

Spain

June-November 2019

Spain continues to be the third largest recipient of asylum applications in Europe this year. Since 1 January 2019, Spain received 107,542 asylum applications, a 110% increase compared to the same period. (Figures as of 31 November 2019)

Most applications were submitted by Venezuelans (37,313), followed by Colombians (25,949) and other persons originated from Central America (16,084 from Nicaragua, Honduras and El Salvador).

Among applicants originating from sub-Saharan African countries, Malians registered the highest numbers of applications (1,162, 80% increase compared to 2018).

Main Activities

Advocacy and External Relations

- During her first weeks in office, and after presenting her credentials to the Spanish authorities, the new **UNHCR Representative Sophie Muller**, paid visits to a wide range of high-level governmental officials, including the Minister of Interior, the Minister of Labour and Migration, the Spanish Ombudsperson, the Secretaries of State for Foreign Affairs, International Cooperation and Migration; as well as the Director of the Spanish Agency for Development Cooperation.



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- **UNHCR High Commissioner, Filippo Grandi**, participated in the international Conference “Peace without Borders: Religions and Cultures in Dialogue”, organized from 15 to 17 September by **Sant’ Egidio Community** and the Archdiocese of Madrid, and attended by around 300 religious leaders and experts from more than 80 countries. During the **opening ceremony** Grandi highlighted that, in order to effectively address global problems related to forced displacement, it is crucial to shift the focus from “walls and closed ports” towards a responsibility sharing perspective.

- **UNHCR signed a gap mapping agreement with the Ministry of Interior** aimed at jointly planning activities to identify solutions for current applications’ backlog and strengthening the asylum system, involving other actors as necessary. The agreement, that will run for an initial period of two years, showcases the scaled-up cooperation with the Spanish government authorities.

Access to territory

- In the context of the Representative's round of introductory meetings, Sophie Muller visited **Madrid Barajas Airport** to observe the situation of the reception facilities for asylum seekers. UNHCR regularly visits the airport to ensure access to asylum, monitors the quality and fairness of the procedures, examines and provides recommendations on the identification mechanisms and reception facilities, including medical care and child-friendly spaces. The Representative also travelled to the **Spanish autonomous city of Melilla** on a joint mission with the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Labour, Migrations and Social Security, to meet the local authorities, monitor the reception conditions, assess the challenges related to access to territory and asylum and visit the Migrant Temporary Stay Centre (CETI).



- **The first anniversary of UNHCR-CEAR project on Information Provision to Sea Arrivals** serves to reinvigorate the Agency's commitment to promote access to asylum for those in need. Since August 2018, in the framework of this project, UNHCR, in cooperation with its implementing partner Comisión Española de Atención al Refugiado (CEAR), provides information on international protection, and supports authorities to identify and address protection needs among those rescued at sea and transferred to the

Andalusian coast. In the first 13 months of the project, some 22,600 persons (over 70% of the arrivals to the Andalusian coast) have had access to relevant information. The majority were from Mali (almost 6,200 persons, increasingly from areas affected by the conflict), followed by Guineans (6,100), Ivorians (3,100) and Moroccans (3,000). Out of the total of persons informed, 86% were men and 14% women. While 12% reported to CEAR their willingness to seek asylum, only 2% obtained the accreditation document. Fear of being returned under Dublin regulation and lack of trust in an overwhelmed asylum system are among the factors explaining the gap between the expressions of will to claim asylum in Europe and effective registrations of the asylum claims.

