



## UNHCR Morocco

Responding to the protection needs of the increasing number of refugees and asylum seekers in Morocco



**13,533** Persons of Concern registered with UNHCR

**8,138** Refugees

**5,395** Asylum seekers

**USD 8.9 million** required to respond to protection needs in Morocco

To respond to the protection needs of the increasing number of refugees and asylum seekers in Morocco, UNHCR requires USD 8.9 million.

This includes USD 8 million of initial requirements for 2021, and USD 900,000 to respond to the additional needs related to the COVID-19 crisis.

May 2021

## Operational context

While Morocco remains a place of transit, trends confirm that it is also gradually becoming a destination for refugees and asylum seekers coming from a variety of sub-Saharan countries, as well as from Syria and the Middle East.

The number of refugees and asylum seekers registered with UNHCR has consistently increased over the past 7 years. 2020 has seen an increase by nearly 30% compared to 2019. As of 1st January 2021, there were 13,533 persons of concern from 45 countries of origin registered with UNHCR Morocco, including 8,138 refugees and 5,395 asylum seekers. Refugees originate primarily from Syria (55%), other Middle Eastern countries (16% - Yemen, Iraq and Palestine) and sub-Saharan countries (25% - Central African Republic, Ivory Coast and Democratic Republic of the Congo).

In 2018, the Western Mediterranean route overtook the Central Mediterranean route as the first entry point to Europe. In response, Morocco has worked towards reducing the number of illegal departures from its coasts towards Europe. To better control irregular migration and dismantle smuggling and trafficking networks, Morocco has scaled up its border monitoring capacity and dismantlement of human trafficking networks.

In this complex environment, Morocco continues to offer refugee protection and promote local integration opportunities through a multi-stakeholder approach in the spirit of the Global Compact for Refugees (GCR) and the Global Refugee Forum (GRF).

The National Strategy for Immigration and Asylum (NSIA), launched in 2013, remains the national framework under which UNHCR operates to support the establishment of a national asylum system. Under the SNIA, refugees have been given facilitated access to national services such as education and primary health centers. Pending the adoption of the asylum law, UNHCR continues to register new asylum applications and conduct refugee status determination (RSD), before referring eligible cases to the Office of Refugees and Stateless Persons (BRA).

In 2021, while closely working with national institutions and civil society to build capacity locally, UNHCR plans to continue delivering protection services to the increasing number of refugees in Morocco such as multipurpose cash-assistance, support access to secondary and tertiary healthcare, education, socio-economic integration opportunities, referrals for victims of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), psychosocial assistance, and provision of legal support for the issuance of civil documentation.



## The COVID-19 crisis

The COVID-19 crisis has particularly affected refugees and asylum seekers in Morocco, as highlighted in September 2020 in a study conducted by Morocco's High Commissioner for Planning (HCP) on the socio-economic impact of the crisis. The number of vulnerable families significantly increased, with little to no source of income during lockdown (9 out of 10 refugees had to stop working) and difficult access to employment following the progressive lifting of movement restriction measures.

The majority of refugee households in Morocco live in urban settings and operate in the informal sector, aggravating the impact of the crisis on their access to livelihoods. In many instances, loss of livelihoods has increased food insecurity, ability to meet most basic needs and children's education. Most refugees have been in need of cash assistance to cover basic needs since the beginning of the crisis and are currently living in extremely precarious situations.



## UNHCR's results in 2020

In response to the COVID-19 situation, the Government of Morocco has taken early and decisive measures since the onset of the crisis including a national health response plan which included all individuals living in Morocco.

In support of, and in complement to, the measures taken by the Government of Morocco, UNHCR rapidly adapted its operational posture to respond to the increasing specific protection and assistance needs of refugees and asylum seekers.

In line with public health measures that have evolved throughout 2020, UNHCR and its partners have worked actively to ensure refugees' and asylum seekers' continuous access to services both physically and remotely. Protection hotlines (in 3 languages) were set-up and continue to be active, acting as an important point of contact for refugees and asylum seekers (over 2,800 counselling sessions conducted).

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### Access to asylum procedures:

In 2020, UNHCR adapted its registration and Refugee Status Determination (RSD) procedures to ensure continuous access to asylum procedures while respecting preventive measures against COVID-19. Asylum procedures were conducted directly in UNHCR's office with prior appointment or remotely when conditions were suitable. In 2020, UNHCR registered 3,614 new asylum requests. Outreach missions were organized throughout the year to conduct RSD for most

vulnerable cases in Oujda, Tangier, Casablanca, Agadir and Marrakech. UNHCR also conducted missions throughout Morocco in order to renew UNHCR's asylum seeker and refugee certificates. Close coordination with national authorities ensured continuous recognition of UNHCR's documentation, even in instances where the validity thereof had expired. The waiting period for asylum seekers to access registration and RSD has increased due to both the COVID-19 crisis and the increase in the number of asylum seekers in Morocco.

### Health:

With its medical partner, Association Marocaine de la Planification Familiale (AMPF), UNHCR facilitates the referral of refugees to public primary health care centers in which services are delivered free of charge. Through its medical programme, UNHCR ensures refugees' access to specialized healthcare services. In 2020, UNHCR and its partner adapted their services to ensure continuous access to healthcare services.

This included the set-up of medical hotlines for remote consultations. Refugees with chronic illnesses were supplied with medicines in AMFP's centers or directly at their homes. In total, 6,100 primary consultations were carried out, as well as over 8,600 specialized medical consultations. UNHCR also signed a partnership with the Conseil National de l'Ordre des Medecins (CNOM) to facilitate refugees' access to specialized medical care (44 surgeries / specialized medical examination in 2020).

### Cash assistance:

UNHCR contributes to the cost of housing and food for the most vulnerable refugees, based on their specific needs and their socio-economic situation, through financial assistance based on assessments carried out with its partner, Fondation Orient Occident (FOO). In 2020, more than 2,500 individuals benefited from the financial assistance for the most vulnerable. In response to the increasing number of

testimonies of extreme precarity received from refugees due to the crisis, UNHCR temporarily and exceptionally adapted its financial assistance programme. With the support of additional resources, every refugee registered with UNHCR, along with most vulnerable asylum seekers benefited from financial assistance in April, May, July, October and December. More than 4,500 families benefited from financial assistance each month.

### Education:

In 2020, some 1,300 families received monthly cash assistance to support their children's education at primary and secondary level. In addition, 74 refugees in Morocco are beneficiaries of the DAFI programme. Due to the COVID-19 crisis, classes were suspended from March to September, in all kindergartens, educational and vocational training institutions, public and private universities. The Ministry of National Education (NEM) set up various tools to ensure remote learning education as an alternative.

73% of enrolled children took online classes during lockdown. Despite the challenging conditions, the success rate for children in primary and secondary education has reached 90%. During the month of August, UNHCR and its partners actively promoted the importance of schooling for refugee children and helped parents prepare the "back to school" period, including with conditional cash assistance for education.

### Livelihood:

With the Association Marocaine d'Appui à la Promotion de la Petite Entreprise (AMAPPE), UNHCR supports refugees' socio-economic integration and access to livelihoods through enrolment in vocational trainings, the creation of income generating activities (IGA) through

In 2020, 581 refugees were received for orientation and counseling sessions in-person and remotely. In addition, 75 IGAs for the benefit of 80 refugees were created and up to 100 other IGAs were financially supported to recover from the COVID-19 crisis and reinforce

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