

UNHCR COVID-19 Preparedness and Response

Highlights

- While the Americas and South Asia now account for almost 50 per cent of all COVID-19 cases globally, the WHO warns that the pandemic is also accelerating in Africa and the Middle East.
- UNHCR's [Global Trends for 2019](#) reports that forced displacement now affects more than one per cent of humanity – 1 in every 97 people – and fewer and fewer are able to return home. COVID-19 exacerbates their situation even more, as it has an unprecedented global social and economic impact and is also affecting asylum systems. Under the theme 'Everyone can make a difference, Every Action Counts', UNHCR marked [World Refugee Day](#) on 20 June 2020.
- In Latin America which accounts for nearly half of the deaths and cases worldwide, the combination of the hurricane season in the north of Central America and COVID-19 is exacerbating humanitarian needs. To combat these emergencies, UNHCR in El Salvador, together with the joint response team provided aid to 1,150 communities and information to 1.2 million people, while in Guatemala, UNHCR delivered bulk beds and mattresses to shelters.
- In the DRC, interactive radio programmes were broadcast on prevention measures as well as peaceful coexistence issues related to COVID-19, reaching nearly 1.5 million listeners



Pakistan. Afghan woman doctor breaks barriers to heal Pakistan's poor
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Global Overview

This year, UNHCR marked [World Refugee Day](#) in a very different world – one in which we continue to face ongoing conflict and skyrocketing displacement, while struggling with an unprecedented health crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed how interconnected and interdependent the world is, and that every human being has a role to play. As the world continues to struggle with this unprecedented health crisis, the global community is also coming together in an exceptional show of human solidarity and kindness. In the time of COVID-19, UNHCR and the global community celebrate refugees, the internally displaced, their hosts and the aid workers supporting them on the frontlines fighting this pandemic under the theme 'Everyone can make a difference, Every Action Counts.'

Four months into the COVID-19 pandemic, people across the world are adjusting to a 'new normal' of frequent handwashing with soap, physical distancing and wearing face masks when in public. Refugees and internally displaced people have stepped up to help themselves and those around them. In South Sudan, for instance, internally displaced people (IDPs) at the UN site in Malakal were trained as tailors by UNHCR and the Humanitarian Development Consortium (a local non-profit) and stitched between 300 to 500 masks a day to support the COVID-19 response.

UNHCR Response

Progress to date and Impact

- As the numbers of COVID-19 cases continue to rise in the Americas, Africa, Middle East, and South Asia and to address anticipated needs of dedicated infrastructure and personnel to treat COVID-19 patients, UNHCR operations are reinforcing preparedness activities in and out of camps.
- UNHCR and IOM announced on 18 June the resumption of resettlement departures for refugees. The temporary hold on resettlement travel, which was necessitated by disruptions and restrictions to international air travel caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, delayed the departures of some 10,000 refugees to resettlement countries.
- To meet the increasing need for personal protection equipment, [several operations are training and supporting displaced communities](#) in the production of masks.

Gaps and Challenges

- The analysis of the socio-economic impact and inequality gap in the coming years due to the pandemic for Africa is worrying, with the World Economic Forum estimating that global financial losses for the continent will be in the order of 275 billion USD.

Regional Updates

Middle East and North Africa (MENA)

Across the region, mobility restrictions and preventative measures have been relaxed in many countries. However, COVID-19 cases are rising in Iraq and Mauritania. The number of confirmed cases in Iraq doubled in early June, now averaging approximately 1,100 new cases per day.

The economic downturn prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic has pushed hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees in the Middle East into an ever more desperate situation and has increased their humanitarian needs. Many refugees have lost already disproportionately low incomes, forcing them to cut down on the most basic needs, including food and medication. Refugee households are taking on additional debt and are not able to pay their rent anymore. Serious protection risks are growing, including risks of child labour, gender-based violence, early marriage and other forms of exploitation.

UNHCR is equally concerned about the humanitarian situation of returnees, more than 6 million internally displaced Syrians and other vulnerable groups inside the country. Prior to the latest downturn, according to UN estimates, over 80 per cent of Syrians lived below the poverty line. Those most in need have been receiving cash or other types of support from UNHCR. In Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey, nearly 200,000 refugees received emergency cash support, along with other assistance to mitigate the impact of the pandemic. These five countries host more than 5.5 million Syrians, the largest refugee group in the world. The agency is attempting to support at least 100,000 more refugees with one-off payments. However, in Jordan for example, only 17,000 out of 49,000 newly identified

vulnerable families received emergency cash support, as UNHCR lacks funds to extend these programmes.

