

Regional Bureau for Europe

UPDATE # 8

20 May – 26 May 2020

Across the region, **movement restrictions are gradually being lifted** and, in many countries, it is expected that travel across internal borders will start to resume in June.

Twelve **UNHCR offices** in the region have shifted from full-time to partial telework over the last two weeks.

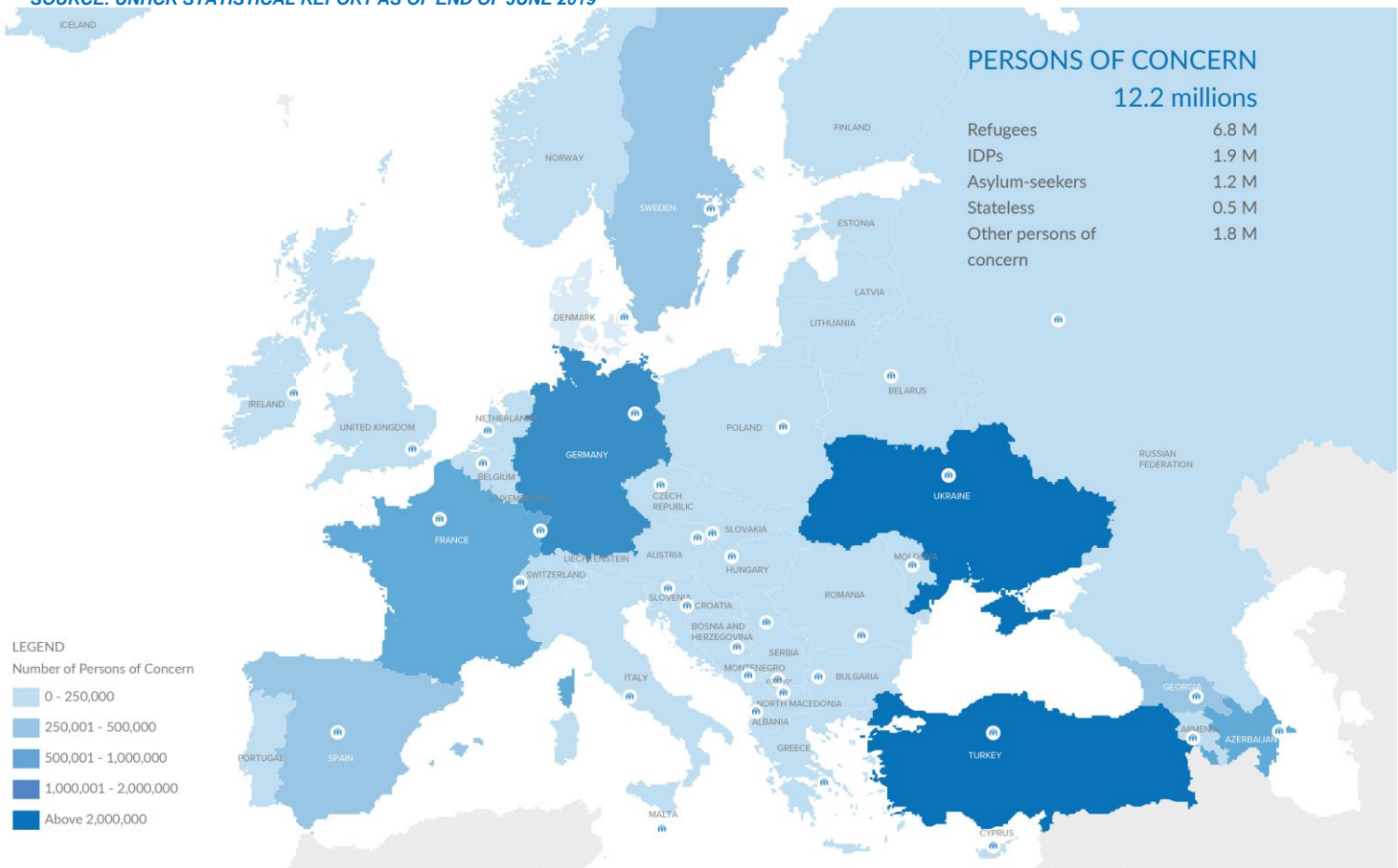
Access to territory remains limited through border closures or entry bans for foreigners, with only a few exceptions.

Many countries in the region continue to maintain access to **international protection** despite restrictions on access to territory.

