

UNHCR OPERATIONAL UPDATE - ALGERIA

1 November 2016 – 1 February 2017

KEY FIGURES

90,000

Vulnerable Sahrawi refugees living in five camps near Tindouf.

6,021

Persons of concern in urban areas registered with UNHCR of which 5,408 are Syrian nationals.

On average in 2017, **63**

Syrians approach UNHCR on a monthly basis for registration

32,100

of school-aged children in Tindouf camps are enrolled in primary education.

18

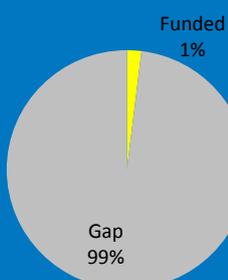
Liters of potable water are available per person per day in Sahrawi refugee camps (below the humanitarian standard of 20 liters/person/day).

FUNDING

USD 36 Million

Requested for the operation

The operation is **1%** funded



Children line up at the newly constructed Mbarek Hbeila primary school in Smara – construction funded by IKEA Foundation. © UNHCR / Y. Bentahar

HIGHLIGHTS

- Young Sahrawi refugee volunteers launched the first ever **Anti-Drug / Anti-Drug Trafficking Campaign** in Sahrawi camps, near Tindouf. This prevention campaign supported by UNHCR was designed by youth to raise awareness on the danger of drugs.
- UNHCR is completing **rehabilitation efforts** in response to floods in October 2015 and storm in August 2016 that affected Sahrawi refugee camps: four schools were rehabilitated and another entirely rebuilt. More than 2,000 of the most vulnerable families received construction materials (cement, iron sheets, and timber beams) to rebuild or rehabilitate their house while 152 improved shelters for persons with specific needs were built. UNHCR's efforts also focused on **building back better**, supporting an innovative shelter project carried out by a young Sahrawi engineer to build 25 shelters made of plastic bottles (see Article in Annex).
- Preliminary results of the **2016 Nutrition survey** conducted in November indicate some positive improvement with regards to global acute malnutrition and stunting in children in Sahrawi camps but worrying malnutrition rates in pregnant and lactating women. Anaemia rates have also significantly increased. Final results are being finalized.
- In December 2016, a dozen of refugees and asylum seekers were affected by an operation of Algerian authorities to deport sub-Saharan migrants from Algiers to Tamanrasset, in the south of Algeria, and to Niger. UNHCR successfully liaised with the Government of Algeria to facilitate the return to Algiers of refugees and asylum seekers registered with UNHCR. UNHCR maintains its close cooperation with Algerian authorities to complete the **return of those in Tamanrasset and the readmission of others currently in Niger**.

Population of concern

A total of **96,021** people of concern

Urban refugees and asylum seekers **6,021**

Sahrawi refugees in camps near Tindouf **90,000**

UPDATE ON ACHIEVEMENTS

Operational Context

UNHCR's activities in Algeria focus on assistance provision to the Sahrawi refugee community who live in a protracted displacement situation in five camps near Tindouf. In addition, UNHCR registers, processes asylum claims and provides targeted assistance to persons of concern in the urban context in Algiers.

In Algiers, the UNHCR Office continues to register and provide documentation to asylum-seekers from Syria, Yemen, Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Cameroon, Mali and other countries of origin. In total, 6,201 persons are registered with UNCHR in urban areas, of which 238 are recognized as refugee under UNHCR's mandate. UNHCR does not conduct status determination for Syrians; about 5,408 are currently registered as asylum-seekers with UNHCR. The Government of Algeria estimates that there are over 40,000 Syrians in the country.

