

North Africa

Major developments

The five member states of the Union of the Arab Maghreb saw a significant increase in 2005 in the flow of asylum-seekers and economic migrants originating from sub-Saharan Africa who transit through their territories in an attempt to enter Europe. Towards the end of the year, hundreds of asylum-seekers in North African countries were expelled, including several recognized refugees. Not only did this reveal the structural deficiencies of the protection system in some of these countries but also the insufficient human and financial resources at the disposal of the UNHCR offices throughout the region.

However, by mid-2005 UNHCR had developed a regional strategy to gradually strengthen the institution of asylum in North Africa. This involved increasing the capacity of the authorities in the region to identify asylum-seekers and refugees amongst the populations who transit through North Africa en route to Europe. The project is being pursued in 2006 and initial results should be evident by mid-year.

With a solution to the plight of the Saharawi refugees seemingly still out of reach, UNHCR continued to provide basic assistance in the camps in the Tindouf region, Algeria. In late 2005, in close coordination with the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO), UNHCR resumed the family visits component of the Confidence Building Measures project.

Algeria

Libyan Arab Jamahiriya

Mauritania

Morocco

Tunisia

Western Sahara

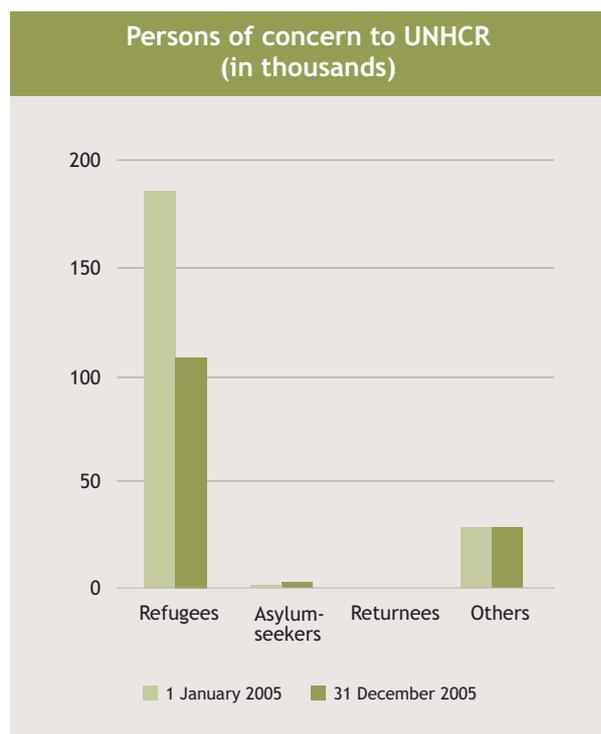


Challenges and concerns

In response to the events in the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla, UNHCR reinforced its presence in Morocco by means of protection staff either on mission status, hired as consultants or UNVs. UNHCR reviewed its operations in Morocco and Tunisia and started strengthening its capacity and resources in Algeria, Libya and Mauritania.

Progress towards solutions

With a few exceptions, only a small number of refugees in North African countries opted for voluntary repatriation, and even fewer were resettled to third countries. In 2005, no significant long-term solutions were identified in response to the asylum and migration problems facing the countries of the region. As local integration was not an available option, UNHCR was mostly engaged in providing basic assistance to the refugees and asylum-seekers, while exploring possibilities for self-reliance measures in the countries of asylum, pending a durable solution.



Operations

In **Algeria**, assistance with food, housing, health and education was provided to an average of 150 vulnerable refugees and asylum-seekers, out of a total of 600. This number comprised 200 refugees and asylum-seekers from Mali and Niger living in rural areas, and 400 urban refugees and asylum-seekers, mostly from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), the Republic of the Congo (RoC), Rwanda, Somalia, Chad and Burundi. In addition, 4,000 Palestinian refugees live in the country.