UNHCR and partners' physical access to persons of concern remains limited. It is however anticipated that this will improve with the progressive lifting of movement restrictions, in compliance with COVID-19 preventive measures.

Populations of Concern

SOURCE: UNHCR STATISTICAL REPORT AS OF END OF JUNE 2019



Includes Serbia and Kosovo (S/RES/1244 (1999)). The boundaries and names shown, and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

Operational Context

- All 49 countries and one territory in the region have reported COVID-19 cases among the general population. So far, 18 countries have reported cases among persons of concern, and some of them have already recovered. However, any figure or estimate at this point needs to be taken with caution due to differing approaches to testing, data segregation and reporting.
- On 19 May, the Council of Europe (CoE) **European Commission against Racism and Intolerance** (ECRI) [expressed its grave concern to the Director of the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights \(FRA\)](#) and the EU Representative for Human Rights about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and related measures on groups of concern to ECRI. The pandemic is reportedly exacerbating the hardship and difficulties experienced in particular by **Roma and migrants** in accessing basic health care, food and clean water, adequate accommodation and leads to increased exposure of these groups to hate speech and violence.
- On 20 May, the CoE's **Violence against Women Division** (DG Democracy) and the **CoE's Academic Networks** (CEAN), [highlighted the dramatic increase of domestic violence as well as the violence against migrant women](#) and victims of human trafficking in the COVID-19 context.
- As a result of lifted restrictions, some UNHCR country offices are planning to gradually resume some of the suspended activities, for example protection monitoring at borders. As of this week, 12 offices continue to work fully virtually, after 12 have shifted from full-time to partial teleworking.

UNHCR Response

- UNHCR's response to the COVID-19 situation is focusing on:
 - Continuing to provide protection assistance including legal aid, registration, documentation, refugee status determination, protection counselling, prevention and response to gender-based violence, as well as child protection services.
 - Supporting national authorities in setting up [preparedness and response plans](#), including improving access to water and sanitation where possible and enhancing reception capacity post disembarkation by establishing quarantine and isolation areas in reception centres to better monitor and isolate, as necessary, confirmed or suspected COVID-19 cases;
 - Enhancing national and community-based [communication platforms](#) to interact with refugees and displaced communities and transmit quality information on hygiene, access to health care and other essential measures in a culturally appropriate manner and in relevant languages;
 - In some operations, supporting authorities in identifying alternative [accommodation](#) or bringing current housing for asylum-seekers up to minimum protection and hygienic standards;
 - [Ensuring the inclusion](#) of persons of concern, host communities and service providers in the provision and distribution of adequate hygienic items;
 - [Continuous advocacy](#) to ensure the inclusion of persons of concern in national COVID-19 preparedness and response plans;
 - [Additional one-off cash distributions](#) to persons of concern, to allow them to cope with the adverse economic impact of COVID-19 and related measures on their livelihoods and self-reliance.

UNHCR Areas of Intervention



PROTECTION

- Advocacy on access to territory, to asylum procedures and the reception system continues where needed, for example in **Cyprus**, where the main reception centre is at capacity and access to asylum procedures is currently contingent upon prior quarantine. In **Spain**, the border police issued an instruction to extend validity of expired documents for six to seven months, which will benefit asylum-seekers in different procedural stages, preventing them from falling in legal limbo due to expiration of documentation.
- In **Albania** a rapid assessment was completed to evaluate the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 measures on refugees and asylum-seekers, highlighting a number of persisting gaps (including access to documentation) that hinder persons of concern's access to rights and inclusion in national response plans.
- In **Malta**, the operation and partners visited the new Hal Far open centre, recently opened to relieve the strain on the Hal Far Tent Village, which hosts some 1,000 people. Major restructuring work is taking place to set up sanitary facilities and common spaces in compliance with COVID-19 measures for up to 500 people. An internet connection to ensure access to updated information will also need to be ensured. The new centre also serves to host asylum-seekers who are in some instances being released from the three overcrowded detention centres. People who have been rescued at sea continue to be held offshore without being assigned a port of safety to disembark. As of 26 May, around 350 persons were in the Government-chartered Captain Morgan boats. UNHCR and IOM issued on 21 May a [joint press release](#) urging European States to speed up efforts to allow for disembarkation and support relocation efforts within the EU.
- In **Spain**, the country office convened some 40 entities (authorities from three ministries and LGBTI organizations and) to exchange on the effects of COVID-19 and related measures on LGBTI asylum-seekers and refugees in terms of access to rights and services. Social isolation was also raised as a matter of concern. As a result of the exchange, a set of recommendations will be issued to facilitate access to adequate services and promote good practices and initiatives to combat stigma in communities as well as reception centres.
- In **Ukraine**, recommendations on workload management and measures to comply with health prescriptions were shared with regional authorities on 22 May to prepare for the resumption of procedures regarding refugees and stateless persons. Support was offered to schedule the registration of new asylum-seekers who have been remotely registered by partners during quarantine. The Office also updated reception and counselling procedures ahead of the resumption of protection activities for persons of concern. These measures foresee mainly remote counselling via phone and online tools. Information about post-quarantine reception procedures are being disseminated through partners to the refugee communities, as well as posted online, including at [UNHCR HELP web page](#).
- UNHCR, jointly with its NGO partner Proliska published its third **Protection Monitoring Report of 119 isolated and conflict-affected localities in eastern Ukraine**. Key findings reflect changes in the humanitarian situation along the contact line, including access to food, WASH, medical assistance, cash, public transportation and telecommunication. The report also provides recommendations to the regional and local authorities to ensure that the critical needs of persons that are mostly exposed to the COVID-19 are timely addressed.