In Tindouf, UNHCR continues to provide protection and undertake care and maintenance activities for the 90,000 most vulnerable Sahrawi refugees living in all the camps. Of particular concern over the last two years was the impact of funding shortfalls on food distribution, which has resulted in reductions of monthly food rations, and which affects the nutritional levels of Sahrawi refugees. Preliminary results of the 2016 Nutrition Survey indicate some improvement in the rates of global acute malnutrition and stunting in children; however, the rates of anemia in women and children were significantly increased, and malnutrition rates in pregnant and lactating women is also of concern. In 2016, UNHCR continued its rehabilitation plan following the October 2015 floods which devastated all five refugee camps destroying the mud-brick homes of 17,841 families and affecting 60% per cent of public buildings. UNHCR rehabilitated four schools and built a new school. UNHCR also rehabilitated 152 shelters for persons with specific needs, and provided construction materials to more than 2,000 affected families in Dakhla camp to rebuild their damaged or destroyed houses. Provision of construction materials has continued into 2017.

In 2017, while continuing to provide essential humanitarian assistance, UNHCR, in coordination with the World Food Programme (WFP) and the Sahrawi refugee community, is strengthening livelihoods initiatives, in particular for the youth. In 2016 UNHCR started, in partnership with Oxfam Belgium and the Danish Refugee Council (DRC), to provide small grants for youth businesses. This year, a total of 13 projects are currently supported by UNHCR in partnership with Oxfam Belgium – from an IT centre to a vegetable farm. In addition, a total of 24 projects are currently supported by UNHCR in partnership with DRC, from a cement brick factory to a food processing project.

Achievements



Protection

Achievements and Impact

Algiers

- From November 2016 to January 2017, 271 individuals were registered by UNHCR and during the same period, 36 asylum seekers have been recognized refugees. Syrians represent the majority of persons approaching UNHCR to register, with 173 Syrians registering during the period - UNHCR does not conduct refugee status determination for Syrian nationals. Since the beginning of 2017, an average of 63 Syrians has approached UNHCR on a monthly basis to register.
- In December 2016, a first meeting gathering implementing partners, international organizations and other NGOs working within the context of mixed migration took place in UNHCR's Office in order to create a Protection Working Group. This would contribute to better coordination and information sharing among the various actors and create synergies.

Tindouf

- For this year's 16 Days of Activism campaign against Gender-Based Violence (25 November to 10 December 2016), UNHCR – in collaboration with the Sahrawi refugee community – carried out diverse activities reaching all segments

of the population from drawing competitions for students to games for persons with disabilities. Campaign activities included drawing competitions in schools and specialized centres; sports competitions, traditional games and gymnastics; a TV session on the theme of the campaign; games with children on non-discrimination and proper use of the internet; and celebrations of World AIDS Day, and International Day of Persons with Disabilities.



Activities with school children in Dakhla camp as part of the 16 Days of Activism. © UNHCR / M. Brahim (L) & UNHCR / K. Halim (R)

- Sahrawi refugee youth volunteers, with support of UNHCR, carried out an Anti-Drug / Anti-Drug Trafficking Campaign, reaching students, youth, and concerned parents in all the camps. This campaign was designed by young refugees to target the youth in Sahrawi refugee camps. It including a theatre performance by school children.
- UNHCR partners, *Comitato Internazionale per lo Sviluppo dei Popoli* (CISP) and *Movement for Peace, Disarmament & Liberty* (MPDL), organized two training workshops during the reporting period, one on **Criminal Law and International Legal Provisions on Illicit Drug Trafficking**, for Sahrawi lawyers; and the other on **Reinforcing Social Protection System for Sahrawi Youth and Women**, in conjunction with the Sahrawi refugee community active in the legal sector and the Sahrawi Human Rights Commission.



(L) Youth presenters speaking to concerned parents at Awserd camp; (R) Students perform a skit using a prop drug cigarette in Agda intermediate school, Smara camp. Both activities were part of the anti-drug campaign organized by Sahrawi youth. © UNHCR / R. Fraser

Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

Algiers

- UNHCR's activities in urban areas are limited to Algiers province; UNHCR is looking at ways to expand its partnership network and to conduct mission to outreach to persons in concern throughout the country.