- During the reporting period, UNHCR **monitored access, quality and fairness of the asylum procedure**, and continued supporting the work of the Asylum Office and the National Police in identifying cases in need of international protection, underscoring the importance of supporting those with specific needs. Consistent with **rising numbers of asylum applications** in the ordinary (or "in land") procedure, around 1,900 asylum applications were registered at **borders posts and migrant detention centres** (accelerated procedure) between June and September 2019, an 11% increase compared to the previous quarter. Most applications registered at **airports** were lodged by persons from southern and central America, primarily Venezuelans. Applications at **migrant detention centres** were mainly lodged by persons originating from Morocco and Algeria who arrived in Spain by sea. With regards to applications lodged at the **border post in Melilla**, Tunisia has become the main country of origin, shifting from Morocco in previous months. The numbers of applications of persons from Syria, Yemen and the State of Palestine have also significantly increased, representing a third of the applications registered in Melilla.
- In order to monitor access to an efficient asylum procedure and the quality of first interviews at the airport, detention centres and national police stations in **Barcelona**, UNHCR carried out a mission to the city in June. Against the backdrop of an asylum system under strain, with access to the procedure and reception system taking up to 4 months, UNHCR met representatives of the asylum NGOs and the Barcelona Bar Association and participated in a conference on LGBTI refugees organized by the University of Barcelona.

Persons with specific needs

- Given the growing number of asylum seekers and **unaccompanied minors who arrive to Melilla**, as well as the increasing difficulties some profiles face while trying to access the autonomous city, UNHCR has conducted participatory assessments and informative sessions to unaccompanied minors (aged 14-17) hosted at the child protection centers. The Office has continued to mediate in cases of unaccompanied and separated children with regional authorities in Melilla, advocating for the improvement of reception conditions and liaising with different authorities dealing with Dublin cases affecting asylum seeking children with family members in EU countries. In addition, UNHCR has organized an informative session on international protection with a group of children from Yemen, Syria, Palestine and Iraq, hosted at the centres for unaccompanied minors. Furthermore, trainings on International protection of children were organized in first reception centres for UASC in different locations in Andalusia.



- UNHCR has provided support to NGOs in cases of **family reunification** affecting persons with international protection in Spain and their families in the country of origin. To this end UNHCR Spain has successfully supported competent authorities on asylum and foreign affairs in the practice of DNA testing and coordinated actions with other UNHCR offices in Africa.
- In June 2019, UNHCR team in Melilla participated in a meeting with local authorities to enhance the coordination of all the actors involved in the procedure of detection, identification, referral and protection of **victims of trafficking of human beings**. In the presence of senior officials from the National Police and the Civil Guards, the Regional Attorney against SGBV and representatives of Melilla's Bar Association and NGOs, UNHCR discussed some of the gaps identified and highlighted the importance of identifying such profiles as well as their potential need of international protection.
- The fifth meeting of the **LGBTI Working Group coordinated by UNHCR Spain** was hosted at the Ministry of Labour, Migration and Social Security, bringing together 30 representatives from Ministries, civil society organizations and refugees. The meeting addressed the obstacles that LGBTI persons face when accessing the reception system and served to identify tools to address specific needs among LGBTI applicants to be considered for their transfer to a reception facility.



Among other activities, **in the framework of Pride celebrations in Spain**, UNHCR participated in several events, including in a Round Table on LGBTI refugees within the framework of the International Conference on Human Rights, a conference on trans asylum-seekers jointly organized by the Embassy of The Netherlands and the Spanish NGO Transexualia. In recognition of its support to LGBTI asylum-seekers and refugees in Spain and worldwide, UNHCR received, during Pride celebrations, the **Award Margarida Borrás**.

Resettlement and Complementary Pathways

- In June, the **Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for a Community based Sponsorship pilot program in Spain** was formally signed in Vitoria (Basque Country) between the Ministry for Labour, Migration and Social Security, the Basque Regional Government, UNHCR Spain, the Jesuits Platform in the Basque Country, and Caritas in the Basque Country. 29 refugees (5 Syrian families) were identified in the framework of the Spanish Resettlement Programme and placed in five different municipalities in the region, supported by local sponsoring groups and -at technical level- by community organisations. The signature of the MoU follows a two-year discussion and negotiation process, counting also on the support of the Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative (GRSI). Last July, UNHCR visited the Syrian families accompanied by local sponsoring groups, and in September an encounter was held with the participation of all stakeholders. This pilot is undergoing **real-time evaluation** and the development of specific tools will allow the replication of the model in other regions in Spain and an escalation to a national framework for Community based Sponsorship.
- 262 refugees arrived under the **National Resettlement program**, reaching a total of 848. Refugees were mainly Syrians (185) resettled from Jordan, Turkey and Gaza and, for the first time, a group of Iranian LGBTI cases (77) were resettled from Turkey to Spain.

