

TUNISIA

Operational context

06 April 2020

In line with the announcement by the Tunisian National Security Council of the extension of the general lockdown until 18 April, 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.

Key figures

UNHCR declared a global internal Level 2 emergency on 25 March, in order to facilitate the response by activating emergency procurement, partner selection and other procedures.

596 confirmed cases of COVID-19¹

Essential support continues to be provided, such as emergency medical care, protection monitoring, psycho-social support, shelter, cash and food assistance, as well as legal assistance for urgent cases (i.e. arrest) and in detention. In-person activities such as registration, verification and home visits remain suspended until further notice.

0 confirmed cases among refugees and asylum seekers

Certain protection consequences related to COVID-19 preventive measures emerged. Most significantly, the closure of international borders is having an impact on access to asylum. UNHCR and its partners are monitoring the situation to ensure follow up on any case that may come to their attention. Also, UNHCR is assessing the socio-economic impact of the closure of all non-essential economic activities; which has drastically limited livelihood opportunities for refugees and asylum seekers and is negatively impacting their capacity to meet their basic needs, leaving many in dire need.

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

Preparedness and response

A total of 30 vulnerable refugees and asylum seekers living in precarious dwellings in Tunis were relocated to safer accommodations. UNHCR and its partner Tunisian Refugee Council (CTR) continued to ensure follow up, case management, and psychosocial support. Food and non-food items were also distributed.

602 vulnerable refugees and asylum seekers identified by UNHCR and CTR as in need of assistance related to COVID-19 pandemic

442 refugees and asylum seekers of different nationalities received food and hygiene items from different civil society organizations across the country (Sfax, Tataouine, Djerba, Zarzis, Ben Guerdane) under the coordination of UNHCR's partner CTR, who is also mobilizing civil society in other cities to contribute (Gabes, Sidi Bouzid, Gafsa, Kebili).

Group awareness sessions were replaced by individual counselling sessions provided on the phone, providing information about prevention and hygiene measures to adopt and business continuity modalities for UNHCR and partners services. Since the start of the lockdown, 346 calls were made by CTR to refugees and asylum seekers in Medenine, Gabes and Sfax.

UNHCR partner Tunisian Association for Management and Social Stability (TAMSS), promoting livelihood opportunities, continued its activities remotely through phone calls to refugees and asylum seekers in order to identify the risks affecting their businesses or jobs and to put in place response measures. TAMSS also continued the identification of persons of concern to UNHCR that can participate in the program (wage employment, self-employment or vocational training).

Partnership and coordination

UNHCR actively participates in the coordination structures put in place with the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Social Affairs as well as with other United Nations Agencies and advocates for the inclusion of refugees and asylum seekers in the preventive measures taken at country level and for them to fully access healthcare services they may require. UNHCR and its partners are coordinating with Tunisian Government to ensure the inclusion of persons of concern to UNHCR in their assistance programs.

Facing many similar challenges to UNHCR, NGO partners (the Tunisian Refugee Council, the Arab Institute for Human Rights and the Tunisian Association for Management and Social Stability) have reacted quickly to the new situation with a spirit of great solidarity and flexibility towards refugees and asylum seekers.

¹ Source: Tunisian Government (covid-19.tn) as of 06 April 2020
² as of 31 March 2020