



IN SEARCH OF DIGNITY AND HOPE

Implications of underfunding in Tunisia

January 2024

13,415
REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS
REGISTERED WITH UNHCR IN
TUNISIA

~ 800%
INCREASE IN INDIVIDUALS
REGISTERED SINCE DECEMBER
2022

70%
FROM SUDAN, SYRIA, ERYTHRA,
ERITREA, SOMALIA, DRC, LIBYA

9%
OF NEW ARRIVALS ARE
UNACCOMPANIED
CHILDREN

48
NATIONALITIES
REPRESENTED, UP FROM
20 IN 2022

\$9.2 MILLION
FINANCIAL REQUIREMENTS 2024

Amidst increased mixed and onward movements to and through Tunisia along dangerous journeys, humanitarian needs are rapidly growing. A total of 13,415 individuals are currently registered with UNHCR in Tunisia, including more than 7,800 new asylum-seekers recorded in 2023, compared to 871 in 2022.

UNHCR profiling exercises consistently show that up to 60% of refugees and asylum-seekers arriving to Tunisia have urgent and acute needs after surviving dire and dangerous circumstances. Most come from countries for which UNHCR has issued non-return advisories (e.g., Sudan, Syria, Eritrea, Somalia), including a high proportion of unaccompanied minors. People on the move often lack access to food, healthcare, shelter, education, information, documentation, and opportunities for self-reliance.

Despite the generosity of donors, funding shortfalls have been the operational bottleneck for a range of critical UNHCR services. If funds are not provided, UNHCR and partner staff offering vital assistance and essential services would not be able to meet the most acute needs. Cuts would be inevitable leaving refugees and asylum-seekers without sufficient protection services and assistance.

Meanwhile, the socio-economic costs of hosting refugees and asylum-seekers on local communities and systems are becoming increasingly heavy. UNHCR is concerned about adding to this burden, particularly at a time when the situation in the sub-region is deteriorating and creating destabilising factors.

This note presents an overview of the most critical funding gaps and the potential consequences for vulnerable populations if additional funds are not secured in 2024. UNHCR activities outlined here are part of the comprehensive needs presented in the [Global Appeal](#) and can be implemented by the end of 2024 if additional funding support is timely received.



Total funding shortfall in 2024: \$2.8 million

Focused sectors

Activities and beneficiaries impacted by underfunding



Case management

Multi-disciplinary individual caring (651 individuals including those at heightened risk e.g., women at risk, GBV survivors, LGBTQI+)



Child protection

Specialized child protection services including best interest determination for unaccompanied and separated minors (250 children)



Community engagement

Community outreach programme (40 refugees and host community members)



Healthcare

Coverage of health care fees, life-saving medical consultations and treatments, and individual accompaniment (1,600 refugees and asylum-seekers)



Housing

Temporary safe and dignified accommodation (473 refugees and asylum-seekers)



Multipurpose cash-based assistance

Financial cash and voucher assistance to cover basic needs (10,000 refugees and asylum seekers)



Resettlement and legal pathways

Third country resettlement for the most vulnerable refugees (300 refugees) + complementary pathways of admission in third countries (50 individuals)



Self-reliance

Job placement and counselling, support to micro-enterprises, vocational training and skills training opportunities (100 refugees and asylum-seekers)



CASE MANAGEMENT

A shortage of resources will have devastating impacts for 651 individuals at heightened risk who arrived in Tunisia exhausted, after long journeys across several countries. Disruptions in case management services will hit the most vulnerable, namely women-at-risk, LGBTQI+ people, survivors of gender-based violence, exposing them to physical and sexual abuse and exploitation and exacerbating pre-existing forms of severe trauma and psychological suffering (e.g., acute anxiety, depression, frequent insomnia). These groups already have higher baseline levels of mental health problems, especially those coming from war-torn countries and those who fell into the grip of human traffickers. Reductions in the number of case worker staff will result in at-risk people not receiving home monitoring visits, gaps in the referrals to specialised services and follow up, and the capacity to regularly monitor the socio-economic conditions of families and individuals to inform their inclusion in regular MPCA program.



