

CHALLENGES AND CONCERNS

With the exception of Libya, which is a party only to the 1969 OAU Convention, all countries in the region have acceded to the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol. UNHCR's principal challenge in the region is to assist the authorities to establish bodies and procedures to assess claims to refugee status. The other challenge is to find a long-term solution for the Western Saharan refugees. In 1999, implementation of the UN Settlement Plan was delayed by continued political differences between Morocco and the *Frente Popular para la Liberación de la Saguia el-Hamra y de Río de Oro* (the POLISARIO Front).

PROGRESS TOWARDS SOLUTIONS

All UNHCR offices worked closely with the relevant authorities of the countries in the region. Seminars and workshops on refugee status determination and international law were used to sensitise officials to UNHCR's mandate and the legal framework for its activities. UNHCR also supported national capacity-building to respond to the needs of asylum-seekers and refugees. Durable solutions were identified and implemented. For example, 41 Malian refugees repatriated from Algeria and 122 Somali refugees repatriated from Libya in 1999 with UNHCR's assistance. Yet the region remains a strategic crossroads for refugee and migratory movements, principally from south to north. Pending repatriation to the Territory of Western Sahara, the first major phase of the pre-registration of Western Saharan refugees was completed.

OPERATIONS

In **Algeria**, UNHCR continued to provide assistance to 80,000 vulnerable Western Saharan refugees (mostly women and children), out of the 165,000 (estimated by the Government) living in the four camps in Tindouf. The pre-registration for repatriation (which began in 1997) continued in the camps, with some 107,000 refugees registered by the end of 1999. UNHCR also assisted 290 urban refugees, including 146 Malians, of whom 41 were repatriated in 1999. Furthermore, UNHCR helped urban asylum-seekers, mainly from sub-Saharan Africa, to apply for refugee status and intervened when necessary on behalf of individuals at risk of expulsion. UNHCR also promoted greater understanding of refugee law within the academic community.

In **Libya**, UNHCR had overall responsibility for the protection of some 7,600 Palestinian refugees, of whom 700 (generally vulnerable individuals and families) received financial and other assistance. In addition, of almost 3,000 Somali refugees, UNHCR assisted 467 and repatriated 122 of them by air, after obtaining clearance from the authorities of northern Somalia.

Pending durable solutions for refugees in **Mauritania**, UNHCR's interventions with the authorities enabled urban refugees living in Nouakchott (346 refugees from Sierra Leone) to circulate freely and go about their activities. The Lomé Peace Accord signed in July 1999, raised hopes that these refugees might eventually be able to repatriate. The Office in Mauritania also pre-registered just over 26,000 Western Saharans for repatriation.

In **Morocco**, UNHCR assisted some 140 refugees of various nationalities, based on an assessment of their needs. These included food, shelter, reimbursement of medical expenses, French language training, education for refugee children and related transport. Twenty-nine refugee children were helped to go to primary and secondary school. Ten refugees were enrolled in Moroccan universities.

In **Tunisia**, UNHCR assisted 157 refugees (out of some 450 refugees in the country) in 1999, giving priority to women and children. Local integration remained difficult for most of the refugees, who were not granted residence permits and were therefore unable to obtain work permits. UNHCR continued to advocate the adoption of national refugee legislation and procedures for refugee status determination.

FUNDING

The region had sufficient resources to implement its planned activities, including protection and assistance and work in Algeria and Mauritania preparatory to the repatriation of Western Saharan refugees.

Voluntary Contributions - Earmarked (USD)

Donor	Earmarking*	General Programmes		Special Programmes/OTF	
		Income	Contribution	Income	Contribution
ITALY					
	Algeria	135,057	135,057	0	0
JAPAN					
	Mauritania	10,000	10,000	0	0
	W. Saharan Op.	0	0	200,000	200,000
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA					
	W. Saharan Op.	0	0	1,221,897	1,221,897
EUROPEAN COMMISSION					
	Algeria	33,196	0	0	0
	Mauritania	39,068	0	223,201	221,551
ESPAÑA CON ACNUR (SPA)					
	Western Sahara	96,840	96,839	0	0
	Mauritania	0	0	44,640	0
TOTAL **		314,161	241,896	1,689,738	1,643,448

* For more information on the various earmarkings, please refer to the Donor Profiles.

** Total funds available for obligation in the region also included unearmarked voluntary contributions, lightly earmarked contributions, opening balances and adjustments.



Budget and Expenditure (USD)

Country	Working Budget*		Expenditure*	
	General Programmes	Special Programmes	General Programmes	Special Programmes
Algeria	3,732,315	1,434,061	3,337,136	1,266,546
Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	1,391,758	0	1,229,044	0
Mauritania	59,243	157,064	58,500	156,560
Morocco	268,299	187,275	227,000	168,620
Tunisia	289,709	0	247,930	0
Western Sahara Territory	0	1,734,333	0	768,427
TOTAL	5,741,324	3,512,733	5,099,610	2,360,152

* Figures do not include costs at Headquarters.