



# ECHO FACTSHEET Sahrawi refugees

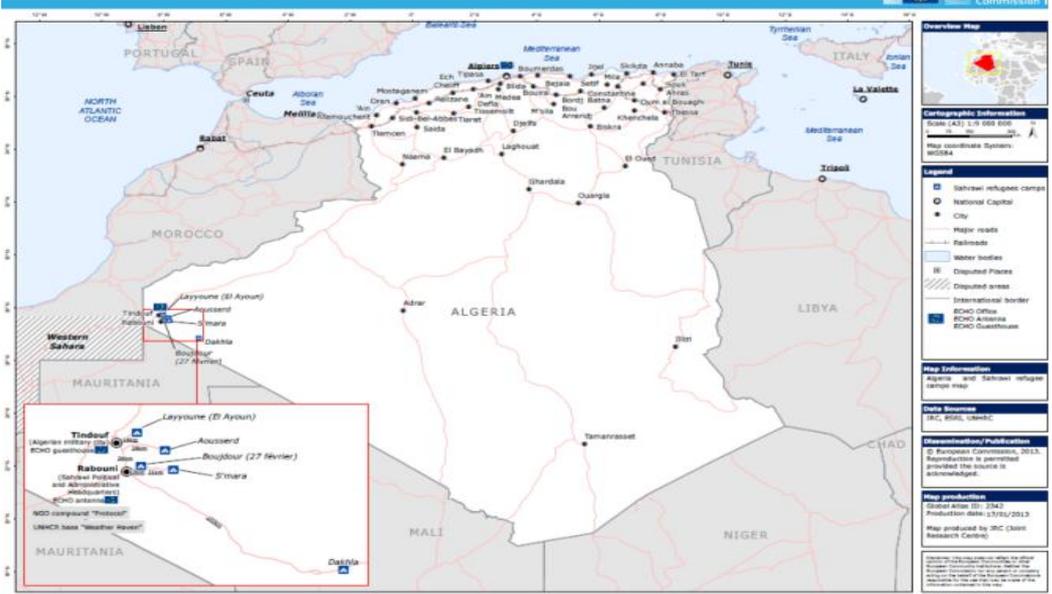
## Facts & Figures

Number of refugees: **90,000** most vulnerable refugees

5 camps in the south south-west of the Algerian desert

Total Funding to date – ECHO: € 10 million in 2013

## ALGERIA AND SAHRAWI REFUGEE CAMPS MAP



## Humanitarian situation and needs

### Key messages

- The Sahrawi refugee crisis counts among the forgotten crises for which the little funding available is coming mainly from institutional donors like ECHO.
- The Sahrawi refugees will remain dependent on international aid as long as no political solution for their situation has been found

### Background

When Spain pulled out of 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 Polisario Front, founded in 1973 by the opponents of the Spanish colonization, proclaimed the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) in 1976 and established a government-in-exile.

Morocco and the SADR were left face-to-face when Mauritania decided to yield its territory in 1979. Although the two warring factions accepted mediation from the United Nations in 1991, up to the present date the conflict is unresolved and without a solution for the Sahrawian people.

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Caught in the crossfire, the Sahrawi refugees installed themselves in the region of Tindouf in 1975 hoping to return home. Today, they live in five refugee camps named after cities of Western Sahara - Laâyoune, Ausserd, Smara, Boujdour and Dakhla.

### Major needs and related problems

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 remote location, logistics also plays a key role to ensure regular distributions of relief items to the refugee population.

## The European Union's Humanitarian Response

### Funding

#### European Commission

ECHO started to help meet the basic needs of the refugees in 1993. Since then it has provided around €200 million in humanitarian aid through its implementing partners.

In 2013, ECHO has allocated €10 million to improving the living conditions of the Sahrawi refugees. Food aid is a major component of this funding: €7 million have been allocated to supply not only basic food items such as wheat flour, barley, rice, oil, sugar and lentils, but also fruits and vegetables.

Water is one of the major concerns for the refugees. The Commission therefore contributes to ensuring the availability of safe drinking water in sufficient quantity. Projects have been implemented to connect the camps directly to water sources through piped networks and water trucking. Two reverse osmosis plants have also been installed to provide clean water.

ECHO is also funding hygiene awareness campaigns and sanitation, particularly in schools and hospitals, to reduce the risk of diseases. Provision of essential drugs and the training of local health personnel are also covered by the Commission's humanitarian department.

In 2013, ECHO is also providing support to the disabled through a distribution of specialized equipment and the training of social workers to improve support at home to these vulnerable individuals.

The maintenance of the vehicle fleet and the purchase of new water trucks are foreseen in 2013 in order to ensure that food, hygiene and household items as well as water distributions are carried out without interruptions throughout the year.

#### Member States

Spain, through the Spanish Cooperation and the 'decentralized cooperation', was the largest donor to the Sahrawi refugees with €16.3 million worth of assistance in 2011. In 2012, the contribution of the Spanish Cooperation alone reached €6.7 million. Sweden also provides regular support through the distribution of canned fish.

### Outreach and coordination with humanitarian partners

ECHO is actively involved in the 3 main coordination bodies for the food, water and health sectors that gather regularly in Tindouf and Algiers. Such mechanisms are an opportunity to discuss core issues with all stakeholders, including the Sahrawi authorities and to improve the quality of aid delivered to refugees.