



North Africa

Working environment

The five Member States of the Union of the Arab Maghreb have, in 2005 and 2006, seen a steep rise in the mixed flow of asylum-seekers and economic migrants from sub-Saharan Africa transiting their territories while trying to enter Europe.

In some instances, asylum-seekers, including some holding UNHCR documents, have been mistreated or even expelled. This situation highlights the need to strengthen the protection system and provide more resources to UNHCR offices in the region to further support the local structures dealing with asylum issues.

In this context, UNHCR began in mid-2005 to implement a regional strategy to gradually strengthen the institution of asylum in North Africa, and to increase the capacity in the region to identify asylum-seekers and refugees among those crossing North Africa *en route* to Europe. The project will continue through 2007.

UNHCR continues to provide basic assistance to the Saharawi refugees in the Tindouf camps in Algeria, for whom no solution appears to be in sight. UNHCR has cooperated with the concerned parties and with the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) to implement the Confidence-Building Measures Project initiated in 2004. As part of this, in 2007, the Office will continue to help refugees in the camps and their relatives in Western Sahara to communicate with each other through family visits and telephone calls.

Algeria

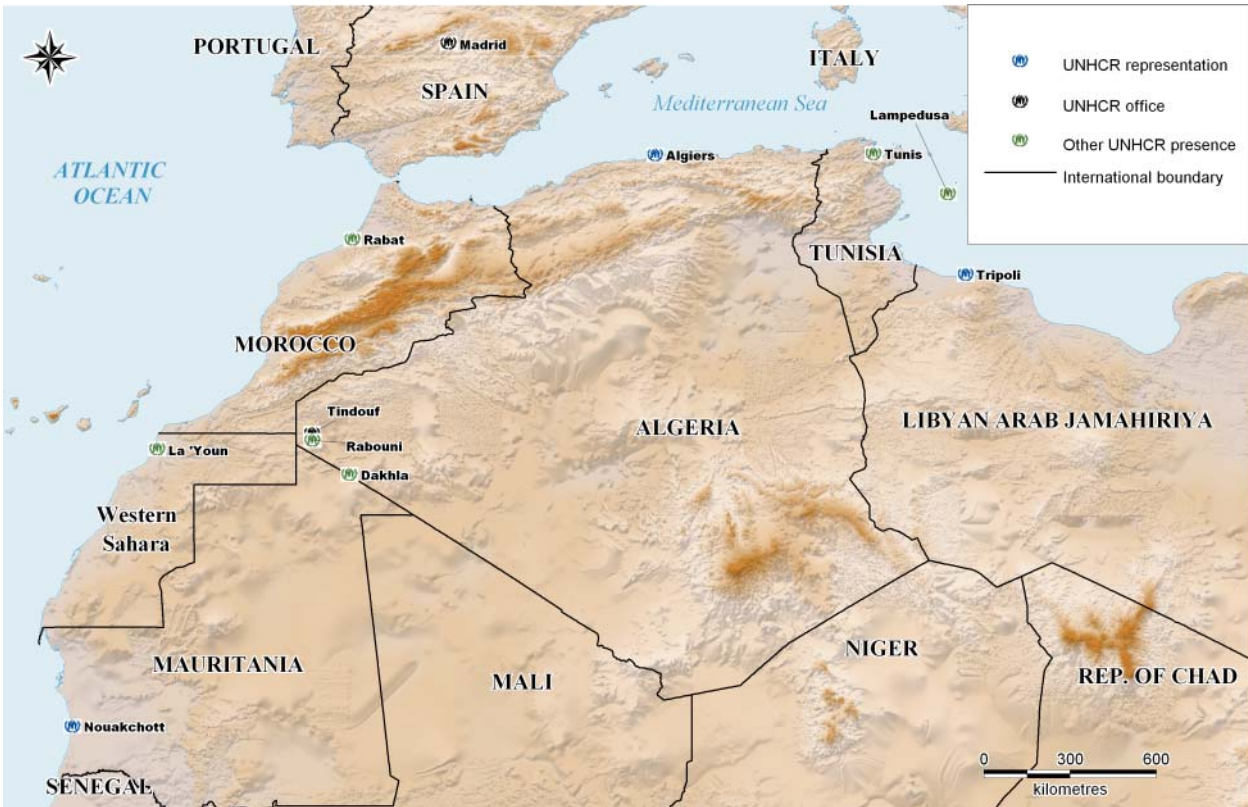
Libyan Arab Jamahiriya

Mauritania

Morocco

Tunisia

Western Sahara



Strategy

In a bid to improve asylum management and assist national governments to manage the migratory flows, UNHCR held an initial regional meeting in Nouakchott, Mauritania in May 2006. A ten-point action plan for North Africa was drawn up and spells out in detail the activities to be undertaken.

The plan entails a dual strategy to help UNHCR strengthen asylum and cooperate with partner agencies, governments, NGOs and civil-society groups to build their capacity for protection-sensitive management of migration movements. The plan also provides a strategic framework for operations in the region in the foreseeable future. The Office intends to implement the ten-point plan from 2007 in an effort to build durable regional solutions to the migration problem.

UNHCR's intervention in asylum issues connected to mixed migration flows has already had some positive impact on the affected populations as well as on government attitudes. However, much more remains to be done in order to consolidate UNHCR's role in the region to ensure that refugees and asylum-seekers, and migrants in general, are humanely treated.

Constraints

As a response to the increasing asylum-related challenges posed by the migratory flows in North Africa,

UNHCR has reviewed its presence in Morocco and Tunisia and strengthened its capacity and resources in Algeria, the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya and Mauritania.

Recent earmarked contributions for operations in North Africa have allowed UNHCR to play a more solid protection and assistance role in the region. However, the problem is so demanding that more staff and resources will be needed for the Office to fulfil its obligations in the subregion.