HEALTH

- In **Greece**, as of 25 May, the number of persons of concern tested positive to COVID-19 remains unchanged. Out of 208 individuals, four are located on Lesbos (in the quarantine area of Megala Therma in the Apanemo site recently opened), 197 in mainland sites/hotels and 7 in other accommodations.
- The site of Megala Therma (Apanemo) hosts 106 arrivals from earlier in May, in addition to 67 persons who have arrived on 22 May on two boats to the North of Lesbos. Joint work has been done with authorities and medical actors to help develop a medical protocol for the new arrivals and to set up areas for people to be

grouped by date of arrival with dedicated sanitary facilities and isolation area for positively tested people. Sixteen people who arrived on the southern part of the island on 21 May remain in the port area, where reception conditions are below standard. A temporary site for accommodation is being sought.

- As of 24 May, 1,077 older and immunocompromised asylum-seekers had been moved from island Reception and Identification Centres (RICs) to alternative accommodations on mainland and on those islands, where compliance with preventive measures to COVID-19 is facilitated. Living conditions on the islands remain dire for the 37,250 people remaining, 32,000 of whom continue to reside in overcrowded and unhygienic conditions in the RICs with a hosting capacity of some 5,400 persons.
- The limited COVID-19 testing capacity on the island hospitals is of particular concern, as the infrastructure and strategies for triage, quarantine, treatment and isolation depend on availability of tests. So far, only serious cases identified as suspect at the triage centre could be referred to the hospital for testing. Other suspected cases are sent back to Moria RIC and asked to self-isolate, which can pose a high risk for other RIC residents.
- In **Ukraine**, the operation continued to distribute antiseptic kits and face masks produced by the local communities to employees of Centers for Social Services for Youth (CSSY) in Luhanska oblast, that continue providing social services to conflict-affected families. Further, the so-called Territorial Centres in non-government controlled areas (NGCA), which support older and isolated people, were provided with utensils to produce face masks and conduct minor repairs for the benefit of some 2,760 beneficiaries. Individual in-kind assistance was also delivered to people with specific needs in NGCA, where access to cash assistance and medical care are limited.
- Six additional electric bicycles were distributed to expand the reach of social, community and medical workers who provide home-based care to elderly persons residing in isolated localities along the contact line. In total, UNHCR procured 35 electric bicycles for communities in Donetsk and Luhanska oblasts near the contact line on Government-Controlled Area (GCA) side.



COMMUNICATION WITH COMMUNITIES

- In many countries, offices and partners have been responding to queries of persons of concern, for example in **Spain**, where over 620 enquiries were received since 6 May, mostly by email and phone, related to assistance, resumption of the asylum procedures and documentation. In **Malta**, partners' helplines received questions on legal issues, food support, employment and rent support. In **Turkey**, UNHCR's Counselling Line reported having answered 1,613 calls during the reporting week. The main line of inquiry was the topic of resettlement (40%) followed by financial assistance (28%).
- In **Ukraine**, the NGO partner Rokada has set up an online and a hotline platform to provide individual counselling with a psychologist upon request. Some persons of concern have already availed themselves of the service and it is expected that requests will gradually increase.



