

Algeriet (2)

**UNHCR**
The UN Refugee Agency76
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An estimated 100,000 to 200,000 people remained internally displaced in Algeria at the end of 2003. About 8,000 Algerians sought asylum in industrialized countries during the year, joining tens of thousands of Algerians who have sought refuge abroad during the past ten years. Hundreds of thousands more Algerians have reportedly fled to Europe without filing asylum claims during the past decade.

Algeria hosted approximately 170,000 refugees at the end of 2003, including some 165,000 from Western Sahara, and nearly 5,000 Palestinians.

Political Violence

A brutal Islamic insurgency in response to canceled elections has killed an estimated 100,000 or more Algerians since 1992, many of them civilians. Although at a lesser degree than previous years, bloodshed persisted during 2003, as insurgent attacks on rural villages and government counterinsurgency measures killed nearly 1,000 people.

Government officials claimed that Algeria's army had virtually defeated insurgent forces and alleged that fewer than several hundred armed rebels remained. The government continued to offer blanket amnesty to insurgents who relinquished their weapons.

Displaced Algerians

As in previous years, Algerian authorities barred international human rights and humanitarian agencies from conducting assessments of internal displacement, making information incomplete and accurate estimates of numbers virtually impossible. Thousands of families uprooted by the decade of violence have fled to urban areas, where they live with friends and relatives and in public buildings, makeshift shelters, and shantytowns.

Up to 30,000 displaced persons continued to seek shelter in the town of Tiaret, 150 miles (190 km) southwest of the capital, Algiers. About 30,000 uprooted people continued to congregate near the town of Saida, 210 miles (330 km) southwest of Algiers. Many internally displaced Algerians in rural areas continued to struggle without clean drinking water, health care, and other basic social services during 2003.

Refugees from Western Sahara

Ethnic Sahrawi refugees continued to live at four camps in a harsh, remote corner of western Algeria during 2003. Most had fled civil war in Western Sahara in the mid-1970s. Negotiations to resolve the 27-year-old dispute in Western Sahara remained stalemated during 2003, forcing an estimated 165,000 Sahrawis to languish in Smara, Laayoune, Asward, and Dakhla refugee camps near the Algerian desert town of Tindouf.

Virtually no Sahrawi refugees have repatriated during the past two decades. Sahrawi refugees continued to cope with food shortages caused by delayed and unpredictable food aid deliveries that lacked nutritional variety. More than 10 percent of the camp's residents suffered from acute malnutrition, while 30 percent suffered from chronic malnutrition during 2003. "Urgent crises elsewhere in the world all too frequently overshadow their food aid needs, making this literally a hand-to-mouth operation," the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) stated in December.



The World Food Programme (WFP) requested nearly \$30 million over a two-year period to feed Sahrawi refugees, but had received less than \$22 million by the end of 2003. The Algerian government donated 10,000 tons of rice.

In December, a high-level UN mission accompanied by officials from Algeria and Morocco visited the camps for Sahrawi refugees to review restarting confidence-building measures in 2004, including mail service and telephone links between the refugee camps and Western Sahara.

As in previous years, the actual number of Sahrawi refugees remained a matter of debate. Algerian authorities, UNHCR, WFP, and refugee leaders stated that 165,000 refugees lived in the Tindouf-area camps. UNHCR was unable to conduct a census to verify the number during the year. The U.S. Committee for Refugees (USCR) has in previous years cited 80,000 Sahrawi refugees in Algeria. The new number is not a result of a new influx, rather, after further research and an extensive site visit to North Africa to examine the plight of Sahrawi refugees in July 2003, USCR is readjusting the figure to reflect the number of beneficiaries served by international humanitarian agencies.