Capacity Building activities

- UNHCR carried out extensive capacity building activities in Spain on different protection related issues addressed to all stakeholders. Among the most relevant ones, the office trained **border guards** on identification of protections needs and access to procedure in **Almería**; **police officers** conducting first asylum interviews in **Madrid**; and several **Bar Associations NGOs lawyers** in cities such as **Madrid, Cádiz, Granada and Melilla**.
- In the area of **integration**, UNHCR hosted two training sessions devoted to over 30 potential mentors taking part on the project **Befriending**, a volunteer program launched in 2015 and implemented by the local NGO Rescate, in cooperation with UNHCR and the National Association *Spain for UNHCR*. Its main objective is to promote the development of social support networks for refugees, facilitating their interaction with local communities.
- With a focus on the situation in **Ceuta and Melilla**, UNHCR, together with **EASO, Fundamental Rights Agency**, and the **Ministry of Labour, Migration, and Social Security**, conducted **two training sessions on special needs for staff working at Melilla's and Ceuta's Reception Centres**. Trainings covered basic concepts on international protection and access to asylum. They also aimed at addressing and identifying protection and specific needs and were an opportunity to conduct a joint assessment of the centres, therefore identifying some of the main protection gaps.
- In the framework of the "**Refugee Focal Point Volunteers**" program, launched by UNHCR Spain in August, a group of 4 Refugee Volunteers was trained on international protection by the Office. This program is a volunteer-pilot initiative aiming to establish regular two-way communication with persons of concern, enhancing community-based protection in Spain. Among other activities, Refugee Volunteers will assist UNHCR in passing on useful information to different refugee communities on how to access social services, education and employment opportunities, while promoting and supporting community engagement, resilience and refugee active participation in all spheres of public life. Likewise, UNHCR Spain has recently signed up in the "**Coursera for Refugees**" platform and is collaborating with the legal firm *DLA Piper* to implement a 9-week legal empowerment pro-bono program called "**Know Your Rights**", addressed to 25 asylum seekers and refugees.



Communications

- The **Japanese singer and UNHCR Goodwill Ambassador, Miyavi**, organized a “meet&greet” encounter with refugees after his concert in Barcelona in October. UNHCR Spain and “**Refugees Friendly**”, a social platform aiming at supporting refugees’ integration through cultural activities, facilitated this meeting with refugees and asylum seekers from countries such as Somalia, Ukraine, Colombia and Venezuela.



- UNHCR has showcased in this [video](#) the story of solidarity and courage of **Pascual Durá**. Mr. Durá, captain of the Spanish fishing boat Nuestra Madre Loreto, rescued 12 people close to Libya in late 2018. Two years earlier, in 2016, Pascual’s father, José Durá, also a fisherman, could proudly say he had saved the lives of over 100 refugees and migrants in the Mediterranean. In the video, that very much explains the meaning and value of solidarity, Pascual confesses “if it happens again, of course, I would do the same a thousand times over”.

Working with Partners

- UNHCR participated in the **International Session of the European Youth Parliament (EYP)** held in Valencia from 25th July to 4th August. The event brought together more than 300 young people from all over Europe. UNCHR Spain presented the #IBelong campaign, analysed the situation of Stateless children and shared views on the protection space in Spain and the Dublin Regulation. Furthermore, the Office sponsored the participation of three young refugees that contributed substantially to the event.



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LINKS

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