

Asia and the Pacific

13 May 2020



9.2 million
Persons of concern



4.4 million
Refugees and Asylum seekers



2.9 million
Internally displaced persons



83,930
Returnees



2.3 million
Stateless persons

Overview

On 12 May, UNHCR and the Ministry of States and Frontier Regions (SAFRON) of Pakistan, in collaboration with the Pakistan Post Office Department, launched an emergency cash assistance initiative to support the most vulnerable refugee families in Pakistan in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. This cash support is similar to the Federal Government's Ehsaas cash programme, where vulnerable families receive Rs.12,000 (approximately USD 75) to cover a four-month period. UNHCR will initially target 36,000 refugee families, which will be expanded to include more families in need once additional donor support is secured.

In Bangladesh, following last week's report of the transfer to Bhasan Char (an island in the Bay of Bengal) of 29 individuals, the Government has indicated that additional boat arrivals, as well as any refugees found outside the camps, will also be transferred to the island. UNHCR has sought clarification from authorities on the matter.

Highlights by country

South-West Asia

Afghanistan

- While implementing activities to mitigate the spread of COVID-19, humanitarian actors in Afghanistan continue to respond to other ongoing and emerging humanitarian needs. Conflict and natural disasters across the country continue to displace thousands of families, compounding pre-existing vulnerabilities and making them potentially more susceptible to exposure to and transmission of COVID-19.

Islamic Republic of Iran

- As of 3 May, UNHCR partially resumed voluntary repatriation from the Islamic Republic of Iran to Afghanistan, which was temporarily suspended in March to limit the risks to refugees and staff. Returns are only taking place from Dogharoun, and preventative health and hygiene measures are in place.
- In the first quarter of 2020, 233 refugees returned to Afghanistan through UNHCR's return programme – 36% lower than in the same period in 2019 – with many reporting fear of COVID-19 spread and loss of livelihood as their main reason to return. Additionally, since January, around 200,000 undocumented Afghans have returned without UNHCR support.

Pakistan

- UNHCR conducted field visits to refugee villages and interacted with female Outreach Volunteers, community mobilizers and gender support groups to improve outreach and communication on COVID-19 preventive measures, including addressing social stigma and psychosocial support. The Office also conducted a virtual training on the updated emergency referral pathway and guidelines for remote SGBV case management developed by UNHCR Peshawar for partners providing specialized services to child protection cases, SGBV survivors and persons with specific needs.

Central Asia

Kyrgyzstan

- On 25 April, UNHCR and partners launched online tutoring for refugee children to support with homework and additional language classes. Tutors are university students with good academic performance from refugee communities.

Kazakhstan

- Approximately 90% of cash-based interventions (CBI) are distributed via electronic bank transfers. Three months of CBI is being provided to vulnerable persons of concern (POC) including those affected by the COVID situation. In addition, some 26 refugee families and 36 stateless/undocumented families have received humanitarian assistance from the Kazakhstan Red Crescent Society that is being provided to vulnerable citizens.

Tajikistan

- UNHCR will provide two-months of CBI support to 190 vulnerable refugee families.

Uzbekistan

- Three months of CBI was distributed in cash to all refugees as a response to the COVID-19 situation.

South Asia

India

- UNHCR initiated a second round of dry food and soap support to cover unmet needs from the first round. Some POC settlements have received support from local governments. Some POCs have also received assistance from local organisations, and UNHCR has facilitated linkages with local organisations where there is no partner presence.
- 600 masks made by a women's refugee initiative are being provided to Delhi police and sanitation workers to acknowledge their support of UNHCR and its persons of concern.

Nepal

- UNHCR finalized a support package to provide basic and critical COVID-19 assistance to Long-Stayer refugee settlements in Nepal through a partner. This includes additional food assistance to both Long-Stayer settlements and schools, medical and hygiene equipment, COVID isolation facilities and COVID awareness raising within these settlements.
- As part of a joint UN Agency monitoring effort, UNHCR Damak conducted assessments of seven quarantine centers on protection, security conditions and available services.

Sri Lanka

- UNHCR and partners in Sri Lanka continue to seek ways to provide psychosocial support to persons of concern utilizing online tools. These include women's support groups, private counselling sessions, English classes, and arts and crafts sessions for children.