Regarding the Saharawi refugees in the camps in Tindouf, the assistance programme aimed at improving their living conditions, and supplementing the support given to them by several other governmental and

non-governmental organizations. The main activities undertaken for the refugees under this programme included the provision of supplementary food (tea and yeast), distribution of butane gas for cooking in the camps, and support for the health, nutrition and education services, including special computer courses, language training and activities for adolescents. UNHCR also supported the provision of potable water and sanitation in all the camps.

In the **Libyan Arab Jamahiriya**, UNHCR continued to strengthen its self-reliance activities for refugees by gradually phasing down its assistance to these populations, with the support of local operational partners. These activities included job placement, vocational training, apprenticeships and microcredit agricultural schemes. Refugee committees were involved in the design and establishment of these activities, ensuring that the needs of refugee women were adequately addressed, and that initiatives and proposals from the refugees were given due consideration. Over 12,600 refugees and persons of concern were registered with UNHCR in 2005 (almost 9,000 Palestinians, 3,000 Somalis, and 600 others originating from Chad, Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone). Among the urban caseload, over 4,200 refugees were directly assisted through basic living allowances, shelter, medical assistance, primary education, legal counselling, vocational training, job placement and various income-generating activities. Forty-two families undertook self-reliance activities and acquired skills in areas such as electrical maintenance, car repair, sewing and computer literacy. A dozen scholarships were granted to refugees by the World Islamic Conference faculties located in Libya, Lebanon

and Syria. UNHCR supported the voluntary repatriation of 46 refugees from Liberia, Sierra Leone and Somalia.

Mauritania has remained an asylum country for many refugees fleeing persecution and civil wars in sub-Saharan Africa. At the end of December 2005, over 600 recognized refugees registered with UNHCR were living in Nouakchott. They were mainly from Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Togo.

Mauritania is not only a country of transit migration towards Europe but also of immigration, owing to the demand for labour in its fishing and mining industries, as well as the urban informal sector. Estimates range from 100,000 to 150,000 immigrants, most of them in Nouakchott and Nouadhibou. A sizeable number of people come from countries destabilized by violent conflicts and/or with poor human rights records, giving rise to protection concerns. While most of these migrants try to make a living in Mauritania, some of them, who are in an irregular situation which is tolerated by the local authorities, try to make their way to Spain and elsewhere in Europe, mostly through Morocco, either by sea, through Nouadhibou, or across the desert. The journey costs many lives.

In partnership with the European Commission, UNHCR began to implement an asylum/migration capacity-building project, through the creation of a Study Group on Migration Flux, and established a migration unit to review the asylum and migration management capacities of local authorities. Two national NGOs were involved in the project, carrying out a social survey of the asylum-seeker and migrant population, focusing

Budget and expenditure (USD)

Country	Final budget			Expenditure		
	Annual programme budget	Supplementary programme budget ¹	Total	Annual programme budget	Supplementary programme budget ¹	Total
Algeria	4,820,811	0	4,820,811	4,552,154	0	4,552,154
Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	916,090	0	916,090	720,373	0	720,373
Mauritania	708,365	0	708,365	610,155	0	610,155
Morocco	603,784	0	603,784	484,467	0	484,467
Tunisia	326,562	0	326,562	265,031	0	265,031
Western Sahara	705,036	3,000,913	3,705,949	273,635	510,833	784,468
Total	8,080,648	3,000,913	11,081,561	6,905,815	510,833	7,416,648

¹ The supplementary programme figures apply to the Western Sahara Operation.

Note: The supplementary programme budget does not include a 7 per cent support cost that is recovered from contributions to meet indirect costs for UNHCR.



Algeria: Saharawi refugee children in Awserd camp. *UNHCR/ J. Gagné*

on access to employment, social infrastructure and information strategy. UNHCR organized a workshop, in cooperation with the Ministry of Interior, on the asylum/migration nexus in Nouadhibou in November 2005. This workshop was attended by key government officials within the regional administration.

In November 2005, the Government requested UN assistance to cover the immediate humanitarian needs of vulnerable migrants found in the desert in the Bir Mogrein/Zouerate areas. UNHCR provided them with emergency assistance and assisted their voluntary return.

