European Commission | Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection

ALGERIA – Sahrawi Refugees

ECHO FACTSHEET

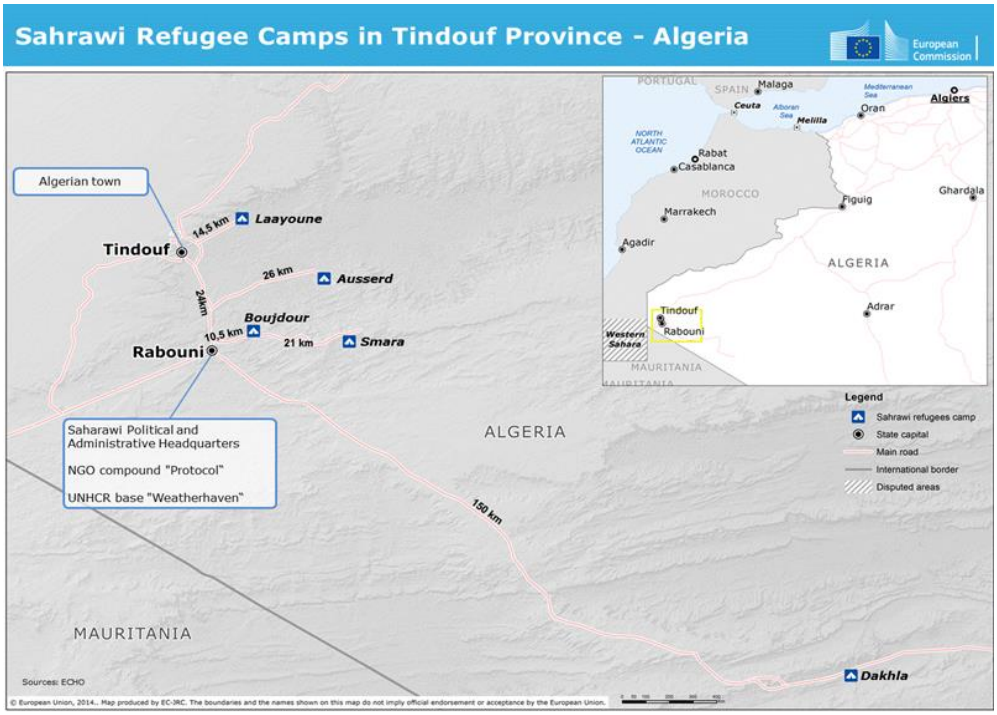
Facts & Figures

Some 90 000 vulnerable refugees

Five camps in the south-west of the Algerian desert

Total European Commission Funding in 2016: € 9 million

Total European Commission funding since 1993: € 222 million



Key messages

- The Sahrawi refugee crisis is the result of an unresolved political conflict with humanitarian consequences, which have to be addressed in line with the humanitarian principles of neutrality and impartiality.
- The Sahrawi refugee situation is defined as a forgotten crisis by the European Commission, meaning that it receives little funding and attention from the international community.
- Refugees living in five camps have little access to outside resources and international aid continues to be necessary for their survival.
- In 2016, European Commission's humanitarian assistance has initiated livelihood activities to increase refugee's resilience and decrease aid dependency.

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Background

When Spain withdrew from its colony of Western Sahara in 1975, it handed over control of two-thirds of the territory to Morocco and one-third to Mauritania. The division of the territory triggered armed conflict with the Polisario Front, founded in 1973 by opponents of Spanish colonization, who proclaimed the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) in 1976 and established a government-in-exile.

To escape the worsening violence, Sahrawi's began to move to the Tindouf region of Algeria. Mauritania pulled out of the Western Sahara in 1979. Morocco and SADR eventually agreed to a ceasefire and mediation from the United Nations in 1991. But today, the conflict remains unresolved and refugees live in five refugee camps named after cities of Western Sahara - Laâyoune, Ausserd, Smara, Boujdour and Dakhla.

The climate in this region is extremely harsh. Access to basic resources such as food, water, healthcare, housing and education is very limited. The largely isolated camps offer almost no employment opportunities, creating a dependency of the refugees on remittances and international aid. In such a remote location, logistics also play a key role to ensure regular distributions of relief items to the refugee population. Another important factor is the safety and security of humanitarian workers, which has improved over the past years but still remains a daily challenge.

The European Union's Humanitarian Response

Funding

From 1993 to 2016, the European Commission has provided € 222 million in humanitarian aid, and is one of the leading donors. In 2016, the Commission gave € 9 million to improve the living conditions of the Sahrawi refugees. Food aid is a major component of this funding: over € 5 million has been allocated to supply basic food items through UN World Food Programme (WFP), and Oxfam. WFP is piloting a Cash Based Transfer (CBT) modality in the camps with e-vouchers, aiming at defining the practical elements of the intervention. CBT is more cost-efficient, decreases logistic costs compared to in-kind distributions, fosters refugees' dignity, and has the potential to boost the camps' economy as well as to contribute to creating jobs in participating shops.

Water is also a major concern for the refugees and the Commission helps to ensure the availability of safe drinking water in sufficient quantities. Projects have been implemented by UNHCR to connect the camps directly to water sources through piped networks and water trucking. Two water treatment plants have also been installed to provide clean water.

Provision of essential medicines and the training of local health personnel by Medico International are also funded by the Commission.

In 2016, the Commission initiated livelihood activities to increase refugee's resilience and decrease aid dependency. For instance, a new central mechanical workshop will significantly increase the capacity to maintain vehicles and extend their lifespan. This is particularly crucial for the maintenance of water trucks and to ensure regular distribution of hygiene and household items as well as food.

Outreach and coordination with humanitarian partners

The European Commission's Humanitarian Aid and Civil protection department (ECHO) is actively involved in the co-ordination bodies for the food, water and health sectors that meet regularly in Tindouf and Algiers, as well in the inter-agency forum recently put in place. Such mechanisms are an opportunity to discuss core issues with all interested parties.

The EU is also engaging with the Algerian and Sahrawi authorities respectively, to improve the quality of aid delivered to refugees and make sure that aid is delivered in the most cost-efficient way.