South-East Asia

Bangladesh

- Construction of isolation and treatment centers (ITC) in Cox's Bazaar is progressing, with the 50-bed ITC completed. Pending the delivery of supplies, the facility will soon be ready to open. Another ITC in Ukhiya (144 beds) is planned for opening on 20 May.
- UNHCR has begun distributing agricultural materials (mainly vegetable seeds) to 2,000 vulnerable households in the host community. The Office is also resuming the Social Safety Net project for 16,000 vulnerable host community households. Also, in response to an appeal by the Deputy Commissioner, UNHCR will support an additional 16,000 households with one-off cash assistance.

Myanmar

- UNHCR supported OCHA and UNWOMEN to deliver protective facemasks to three quarantine facilities in Sittwe township in Central Rakhine, while in northern Rakhine, UNHCR is implementing several WASH projects. UNHCR in coordination with ICRC ensured coverage of handwashing facilities and related support in Buthidaung sites with the highest number of IDPs. In addition, UNHCR and UNDP have jointly conducted COVID-related awareness-raising sessions and distributed information, education and communication materials in 33 villages.

Indonesia

- UNHCR's persons of concern are now able to keep UNHCR updated with their current contact details thanks to a new online form (which is also updated on the UNHCR Indonesia website), which is

important not only for COVID-19 assistance but will also support more efficient and effective information sharing by UNHCR.

Malaysia

- UNHCR's COVID-19 Response Hotlines are open daily, seven days a week in multiple languages (Rohingya, Chin, Burmese, Arabic, Somali, Persian, Urdu and Tamil). The hotlines have so far received 14,939 calls, an average of 287 calls a day (80% of calls about COVID-19 are in Rohingya, followed by 16% in Burmese or Chin).
- UNHCR is providing hygiene and WASH equipment/supplies and material support for quarantine facilities in support of the Government's response to COVID-19.

Philippines

- More than 26,000 individuals (5,300 families) have been newly displaced across Mindanao since the outbreak of COVID-19, bringing the total number of displaced to 372,700. New displacement is still taking place. As response has been impacted by movement restrictions and social distancing requirements, the Bangsamoro Ministry of Social Services and Development (with UNHCR and other agencies) has launched the Mindanao Virtual Protection Coordination Platform to ensure coordination, protection analysis, advocacy and informed decision making amongst protection actors in Mindanao.

East Asia and the Pacific

Japan

- The Task Force on Prevention of Infection in Immigration Facilities published the first edition of "COVID-19 Response Manual in Immigration Facilities" – a compilation of concrete and practical countermeasures in three different work environments: ports of entry, residence application counters, and immigration detention facilities.

Pacific Islands

- The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly affected economic activity in the Pacific Islands where UNHCR has persons of concern, notably in Fiji and Samoa. In response, UNHCR provided on an exceptional basis, a three-months cash assistance support to POC who have been assessed to be in need of support in Fiji and Samoa.



In the refugee villages in Lakki Marwat district, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan, UNHCR staff continue their community outreach, meeting with Afghan refugee shopkeepers to inform them of the impact of the lockdown on small businesses.

Funding needs

UNHCR's revised COVID-19 Appeal was launched on 11 May, following the launch of the revised Global Humanitarian Response Plan. The total budgetary requirements for Asia-Pacific in UNHCR's revised appeal stands at USD 96.3 million to support preparedness/response activities in 14 operations in the region. The revised appeal can be found [here](#).

UNHCR remains grateful for the robust support from donors on the COVID-19 response including the Governments of the **US, Germany, the UK, Japan, Denmark, Canada, Australia**, as well as the **EU (ECHO and DEVCO)** and **CERF**. We also appreciate the support from private donors who have rallied swiftly to provide a range of in-kind donations for COVID-19 response in the region.

We are also grateful to donors who provide unearmarked contributions to UNHCR, which help support operations in Asia and enable us to respond in a timely and flexible manner. These donors include **Sweden, Norway, the Netherlands, Denmark, the UK, Germany, Switzerland**, and **private donors in Spain and the Republic of Korea**.

UNHCR continues to appeal to donors not to deprioritize funding for the regular programmes in Asia-Pacific as our ongoing activities are critical to support the over 9.2 million persons of concern in the region.

Contacts

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