Due to its strategic geographic location, **Morocco** has become a major transit country for thousands of

migrants from sub-Saharan Africa and others from as far afield as Bangladesh and China. Following the tragic events in the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla, UNHCR reinforced its presence in Rabat and attempted, with minimal resources, to distinguish refugees and asylum-seekers from economic migrants. By the end of the year, UNHCR had registered more than 2,100 asylum-seekers and almost 300 refugees in Morocco. UNHCR provided assistance to the most vulnerable amongst them. This included food, shelter, health, education, legal counselling and income-generating activities. During 2005, UNHCR in Rabat continued to undertake refugee status determination procedures. More than 400 people were recognized as refugees, but were unable to obtain legal employment or access public services for lack of legal documentation. The majority live

in poor neighbourhoods of the major towns and cities of Morocco.

The office of the Honorary Representative in **Tunisia** carries out refugee status determination in lieu of the Government, ensuring that the rights of refugees and asylum-seekers are respected. Most of the refugees in Tunisia originate from African countries. UNHCR is also engaged in the promotion and dissemination of refugee law. Some 60 refugees and asylum-seekers benefited from UNHCR's assistance throughout 2005. They received an allowance to cover their basic food, housing, health care and educational needs. By the end of the year, the Office had registered 87 refugees and 26 asylum-seekers. Fifteen Palestinian refugees were also assisted by the Office.

Since 1999, UNHCR and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for **Western Sahara** have been promoting a series of confidence-building measures involving the parties to the Western Sahara conflict. These measures were designed to meet the communication needs of two populations that had already suffered the effects of prolonged separation. The year 2004 saw a breakthrough with the facilitation of person-to-person contact – for the first time in almost three decades – between the refugees and their communities of origin in Western Sahara. The first phase of these measures, which was implemented between March and December 2004, included exchanges of family visits and a telephone service enabling the refugees in the camps in Tindouf to communicate with their communities of origin in Western Sahara. While the telephone communication system continued to operate smoothly throughout 2005, the family visits were interrupted for several months, and did not resume until the end of November 2005. The parties concerned have indicated their willingness to continue with this programme in 2006.

Between the end of November 2005 and the end of the year, 265 people benefited from the family visits programme, bringing to over 1,700 the overall number of beneficiaries since the start of the family exchange programme in 2004. Interest in this programme is very high among the Saharawi communities on both sides: 17,000 candidates registered by UNHCR (6,000 in Western Sahara and 11,000 in the refugee camps) keenly await the opportunity to see relatives and old friends. Since the establishment of the telephone service between the refugee camps in Tindouf and Western Sahara, more than 42,000 calls have been made from the camps.

Impact

UNHCR increasingly intervened in issues related to the nexus between migration and asylum. UNHCR offices in the region initiated the establishment of a comprehensive framework to deal with these issues in coordination with the governments concerned. Having noted a shift in approach on the part of governments, asylum-seekers began to show far greater trust in the work of UNHCR's country offices.

Funding

During 2005, UNHCR continued to prioritize its activities within the allocated programme budget. UNHCR operations in the region were reinforced by additional funding aimed at supporting asylum in North Africa.

Restricted voluntary contributions (USD)			
Earmarking ¹	Donor	Annual programme budget	Supplementary programme budget
North Africa			
	European Commission	1,003,169	0
	Finland	0	259,403
	Netherlands	138,532	
	Sweden	453,858	756,430
	United States	1,200,000	700,000
Sub-total		2,795,559	1,715,833
Algeria			
	Netherlands	2,012	0
	Spain	317,647	0
	United States	700,000	0
Sub-total		1,019,659	0
Libyan Arab Jamahiriya			
	Netherlands	5,463	0
Sub-total		5,463	0
Mauritania			
	Netherlands	40,143	0
Sub-total		40,143	0
Morocco			
	Dutch Postcode Lottery (NPL)	83,802	0
	Netherlands	4,912	0
Sub-total		88,714	0
Tunisia			
	Netherlands	54,296	0
Sub-total		54,296	0
Total		4,003,834	1,715,833

¹ For more information on the earmarking, please refer to the donor profiles.