

TUNISIA

28 April 2020

Key figures

967 confirmed cases of COVID-19¹

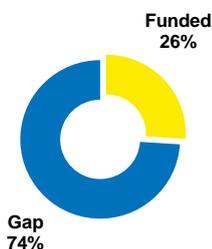
0 confirmed cases among refugees and asylum seekers

4,494 registered persons of concern to UNHCR (refugees and asylum-seekers)²

1,000 vulnerable refugees and asylum seekers received food and hygiene items from civil society organizations, companies and private citizens.

Funding

USD **8.8 M** required in 2020



USD **2.2 M** received as of 14 April 2020

Operational context

On 19 April 2020, Tunisian Prime Minister announced the extension of the confinement period until the 3 May 2020, and a re-adjustment of curfew schedule during the month of Ramadan, from 8pm until 6am. UNHCR Tunisia will continue to rely on alternative working arrangements, to adapt and sustain existing activities, and to step up support to refugees and asylum seekers to meet current and emerging challenges.

On 8 April, the Minister of Interior, the Minister of Social Affairs and the Minister in charge of Human Rights, Relations with Constitutional bodies and Civil Society, issued a statement ([ARB](#)) about exceptional measures that will be taken by the Government in favour of foreigners in Tunisia (including refugees and asylum seekers); namely concerning the non-penalization of foreigners with expired visa and non-applicability of fees related to illegal stay.

Essential support to persons of concern to UNHCR continued to be provided, such as emergency medical care, protection monitoring, psycho-social support, shelter, cash and food assistance, etc. Some activities previously limited to urgent cases resumed in remote modality; namely legal counselling (provided remotely by lawyers from UNHCR's partner the Arab Institute for Human Rights) and the recording of people waiting to be registered, allowing identification of persons with specific needs.

Preparedness and response

Given the high volume of calls received through helplines established by partner Tunisian Refugee Council (CTR), UNHCR provided a data collection tool (using KoBoToolbox software) to assist CTR frontline staff who receive the calls to process them more efficiently. The tool consist in a digitalized 20-minutes assessment survey, currently in its pilot phase, and aims to facilitate the interaction with refugees and asylum seekers; to document protection and COVID-19 related concerns; to identify persons in need of services and assistance and to collect harmonized data country-wide. Moreover, the survey aims also to collect consent from persons of concern to share their basic biodata with the government in view of including them in the national assistance program.

More than 150 refugees and asylum seekers joined the dedicated Facebook groups "We hear you" (run by partner CTR) through which they can raise concerns or get information about COVID-19. The group allows also the dissemination of information material in different languages.

Counselling related to Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) was reinforced in order to respond to the increasing needs expressed by refugees and asylum seekers (cases of insomnia, acute anxiety, depression) both through phone or videocall and through visits to shelter for individual and group support conducted by psychologists from CTR.



Distribution of blankets for confined patients in Djerba island © CTR

¹ Source: Tunisian Government (covid-19.tn) as of 28 April 2020

² as of 31 March 2020



Refugee Housing Unit donated to Medenine Regional Hospital for visitors screening © UNHCR

UNHCR donated one Refugee Housing Unit to Medenine Regional Hospital, to be used for screening the visitors before entering the hospital. Moreover, 100 blankets were donated to Medenine Governorate for the persons under confinement coming from Djerba island.

Partnerships and coordination

The Ministry of Human Rights, Relations with Constitutional bodies and Civil Society, in coordination with members from the parliament, other ministries and the Tunisian Union for Industry and Commerce (UTICA) launched an on-line [platform](#) for the civil society and international organizations including UNHCR. The organizations can provide lists of foreigners living in the country, including students, migrants, refugees and asylum seekers who need assistance in order to include them in

the national assistance program. As a result, UNHCR protection unit is in discussion with the Government in order to assess the issue of data protection and to finalize a data sharing agreement with the concerned ministry.

On 22 April, [UNHCR](#) and IOM met the President of Tunisian Parliament, Rached Ghannouchi, to discuss the situation of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in the context of COVID-19 pandemic and the importance of ratifying the draft national law on asylum. The President of the Parliament welcomed the efforts made by international organizations in providing care for migrants and refugees and said there is readiness to strengthen legislation on their rights.

In the city of Sfax, the local authorities, together with UNHCR, IOM, partners NGOs and civil society set up a task force in order to coordinate the collection and distribution of in-kind donations for refugees and asylum seekers, and to advocate against evictions for non-payment of rent.

On 16 April, UNHCR met Minister of Women, Family, Children and Elderly Affairs to advocate for the inclusion of refugee women and elderly in the government psychosocial response plan for COVID-19.

UNHCR Tunisia [launched](#) an emergency preparedness and response plan for an initial period of three months with additional and immediate needs for the COVID-19 prevention and response efforts estimated at \$1.5 million. Given expected long-lasting effects of the Covid-19 situation on forcibly displaced, UNHCR is reviewing its response plan to expand assistance until the end of the year.

UNHCR Tunisia is grateful for the support of [European Union](#) | [Italy](#) | [Monaco](#) | [Netherlands](#) | [RDPP NA – EU](#) | [Switzerland](#) and to those who have contributed to UNHCR programmes with unearmarked and softly earmarked funds.