Education

Achievements and Impact

Algiers

- All school-aged refugee and asylum-seekers children continue to have free access to and are enrolled in public school. UNHCR provides transport, school supplies and a daily meal to refugee children in Algiers in the Lycée

Descartes, the public francophone school attended by sub-Saharan PoCs. In January 2017, UNHCR and partner *Reseau Algérien pour la défense des droits de l'enfant* (NADA) organized a one day event to raise awareness on gender-based violence which gathered 100 children and educational staff at Lycée Descartes, as part of the 16 Days of Activism.

Tindouf

- UNHCR met with Sahrawi DAFI (university scholarship) students, to receive their feedback and draw lessons from the programme. In 2017, 50 additional students will receive scholarships, for a total of 75 DAFI students.

Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- **Algiers:** Language barrier is a challenge, most notably for children without a good command of Arabic, as there is only one public school teaching in French. Arabic courses for French-speaking individuals should be strengthened for both children and parents. Due to limited funding, unaccompanied asylum-seeker children do not have assistance to cover school supplies and transportation to school.
- **Tindouf:** 47 students due to graduate from Simon Bolivar Secondary School, a Spanish speaking school in Smara camp, need scholarships to complete their education abroad. There are no Spanish language secondary schools in Algeria or the camps offering upper level of secondary education.



Health and Nutrition

Achievements and Impact

Tindouf

- Preliminary results of the 2016 nutrition survey showed a net improvement in terms of global acute malnutrition prevalence (decrease from 7% to 4.5%) but the issue of anemia is still of concern with a significant increase of its prevalence among children (from 28% in 2012 to 48% in 2016) and also among women of reproductive age (from 38% to 58%). The increase was specifically significant among lactating women (from 56% to 72%). The final report will be shared by mid-March.
- In December 2016, UNHCR organized a two-week training workshop for 40 medical doctors and 30 nurses, all of whom are from the refugee community. The training focused on non-communicable chronic diseases (NCDs). After this workshop, standardized and unified protocols for the treatment of the main NCDs were developed and shared with all health centres/hospitals.
- UNHCR and partner CISP organized two training sessions on psychosocial support for 20 psychologists. Topics related to psychomotor development of children and psychological resilience strategies in protracted refugee situations.
- UNHCR and partner *Triangle Génération Humanaire* (TGH) inaugurated the new X-ray ward in Dakhla camp hospital and the voluntary testing centre for STIs/HIV in Rabouni. The former will enhance the access to quality health care and decrease the number of referrals to Rabouni hospital (180 km away).



Measuring the length of a child, nutrition survey 2016, Laayoune camp. © UNHCR / C. Meziani



Water and Sanitation (WASH)

Achievements and Impact

Tindouf

- In order to strengthen and improve the existing water system in the camp, UNHCR partner Solidaridad Internacional – Andalucía (SI-A) conducted a hydrogeological study of the existing boreholes and aquifer in Laayoune camp. The result of the study confirmed the urgent need to reduce the quantity of sand present in the water before it passes through the osmosis station. Two reservoirs were therefore moved upstream of the osmosis station to reduce the quantity of sand.

- UNHCR constructed 150 reinforced concrete water storage tanks for identified vulnerable families, to improve water storage at household level.

Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- The average 18 litres per person per day distributed to Sahrawi refugees is below the international minimum standard of 20 litres per person per day.

Shelter and NFIs

Achievements and Impact

Algiers

- UNHCR provides a monthly food basket and core relief items to all urban refugees. Accommodation along with essential NFIs (i.e. mattress, blankets and kitchenware) was provided to approximately 90 vulnerable refugees.

