European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations

Algeria

Introduction
A more than four-decade long unresolved political conflict with humanitarian consequences in Western Sahara has left behind tens of thousands Sahrawi refugees. They live in 5 camps in southwest Algeria with little access to outside resources, making humanitarian aid essential to their survival. The EU addresses this crisis in line with the humanitarian principles of neutrality and impartiality.

What are the needs?
The Sahrawis largely depend on outside help to survive. In the remote region where the refugee camps are located, access to basic resources such as food, water, healthcare, housing, and education is limited. The climate in the desert is extremely harsh.

A 2019 nutrition survey (World Food Programme, June 2019) found increasing malnutrition among Sahrawi refugee children, with global acute malnutrition among children under the age of 5 at 7.6% compared to 4.7% in 2016. Half of the number children and women also suffer from anaemia.

The largely isolated camps offer almost no employment opportunities, making refugees dependent on remittances and international aid. In such a remote location, logistics also play a key role to ensure regular distributions of relief to the refugee population.

Social cohesion and peace are extremely fragile in the camps, with young people growing frustrated by the lack of opportunities or change due to the political stalemate. Livelihood activities are therefore crucial to reduce the risk of radicalisation or social unrest.

The Sahrawi desert refugee camps are prone to natural hazards such as flash floods and sandstorms.
How are we helping?

Based on the lack of donors support and the low media coverage, the Sahrawi refugee situation is considered a ‘forgotten crisis’. Advocacy towards other donors is therefore important to raise the profile of the crisis and attract further funding.

The EU is the leading donor in this crisis. In 2019, the EU committed €9 million in humanitarian funding, of which €5.5 million provided food products and went to tackling the increasing malnutrition among Sahrawi refugee children and women in the camps.

Food and clean water are the main needs in the Sahrawi camps and the EU supports the provision of both. Currently the EU provides safe drinking water (including delivery of clean water by trucks). A strategy planned for several years includes the extension of the water network. This would reduce the dependency on water delivered by trucks, which is much less efficient.

The EU humanitarian aid also provides essential medicines that cover 80% of the health needs of the population in the camps. Particular attention is given to people with disabilities to alleviate their suffering, improve their well-being, and promote their inclusion in the community.

The EU is working to improve the education sector, especially the poor state of the infrastructure and sanitary facilities in schools. Improving the quality of education through better qualification of teachers and educational staff is also a priority.