNHCR's partner AIHR provides **legal counselling and legal representation** to support refugees and asylum seekers. Legal assistance units are present in Tunis, Sfax, Sousse and Zarzis/Medenine.
- UNHCR collaborates with several academic institutions to **contribute to juridical research and debate** on issues related to asylum, forced displacement and statelessness. Moreover, UNHCR's partner AIHR developed a portal (asile.tn) collecting Arabic-language scientific and editorial resources on international protection.

Education

- Children who are refugees or asylum-seekers have **access to primary and secondary education**. To increase school attendance, UNHCR and partners provide a one-time education grant for students to help parents purchase books and school supplies.

Health

- Refugees and asylum-seekers have **access to basic public health facilities**. UNHCR and its partner CTR supports vulnerable asylum-seekers and refugees with the reimbursement of medical expenses and medicines for basic primary healthcare, chronic diseases, and emergency medical interventions. Through an agreement with the Ministry of Social Affairs, refugees and asylum seekers with disabilities and chronic diseases can access national protection systems initially designed to serve nationals only.

Food Security and Nutrition

- Refugees and asylum seekers hosted in shelters, as well as vulnerable refugees and asylum seekers living in urban and rural areas, receive **cash assistance to purchase food and other essential items**.

Shelter and Non-Food Items (NFIs)

- Vulnerable refugees and asylum-seekers have **access to temporary accommodation in shelters** while their refugee status determination procedure is processed.

Community Empowerment and Self-Reliance

- Along with partner TAMMS, UNHCR is enhancing refugees' self-reliance and livelihood opportunities by supporting access to tailored vocational training, micro-businesses, and employment with private companies.
- UNHCR works on the **socio-economic inclusion of refugees and asylum seekers, enhancing coordination among authorities.**

Emergency preparedness

- With the deterioration of the security situation in neighbouring Libya since mid-2019, the Government of Tunisia, UNHCR and IOM, in close collaboration with other UN Agencies, accelerated contingency planning efforts. However, no substantive influx from Libya was recorded during 2020 and 2021, likely due to the closure of the land border as a COVID-19 containment measure. UNHCR is working to reinforce the capacity of the Government of Tunisia at the border entry points.

Key priorities for 2021

- Pursue agreements with key ministries that would allow access of persons of concern to public services while supporting the **adoption of the draft national asylum law and** continuing capacity building to foster good practices in the interim.
- Continue **profiling, registering and RSD** to identify persons in need of international protection in the context of mixed population flows and pursuing solutions such as resettlement and complementary pathways.
- **Ensure refugee self-reliance** by supporting **access to livelihoods and basic services**, as well as prioritizing direct assistance to the most vulnerable.

Key challenges for 2021

- Comprehensive domestic legislation to establish a **national protection framework** for refugees and asylum-seekers is pending adoption, leaving refugees and asylum seekers in a fragile legal and socio-economic situation.
- Tunisia remains affected by the **volatile political and security environment in the region** and by the unpredictable national political and socio-economic situation. Increasing new arrivals are severely compromising the limited absorption capacity within the country.
- **Shelter capacity** to accommodate new arrivals remains a challenge considering the highly vulnerable profile of new arrivals.
- **Mixed movements to and from Tunisia** continue to put pressure on the limited capacity of the

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