

Tunisia

February 2022

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/Algeria.

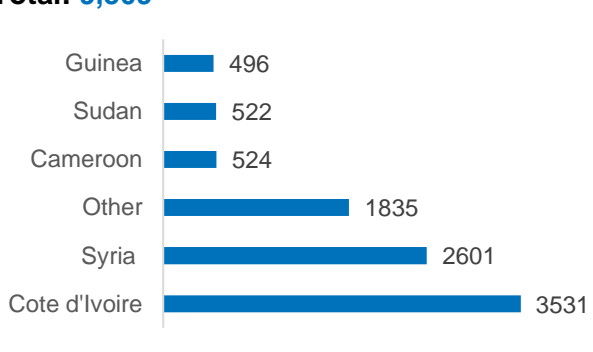
Tunisia has yet to adopt **a national asylum system**. UNHCR is the sole entity responsible for conducting registration and Refugee Status Determination (RSD). The unpredictable political and socio-economic situation provides **limited durable solutions** for most refugees and asylum-seekers.

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: 9,509

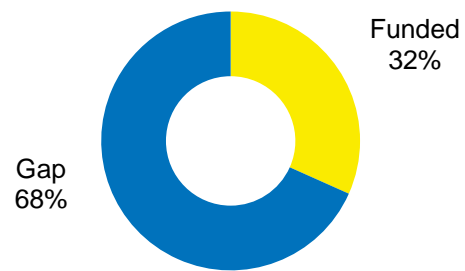


As of 28 February 2022

FUNDING (AS OF 01 MARCH 2022)

\$8.5 million

requested for the Tunisia operation



COVID – 19 IN TUNISIA

Total infections exceeded 960,000 during February 2022, ranking Tunisia among the most affected countries in Africa. Over 60% of the population is fully vaccinated. Refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants are included in the vaccination campaign thanks to coordinated advocacy, and UNHCR is supporting refugees and asylum-seekers in registering for the vaccine. **As of end 2021, 344 refugees and asylum-seekers were fully vaccinated** as verified by UNHCR partner Tunisian Refugee Council (CTR), although the estimated total number of is estimated to be much higher (over 3,000 individuals).

UNHCR Tunisia continues its support to healthcare structures, government institutions, local authorities and civil society through distributing hygiene and medical material, as well as installation of Refugee Housing Units (36 so far) for patient screening in hospitals and isolation of cases. Psychosocial support and communication with communities (CwC) continued to be provided for people of concern. Sessions on COVID-19 prevention methods and work sessions on access to health services were also organized. The presence of dedicated medical personnel was put in place in UNHCR-run shelters and hygiene kits and personal protective equipment is being distributed to refugees, asylum-seekers, and individuals rescued at sea.

Working with Partners

Together with the Tunisian Government, UNHCR ensures international protection and delivers **multi-sectoral assistance** to people of concern. UNHCR works with the Ministry of Justice; Ministry of Education; Ministry of Health; Ministry of Social Affairs; Ministry of Women, Family, Childhood and the Elderly; and the Ministry of Vocational Training and Employment (among others) to enable refugees and asylum-seekers to enjoy essential rights and basic services, and to allow for 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 people of concern to access social services. Moreover, UNHCR maintains positive collaboration with state entities at the local level—namely in southern Tunisia—where the highest number of refugees and asylum-seekers are hosted.

In the framework of the **Global Compact on Refugees**, UNHCR is strengthening his collaboration with several municipalities hosting large numbers of refugees and asylum-seekers, to ensure their inclusion in the local services and facilitate their 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 and advice.
- **Tunisian Association for Management and Social Stability (TAMSS)** – 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 to healthcare and education; individual case management and community-based protection; protection and prevention against gender-based violence (GBV); child protection; psychosocial support; assistance to people with specific needs; counselling and recreational activities in the context of mixed population flows.

UNHCR is a member of the UN 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 government of Tunisia during the period 2021 - 2025.

Operational context

UNHCR established its presence in Tunisia in 1963, 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, UNHCR Tunisia witnessed a **growing number of new arrivals from the west and horn of Africa**. Starting from 2020, an increasing number of Ivorian nationals who entered Tunisia by air and in possession of a three-months tourist visa approached UNHCR to seek international protection. At the same time, Tunisia hosts refugees and asylum-seekers fleeing conflict across the Middle East, primarily from Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Palestine.

In the aftermath of Libya's 2011's 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 encourage **social-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 people of concern to UNHCR 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 principles of international protection and refugee rights**, in order to create a de facto protection space for people of concern in the country. 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 refugee and asylum-seeker survivors of 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 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 judicial research and debate** on issues related to asylum, forced displacement and statelessness. Moreover, UNHCR's partner AIHR developed a portal (asylum-mena.org) that collects scientific and editorial resources on international protection in Arabic.

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 illnesses, and emergency medical interventions. Through an agreement with the Ministry of Social Affairs, refugees and asylum-seekers with disabilities and chronic illnesses 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 those 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 RSD procedures are processed.

Community Empowerment and Self-Reliance

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

Emergency preparedness

- With the deteriorating 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 also due to closure of the land border as a pandemic containment measure, but coordination is maintained to monitor the situation and adjust contingency planning as needed. UNHCR continues to reinforce the capacity of the Government of Tunisia at the border entry points
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- capacities of Tunisian authorities at border entry points.

Key priorities for 2022

- Pursue agreements with key ministries that would allow access of people 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, registration** and **RSD** to identify people in need of international protection in the context of mixed population flows. Delivering **dedicated protection services to the most vulnerable**, namely survivors of torture and sexual violence, single parents, LGBTQI individuals, and unaccompanied children.
- **Promote refugees' self-reliance** by supporting **access to livelihoods** and basic services, as well as prioritizing direct assistance to the most vulnerable.
- **Strengthening partnership** with private institutions and advocating for engagement of a wider range of actors in ensure protection of refugees and asylum-seekers.

Key challenges for 2022

- 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**, namely in neighbouring Libya. New arrivals are severely compromising the limited absorption capacity within the country.
- **The socio-economic situation of refugees and asylum-seekers** is affected by the deterioration of the economic situation in the country due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

- **Mixed movements to and from Tunisia** continue to put pressure on the limited capacity of the operation. The number of people awaiting registration and RSD continues to grow despite enhanced staffing capacity.

External / Donors Relations

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