CASH-BASED ASSISTANCE

- In **Ukraine**, between 18 and 22 May, the operation and its partners reviewed the situation of 184 households in Kyiv, Odesa and Kharkiv to assess their needs for a monthly subsistence allowance, and confirmed that 103 households, which have lost their incomes as a result of COVID-19-related quarantine restrictions and measures, were eligible for a four-month assistance. However, due to recent amendments to the Law of Ukraine the Law on Financial Monitoring, cash transfers within Ukraine over 5,000 UAH must now be accompanied by information about the recipient. This new requirement impacts some 80% of asylum-seekers who are not documented with a valid national passport, which prevents them from opening a bank account. The operation is currently seeking alternative forms of money transfer, including the use of vouchers and pre-paid cards.

- In **Turkey**, the Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM) assessed that 7,379 households were eligible for emergency cash assistance. Payments will be made following approval by the DGMM. Further 2,463 households are to be assessed.

Stories from the field

In **Armenia**, inspired by UNHCR's and MADE51's call [encouraging displaced entrepreneurs around the world to consider producing non-medical masks](#), a group of displaced Syrian women partnered up with the Homeland Development Initiative Foundation (HDIF) and Nor Arev, and started production in an atelier provided by the [Syrian Armenian Union](#) NGO. The masks are made based on the design provided by MADE51. Starting with a production of 300 masks in mid-May, the ambition is to reach 1,500 by the end of the year, with options to export through MADE51. Joining the global mask production initiative by UNHCR and MADE51 to promote refugees' self-reliance and empowerment, HDIF is supporting the group with guidance and marketing.



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In the words of one of the participating women, this is an *“opportunity to make some income and support my family. During these difficult days of emergency when people are in need of masks, I feel honoured that my skills and input can serve useful for the host community”*.

Working in partnership

- UNHCR supports governments' efforts to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic through existing coordination mechanisms and by working closely with WHO and other partners. In addition, UNHCR co-chairs the Issue-Based Coalition on Large Movements of People, Displacement and Resilience, steering collective advocacy efforts on COVID-19-related issues affecting persons of concern.
- In **Greece**, the operation continues supporting the Government's efforts by enhancing coordination mechanisms in response to the COVID-19 situation, with a particular focus on the islands, regarding health, clean water and sanitation, as well as Communication with Communities.
- In **Ukraine**, where the humanitarian programme cycle is implemented, the UN Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator and the Humanitarian Country Team lead the response, with WHO providing lead expertise on public health issues, in consultation with the authorities.
- In **Turkey**, UNHCR is also part of the COVID-19 Socio-Economic Impact and Response Task Team that has been established at the request of the UN Turkey Crisis Management Team and in follow-up to guidance by the UN Secretary-General, to assess the economic and social impact of the COVID-19 crisis in Turkey.

Financial Information

- The [revised COVID-19 Global Humanitarian Response Plan \(GHRP\)](#) was released on 7 May, covering the period April-December 2020. UNHCR seeks USD 745 million to globally boost preparedness, prevention and response activities to address immediate public health needs of refugees and host communities. The amount presented in the appeal does not represent the magnitude of UNHCR's engagement to support governments' efforts in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, including in Europe.
- UNHCR Regional Bureau for Europe is grateful to donors who have provided generous and timely support to the Coronavirus Emergency Situation globally and to Europe in particular, including for non-COVID-19 related interventions, which are critical to ensure business continuity.

Total contributed or pledged to UNHCR COVID-19 appeal

USD 235 M

Including: United States of America \$64.0M | Germany \$38.0M | European Union \$31.8M | United Kingdom \$24.8M | Japan \$23.9M | Denmark \$14.6M | CERF \$6.9M | Canada \$6.4M | Ireland \$3.3M | Private donors \$3.1M | Sweden \$3.0M | Sony Corporation \$3.0M | Finland \$2.4M | Education Cannot Wait \$1.8M | Qatar Charity \$1.5M | Norway \$1.4M | USA for UNHCR \$1.0M

Unearmarked contributions to UNHCR's 2020 programme

Sweden \$76.4M | Norway \$41.4M | Netherlands \$36.1M | Denmark \$34.6M | United Kingdom \$31.7M | Private donors in Spain \$26.6M | Germany \$25.9M | Switzerland \$16.4M | Private donors in Republic of Korea \$13.9M

Useful Links

[UNHCR's revised Coronavirus Emergency Appeal](#)

[UNHCR operations overview in Europe](#)

[COVID-19: UNHCR's response](#)

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