

New report highlights need for protection in mixed migration

GENEVA, 31 March 2010—A recent report published by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Policy Development and Evaluation Service examines the impact of the Agency's work on the well being of refugees and asylum seekers in Morocco, most of whom report having endured numerous forms of physical, psychological, economic and social deprivation over the course of their journey to and through the country.

While significant challenges remain, UNHCR's efforts have contributed to an environment that is more conducive to effectively protecting refugees in the country, many of whom find themselves side by side with other migrants who have experienced similar challenges en route to and upon arrival to Morocco.

Morocco is signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, has a longstanding tradition of hosting refugees and migrants and has demonstrated considerable leadership on migration internationally. The report notes however, that a legislative and institutional framework on migration and asylum is needed in order for refugees and asylum seekers to be able to establish dignified, sustainable livelihoods.

"Hindered by their lack of recognized legal status in the country, as well as by high national unemployment rates, the difficulties that refugees, like other migrants in Morocco, encounter in establishing livelihoods and attaining self reliance are of great concern to UNHCR, as well as to non-governmental organizations (NGOs) including ICMC," notes ICMC Communications Officer, Alanna Ryan, who contributed ICMC expertise by serving as a consultant on the review team that prepared the report.

Evoking the multiplicity of need and the not uncommon despair with current livelihood prospects, one refugee woman told the review team that she had "...lost everything. My husband, my children, I have no one. I am so old that no one even wants me when I try to prostitute myself. My skin, my lips are cracking from malnourishment. Yet they say I am not vulnerable. Maybe as I lay on my deathbed, they will say that I am. But by then I shall not even care."

The report acknowledges that Morocco has, by signing the international refugee instruments, voluntarily assumed responsibilities toward people who are in need of protection. It further acknowledges that efforts to increase protection for asylum seekers and refugees within the country will only succeed with the active engagement and support of the Moroccan government, given that the ultimate responsibility to protect and provide durable solutions for refugees lies with states. The report also suggests a need for greater public and political awareness about refugee protection and asylum seekers in the country.

Only about 750 to 800 people, or less than one percent of the total number of migrants in Morocco, have been recognized as refugees. It remains difficult to estimate the number of foreign nationals currently living in Morocco without legal status. Moroccan government sources and independent researchers suggest that some 10,000 irregular migrants of sub-Saharan origin may be in the country, while individuals from Asian countries, including Bangladesh, India and Pakistan also make their way to the country via Niger and Algeria. A growing number of Iraqis are also present within Moroccan communities.

A copy of the full report is available for download below, or by visiting: www.unhcr.org