The sustainability of a strengthened role for UNHCR in protecting and assisting refugees and asylum-seekers within the massive flow of illegal migrants remains a difficult and challenging task. Major partnerships have yet to be forged and/or consolidated with other UN agencies and other organizations such as IOM.

Operations

In **Algeria**, the total urban refugee population remains at around 400 people, of whom 150 refugees and 50 asylum-seekers will be provided with protection and assistance. Basic assistance will address food, housing, health and education needs. The majority of the urban refugees and asylum-seekers originate from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), the Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, Somalia, Chad and Burundi. Another 4,000 Palestinian refugees in the country are well integrated and receive no support from the Office. The office in Algiers will also continue supporting another 200 rural refugees from Mali and Niger.

Confidence-Building Measures in Western Sahara

Based on UN Security Council Resolution 1282 of 1999 and subsequent resolutions, the joint UNHCR/MINURSO Confidence-Building Measures Project was launched in March 2004 and continues today. The measures comprise exchange of family visits and the establishment of telephone links between the Saharawi communities in the camps and those in cities in Western Sahara. The project is also designed to reunite prominent figures representing civil society among both refugee and Territory communities in seminars on diverse non-political issues.

From the inception of the family visits programme in March 2004 until the end of May 2006, over 2,500 people have benefited from this project. Of these almost 1,300 are refugees in the camps in Tindouf who visited their family members in several cities in Western Sahara, and another 1,210 were Saharawis living in the Territory who visited their relatives in the camps. Interest in this programme is very high, as reflected in the 19,240 people who have registered for it so far. The family visits stopped in May 2006 due to difficulties with flights, but were resumed in November 2006 and will continue throughout 2007.

The telephone service established in the camps to enable the refugees to communicate regularly with their family members in Western Sahara has been operating smoothly. By the end of August 2006 more than 56,000 calls had been made by refugees to their relatives in the Territory. Most of the callers are women. Due to high installation costs the telephone connection in the Dakhla refugee camp is not yet operational. The telephone service is expected to continue throughout 2007.

Soon to be launched are seminars on issues of common interest intended to bring together in a neutral venue distinguished members of the Saharawi communities from the refugee camps and the Territory. Several subjects and different venues have been proposed to the parties. If the first of these seminars is successful more could be conducted in 2007.

The financial requirements for the Confidence-Building Measures Project will be presented in a separate supplementary appeal.

Pending a political solution to the Western Sahara situation, UNHCR will continue assisting the Saharawi refugees in the Tindouf camps. The programme aims to improve the living conditions of the refugees and supplement the support provided by governmental and other organizations. Activities to address basic needs include the provision of supplementary food, cooking gas and support services for health, nutrition, water and sanitation. Educational and vocational programmes are also provided. In addition, the Confidence-Building Measures Project will continue in 2007.

In the **Libyan Arab Jamahiriya**, UNHCR will continue to strengthen its self-reliance activities for refugees, gradually phasing down its protracted assistance, with the support of local operational partners. Microcredit agricultural schemes, vocational training and apprenticeships leading to either self-employment or paid work will continue in 2007. The refugees will benefit from training in electrical practice, car mechanics, sewing and computer literacy. Refugee committees have been involved in the design and establishment of the activities, also ensuring that the needs of refugee women are addressed.



Overview of Smara Saharawi refugee camp in Algeria. UNHCR / J. Gagné

Some 12,600 refugees and others of concern are registered with UNHCR. These include about 3,000 Somalis, 9,000 Palestinians and another 600 people of different nationalities (Guineans, Chadians, Liberians and Sierra Leoneans). In 2007 some 4,000 refugees will continue receiving basic living allowances, shelter, medical assistance, primary education and legal counselling. The Office will also continue implementing a voluntary repatriation programme for refugees originating from the DRC, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Somalia.

Activities in **Mauritania** for 2007 will be aimed at reinforcing asylum capacity and proper management of the migratory flows transiting the country. UNHCR will work to clarify the asylum procedure and find durable solutions in partnership with the Government and national NGOs. The Office will also ensure the distribution and understanding of adopted laws and their proper application at the local or regional level. UNHCR's capacity in the country will have to be strengthened so it can better support the newly created Migration Unit and national NGOs.

Owing to its strategic geographic location, **Morocco** has become a major transit country for thousands of migrants from sub-Saharan Africa and others coming from as far as Bangladesh and China. Following the

tragic events in the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla in 2005, UNHCR reinforced its presence in Rabat and attempted, with minimal resources, to distinguish refugees and asylum-seekers from economic migrants. At the beginning of 2006, the Office had registered more than 2,000 asylum-seekers and another 280 refugees in Morocco. In 2007, UNHCR will continue providing basic assistance to about 330 of the most vulnerable refugees by meeting their food, shelter, health, education and legal needs. Income-generating activities to increase self-sufficiency among the refugees will be supported. The Rabat Office will also continue with refugee status determination.

The office of the Honorary Representative in **Tunisia** will continue to undertake refugee status determination in lieu of the Government, ensuring that the rights of refugees and asylum-seekers are respected. UNHCR will continue to promote and disseminate refugee law. About 60 refugees and asylum-seekers will benefit from UNHCR assistance in 2007. Assistance will cover their basic needs in food, housing, health care and education. At the beginning of 2006, the Office had registered over 100 refugees and asylum-seekers. A small number of Palestinians (15) have been also assisted.

Budget (USD)		
Country	Annual Programme Budget	
	2006	2007
Algeria	4,889,412	4,268,794
Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	1,096,200	984,270
Mauritania	605,017	885,472
Morocco	535,609	983,475
Tunisia	358,859	358,096
Total	7,485,097	7,480,107