Tindouf

Emergency Response:

- As part of the long-term emergency response to the October 2015 floods, UNHCR, through the Algerian Red Crescent, provided 920 tons of cement for approximately 2,000 families in various camps to rehabilitate or to reconstruct their damaged or destroyed shelters. 5,990 corrugated iron sheets and 1,017 timber beams were also distributed for affected families in Dakhla camp. UNHCR and partner TGH provided 152 improved shelters for persons with specific needs. After rehabilitating four schools, UNHCR partner CISP finalized the construction of a primary school in Smara camp funded by IKEA Foundation. The school has the capacity to accommodate some 600 pupils. Altogether, 5,000 metric tonnes of cement, 5,354 pieces of timber beams, and 14,000 corrugated metal sheets have been distributed. Regular field visits allow UNHCR to monitor the progress in reconstruction and rehabilitation.
- With the support of UNHCR Innovation Fund, Sahrawi refugees began the construction of 25 shelters (five per camp) made of plastic bottles (see Article in Annex). These shelters will be environmentally friendly and more energy efficient. 25 vulnerable refugees, identified by the community, will take ownership of the houses once completed. As of 1 February 31, 10 shelters were completed in Smara and Awserd camps, with the other 15 well underway.

Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- **Algiers:** Due to limited funding, UNHCR cannot provide accommodation to asylum-seekers is non-existent, including vulnerable cases with specific needs such as teenagers and unaccompanied children.

Livelihoods and Self-Reliance

Achievements and Impact

Tindouf

- Last year, UNHCR and Oxfam Belgium launched an appeal to youth in the camps for projects within the camps which would have positive social impact on the community and be sustainable in the long term. A total of 13 projects were selected, and eight of the 13 were up and running as of end of January: an IT centre and a children's park in Boujdour camp, a youth volunteer centre in Smara camp, a poultry farm and a vegetable farm in Laayoune camp, a pizzeria, and a sweetshop ('pâtisserie') in Awserd camp, and a flour mill in Dakhla camp. The remaining five projects are expected to be operational by the end of February 2017.



A chicken farm in Laayoune camp launched by OXFAM Belgium. © UNHCR / N. Tounsi

- During 2016, 112 projects were submitted by youth refugees to UNHCR partner Danish Refugee Council (DRC) for support. IN total, 59 were selected: 24 projects funded by UNHCR, and 35 projects funded by ECHO. UNHCR-funded projects range from a cement brick factory in Smara camp to a public bath in Dakhla camp.

Durable Solutions

Achievements and Impact

Algiers

- UNHCR is seeking durable solutions for refugees in Algeria through assisting voluntary return or resettlement to a third country. In November 2016, one refugee departed for resettlement to the USA. In January 2017, one refugee was resettled to France.

In 2016, UNHCR submitted 46 cases for resettlement. In total, 17 individuals were resettled to third countries in 2016/2017 with UNHCR support.

Working in Partnership

Algiers

- UNHCR is working closely with IOM who recently opened an office in Algiers, to establish a good working collaboration, notably a referral mechanism for rejected asylum-seekers and victims of human trafficking.

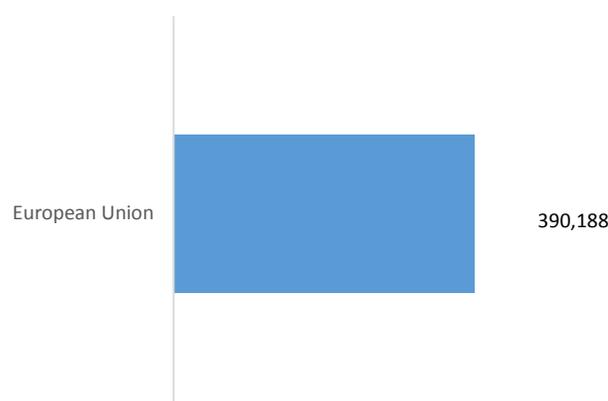
FINANCIAL INFORMATION

Total recorded contributions for the operation amount to some **US\$ 390,188**.

Major donors of unrestricted and regional funds in 2016:

United States of America (200 M) | Sweden (95 M) | Priv Donors Spain (58 M) | Netherlands (46 M) | United Kingdom (45 M) | Norway (40 M) | Japan (24 M) | Denmark (24 M) | Priv Donors Republic of Korea (21 M) | Priv Donors Italy (20 M) | Priv Donors Japan (18 M) | Priv Donors Sweden (18 M) | Priv Donors USA (16 M) | Canada (16 M) | Australia (15 M) | Switzerland (15 M) | France (14 M) | Germany (13 M) | Italy (10 M)

Funding received in 2017 (USD)



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Annex I

Bottled sand builds better homes for Sahrawi refugees

In the remote desert of southwest Algeria, a young Sahrawi refugee is filling discarded bottles with sand to build shelters that better withstand the harsh climate.