CHILD PROTECTION

Current funds are already forcing UNHCR to prioritise among the most vulnerable, with the inability to cover all registered unaccompanied children with shelter, assistance, and case management. Further decrease of funds will further put at risk the safety and wellbeing of children, including 1,200 unaccompanied children in 2023 (up from 120 in 2022). As many live in the open and have no means of survival, lack of funding will have dreadful effects, exposing children to harm such as trafficking or violence and contributing to a greater likelihood of children engaging in labour and other protection risks. It also means increased learning losses and dropouts alongside diminished opportunities for continued education and training. While only 225 children are enrolled in primary and secondary school, additional funding is needed to establish a community-based care arrangement programme, including alternative education such as vocational and skills training for youth, increase the capacity to monitor school attendance and respond to risks which might result in dropouts (e.g., violence, discrimination, bullying).



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Underfunding will result in rollbacks to maintain essential community outreach and communications initiatives providing orientation and information on rights and protection pathways. If fresh resources are not secured, a wide variety of on-line/digital outreach, in-person community meetings, distribution of printed information material, and one-to-one counselling will cease, creating confusion for both refugees and members of the local community regarding the criteria for refugee status and services available. Proactive measures to prevent fraud and/or the sexual abuse and exploitation of refugees will also not be reinforced due to lack of funding.



HEALTHCARE

Fundings gaps will create severe challenges to support access to primary and secondary health including priority medical referrals, cash-based support for life-saving medical interventions and treatments, management of chronic and non-communicable diseases. Lack of funding will directly impact UNHCR's ability to reach the planned target of 1,600 individuals who have suffered abuse and outright violence while on the move. It will limit UNHCR's support to only emergency cases. It will affect the wellbeing of individuals with treatable medical conditions, expose those most in need of medical care to life-threatening situations and increase suffering from existing forms of medical condition including chronic disease, difficult pregnancy, malnutrition, mental illness. Primary health care is the entry point to all health systems for refugees and asylum-seekers in Tunisia and is essential to be maintained.



HOUSING

As the demand for safe and sustainable housing conditions is rising, lack of resources will leave 90% of people who approach UNHCR seeking international protection without support on cash for rent or shelter rehabilitation. This will result in increased risk of eviction and/or deteriorating housing conditions. Lacking stable, safe, and functional housing is a 'force multiplier,' increasing the tensions with host communities and authorities, aggravating the needs of displaced people even further, while also making those needs more difficult and expensive to address. While UNHCR and partners run five temporary and safe shelters, namely three in Tunis and two in Medenine, they are operating at maximum capacity, which cannot be further expanded without compromising the safety and dignity of shelter residents.



MULTI-PURPOSE CASH-BASED AND VOUCHERS

While many depend entirely on UNHCR cash and vouchers assistance to survive, the programme will be scaled-back or cancelled if more funding is not forthcoming soon. Cash and vouchers assistance has proven to be a lifeline support to ensuring that refugees and asylum-seekers are able to cover their basic needs (e.g., food, rent, hygiene). Currently, some 5,200 individuals receive exceptional cash, 620 receive regular cash, 380 receive cash-for-food, and 10,000 receive food vouchers. Underfunding will impede UNHCR's ability to deliver this vital aid, leading to detrimental outcomes such as reduced food intake, debt burden, child labour, survival sex and aggravating medical conditions. Without adequate funds, UNHCR will also have to reduce or stop its winterization assistance to vulnerable displaced people, which includes cash transfers and the distribution of relief items this winter.



THIRD COUNTRY RESETTLEMENT AND COMPLEMENTARY PATHWAYS

Lack of funding will considerably delay or put on hold the processing of 300 resettlement submissions and leave refugees at risk without third country solutions for an extended period of time. At the same time, investments in identifying suitable complementary pathways for admission for 50 refugees, through – for instance – labour or education mobility pilots, will not be possible without the needed resources to develop the right identification mechanisms and connections with third countries. Third country resettlement plays a key role in the overall protection strategy, as this is often the only practical or relevant durable solution for the most vulnerable members refugees.



RESILIENCE & SELF-RELIANCE

If the funding gap remains, at least 100 refugees and asylum seekers will miss out on job placement and job retention opportunities in companies guaranteeing decent employment in the formal sector. Also, refugee-led micro-businesses will not be able to access business management training and/or financial and technical services to support business continuation. Lack of funding will therefore threaten refugees' economic resilience and UNHCR and partners' capacity to galvanise private sector interest in recruiting refugees. These statistics represent people with dreams – people with hopes. People who deserve every chance at a better future.



Beyond additional funding, UNHCR Tunisia is also calling for donor flexibility when financial contributions are made available so that resources can be targeted to the sectors with the greatest needs. This is increasingly important given the unpredictable nature of the context and the variations in humanitarian needs.



A young refugee girl participates in the pilot digital training in partnership with Go My Code training center in Tunis, Tunisia, 2023.

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