

TUNISIA

Highlights

31 May 2020

Key figures

4,434

Persons of concern to UNHCR (asylum seekers & refugees)

2,102

Vulnerable refugees and asylum seekers received cash assistance (regular program + COVID-19)

2,545

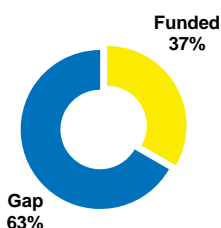
Vulnerable refugees and asylum seekers received food and non-food items from civil society organizations, authorities, companies and private citizens.

160

Individuals were profiled so far in 2020 to assess their need for international protection

Funding

USD **11.6 M** required in 2020



USD **4.2 M** received as of 4 June 2020

As of 31 May 2020, Tunisia recorded 1084 confirmed cases of COVID-19; with 48 deaths and 964 cases recovered, while 72 cases remained active. **The progressive ease of national confinement measures started on 4 May. Essential support continued to be provided by UNHCR**, including emergency medical care, protection monitoring, psycho-social support, shelter, cash and food assistance. **Some activities that were limited to urgent cases have resumed in remote modality**; namely legal counselling (provided remotely by lawyers from UNHCR partner the Arab Institute for Human Rights) and the recording of people waiting to be registered, allowing persons with specific needs to be identified.

On 5 May, **a boat with 50 individuals on board was rescued by the Tunisian Coast Guard and allowed for disembarkation in Sfax**. The boat departed from Zwara (Libya) to head toward Europe. The rescued included nationals from Eritrea, Senegal, Pakistan, Mali and Nigeria, among whom were 15 children. **Following 14 days of compulsory quarantine, the rescued were profiled, with 47 requesting asylum. They were registered and assisted with shelter, food and non-food items.** Moreover, during May, the authorities reported to the media to have conducted 34 interceptions at sea and on land, against attempted departures from Tunisia, involving 303 Tunisian nationals and 563 third-country nationals.

Operational Response

During the month of May, **2,102 vulnerable refugees and asylum seekers received cash assistance**. Of these, 477 are hosted in UNHCR shelters and apartments and 297 others live in urban and rural areas.



Registration of the rescued at sea © UNHCR

Remote recording of people awaiting registration started on 21 April. **As of 31 May, UNHCR has recorded 293 households. Among them, more than 70% had specific needs**, including legal and physical protection needs, serious medical conditions, unaccompanied and separated children, women at risk, single parents, etc. They had been prioritized for registration that will resume on the 1st of June.

Following successful advocacy by UNHCR, **the Ministry of Women, Family, Children and the Elderly agreed to allocate five spaces to unaccompanied asylum seeker and refugee children** in the government-run shelter in Tunis on a long-term basis. This is an important step forward in addressing the urgent need for adequate and safer housing for unaccompanied and separated children. Previously, placements were done on an *ad hoc* basis with children placed in often over-crowded facilities.

Capacity building activities resumed in virtual modality. Namely, UNHCR partner AIHR organized a two-day training (8–9 May) for journalists with the title “Asylum and mixed migration issues in times of crisis; editorial requirements and principles of ethical journalism”. The training included lectures, exchanges of best practices, case studies on crisis communication, culminating in the preparation of a code of conduct for crisis communications.

Moreover, AIHR and UNHCR organized a series of academic debates (26–28 May) with participation from university professors and PhD students on the subject of international protection of refugees and stateless persons. Main topics included the principles of international protection; the international and national instruments for refugee protection in Tunisia; the national system to combat human trafficking; statelessness; the developments in the field of refugee protection and statelessness in African systems of human rights and the asylum system in the European Union.

Operational response COVID -19

To increase social protection of refugees and asylum seekers most affected by the COVID-19 situation, UNHCR's has reinforced its regular cash assistance programme. Some 375 single refugees and asylum seekers already enrolled in the assistance programme received a top-up and all those temporarily enrolled in the assistance programme were extended until the end of the year. Moreover, 1,328 refugees and asylum seekers whose cases are followed by UNHCR but who are not enrolled in the assistance programme, received cash assistance.

UNHCR donated and installed three additional Refugee Housing Units (RHU) in Zarzis, Djerba and Ben Guerdane hospitals (Medenine Governorate) to allow for screening of visitors before entering the hospital. One RHU was donated and installed in Medenine Regional Hospital in April. Refugee Housing Units (RHUs) are an innovative shelter solution resulting from a collaborative research and development project undertaken by Better Shelter and UNHCR, with the support of the IKEA Foundation. RHUs are comprised of a lightweight steel frame, a roof, wall panels, door and windows, floor covering, a solar energy unit, and an innovative anchoring system (see pictures below).

As of 31 May, more than 2,500 refugees and asylum seekers residing across 17 governorates received donations of food and non-food items from different civil society organizations, local and national authorities, private citizens and companies.

UNHCR and its partner Tunisian Refugee Council (CTR) completed the first round of the country-wide verification and assessment exercise (using KoBoToolbox software) to confirm the presence of all persons of concern to UNHCR on Tunisian territory and to collect information on their current socio-economic and protection situation. The verification was also aimed at collecting consent from persons of concern to share their basic biodata with the Government in view of including them in the national assistance programme. The list included 1,345 households that are currently not part of UNHCR assistance programmes. 750 cases have been reached while 595 resulted impossible to reach and will be contacted again in the second round. Among those reached, 70 per cent declared not being able to pay for rent, food, medicines and utilities.

Preventive hygiene measures continued to be taken with routine disinfection of UNHCR-managed shelters and apartments and installation of hydroalcoholic gel dispensers. Some 4,000 gloves, 15 L of sanitizer gel and 200 face masks were handed over to UNHCR partner CTR in Medenine, to be distributed to asylum seekers attending physical RSD interviews (to be resumed on 1 June) and collecting cash as part of wider distributions.

In the light of the verification results, UNHCR Tunisia launched the updated emergency preparedness and response [plan](#), estimating prioritized needs at 3.2 M USD to cover protection services and cash assistance for vulnerable refugees, asylum seekers and host communities affected by COVID-19 and to support national COVID-19 response efforts in reducing the risk of infection and transmissions while advocating for the inclusion of refugees and asylum seekers.

UNHCR welcomed the 200,000 EUR contribution from Luxembourg to the Tunisia Operation that will be partially allocated toward the COVID-19 response.



UNHCR Tunisia is grateful for the support of [European Union](#) | [Italy](#) | [Luxembourg](#) | [Monaco](#) | [Netherlands](#) | [RDPP NA – EU](#) | [Switzerland](#) | [World Food Programme](#) and to those who have contributed to UNHCR programmes with unearmarked and softly earmarked funds.