Tindouf, Algeria, 11 January 2017



A young Sahrawi refugee builds a weather-resistant shelter out of recycled plastic bottles filled with sand at a camp in Tindouf, Algeria. © UNHCR

TINDOUF, Algeria – With a master’s degree in energy efficiency, Sahrawi refugee Tateh Lehbib Breica had originally planned to build an energy efficient home in the desert, using discarded bottles for a roof garden. But as the roof’s circular form presented construction challenges, the 27-year-old found himself left with numerous bottles which were no longer good for their intended purpose – growing plant seedlings.

“I asked myself ‘What can I do with these?’” says Breica, who was born and raised in Awserd refugee camp, attended university in Algiers under a DAFI scholarship, and later studied for his master’s at a Spanish university. “Then I remembered a documentary I had seen, during my university studies, on building using plastic bottles, and thought, ‘Why not try that?’”

Providing adequate housing that can withstand the harsh desert climate is a challenge in Awserd camp, one of five in the area surrounding Tindouf, sheltering Sahrawi refugees who fled fighting in the Western Sahara War more than 40 years ago. Houses built from mudbricks, or adobe, are vulnerable to the heavy rains that periodically sweep in over the Sahara

Desert, including one storm in late 2015 that demolished thousands of homes. Frequent sandstorms also fill the houses, and traditional Sahrawi tents, with choking dust, leading to temporary evacuations.

The first house Breica built, using discarded bottles filled with the ubiquitous sand, was for his elderly grandmother, who has difficulty walking and was injured while being carried to a community centre in the camp to sit out one sandstorm. In addition to having greater structural resistance to water, the thick-walled circular home also presented a lower profile to the wind and proved better at keeping out the penetrating sand and dust from the sandstorms or “haboobs.”

Breica’s interest in building with throwaway plastic containers earned him the moniker of “*Majnoun al qarurat*” – “Crazy with bottles.” The structure’s uniqueness, together with posts that Breica made on Facebook, also ensured that the house received a lot of attention beyond the camp.

Among those who were quick to perceive its benefits were staff with UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, who came to see it for themselves. “After the October 2015 heavy rains that damaged and destroyed tens of thousands of adobe houses, UNHCR has been working with the Sahrawis on improving construction techniques, to better withstand the severe weather of this region,” says Juliette Murekeyisoni, Senior Field Coordinator for UNHCR in Tindouf. “We have been supporting the use of bricks fortified by cement, and now we are supporting the use of plastic bottles.”

Shelter Officer Otis Moore, meanwhile, explains that plastic bottles have advantages over the adobe brick houses and traditional family tents used by most Sahrawis, while the circular house design itself brings its own benefits. “As the adobe houses can be destroyed by heavy or prolonged rain, use of plastic bottles instead of mud-brick will create more durable structures. And we have adopted the circular shape because it is aerodynamic and can withstand storms more effectively.”

Now, in a project bankrolled by the UNHCR Innovation Fund, Breica is working with the UN Refugee Agency to construct 25 houses using sand-filled plastic bottles in place of bricks in all five camps: Awserd, Boujdour, Dakhla, Smara and Laayoune. The houses, which are on track for completion this month, will be allocated to vulnerable people.

In recognition of his creative designs, Breica recently received an award for 2016 Personality of the Year from a local magazine. However, the nickname given him in the camp has stuck: “People still see me as the guy obsessed with recycling bottles and building unusual houses,” he says.

<http://www.unhcr.org/news/latest/2017/1/5874c2dd4/bottled-sand-builds-better-homes-refugees.html>

Story by Russell Fraser, UNHCR Tindouf