Asia and the Pacific

In several countries in the region, UNHCR's persons of concern continue to express a need for cash assistance to assist with food, rent, and basic supplies. Urgent assistance was specifically requested for rent support, including requests to intervene in negotiating with landlords. In Afghanistan, a survey on urban refugees and asylum-seekers highlighted concerns regarding limited savings and the inability to meet basic needs as a result of COVID-19. In the Central Highlands, weather conditions typically mean that most people work for only six months of the year, using their savings to cover the winter months. With the first two months lost, families are increasingly anxious about their ability to save enough money to survive the winter months. Survey results also point to a high prevalence of anxiety and psychological distress amongst UNHCR's persons of concern.

In the Islamic Republic of Iran, UNHCR plans to roll out additional cash-based interventions in response to the COVID-19 pandemic through its main government counterpart in the coming weeks. Through this intervention, UNHCR will provide unrestricted and unconditional cash assistance through gift cards to some 2,000 eligible persons of concern registered in the government database.

West and Central Africa

On 11 June, [WHO reported that COVID-19](#) is accelerating in Africa and moving from the continent's main urban centers into the remote rural areas where it is more challenging to contain. Despite this continuous spread, some

countries in the region have relaxed restriction measures imposed to curb the spread of the virus since March. Others have maintained or strengthened them, such as Cote d'Ivoire, where the recent surge in new confirmed cases forced the government to tighten prevention measures. So far, the number of confirmed cases amongst persons of concern to UNHCR remains low. In Nigeria, UNHCR continues to monitor the south-eastern border to provide assistance to those still arriving from Cameroon. In the past week, over 960 newly arrived refugees were relocated to Ikyogen settlement where they are hosted at the quarantine center before being settled into the site. Sensitization activities on COVID-19 are ongoing in the refugee settlements and hosting areas in south-east Nigeria with some 1,500 persons reached in the past week.

In most countries of the region, the rainy season will make many roads impassable, reducing access to persons of concern, and making transportation of goods by trucks more challenging and expensive. Shelter needs will increase and UNHCR's intervention will be crucial during this period to ensure adequate rehabilitation of dwellings and allow for more distancing and isolation in case of COVID-19 infection. With the rainy season starting, UNHCR operations are strengthening their preparedness and emergency response mechanisms to mitigate the potential impact of floods in high risk hosting areas.

In Benin, Gambia, Guinea Bissau and Sierra Leone, UNHCR is supporting the authorities and other UN agencies, such as UNICEF, in their efforts to progressively reopen schools. UNHCR is contributing to sensitization and capacity-building activities for teachers, students and the community, the provision of personal protective equipment and the cleaning of school environment. UNHCR is also supporting

distance learning by providing increased connectivity, expanding radio broadcast coverage, establishing Wi-Fi hotspots, and providing laptops to teachers.

East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes

Access to registration and refugee status determination for new asylum seekers in East Africa and the Great Lakes region remains difficult due to current public health and safety measures. Movements continue through unofficial border crossing points where screening and provision of information is not in place. UNHCR has appealed for special measures to be put in place, to allow for asylum-seekers to be screened, quarantined and admitted, and for UNHCR to be granted access to areas where new refugees are arriving.

As the countries in the region continue to grapple with delivery of distance learning, governments are considering reopening schools. Tanzania reopened secondary schools on 8 June with primary schools expected to follow. Other countries in the region may work toward a September reopening. UNHCR and Save the Children (SCI), as co-leads of the regional education in emergencies working group, are planning a regionwide webinar on the reopening of schools. The webinar will bring together education stakeholders, child protection teams, WASH and public health teams to jointly discuss reopening of schools going forward and adopt inter-agency guidance on the safe reopening of schools.

Southern Africa

Many governments have spent the past weeks strengthening COVID-19 prevention and response measures, and COVID-19 restrictions are gradually beginning to ease in many – but not all – countries in the region. The socio-

economic impacts of COVID-19 lockdowns and restrictions are leading to tensions between host and refugee communities in some countries in the region. To mitigate this, UNHCR is working closely with partners and local community structures to promote peaceful coexistence between refugees and their host communities. In Tanganyika Province in DRC, four interactive radio programmes were broadcasted on peaceful coexistence issues related to COVID-19, reaching nearly 739,000 listeners. In Kasai Province, 10 radio spots on COVID-19 were broadcasted in Tshiluba and French, with an estimated 700,000 people reached. In addition, UNHCR's health partner has begun construction work of four isolation sites at refugee camps in Nord and Sud Ubangi Provinces in DRC, hosting refugees from Central African Republic. The partners are experiencing challenges related to the transportation of building materials to the various sites, given the very poor road network, compounded by rainy season.

As some countries are reopening schools in June, UNHCR and partners are supporting preparedness and mitigation measures to reduce the risk of COVID-19 as students return to class. Following the reopening of schools in Zambia on 1 June, both refugee and Zambian students returning to school are undergoing COVID-19 screening to prevent potential transmission. To ensure that students and teachers are protected, UNHCR provided COVID-19 prevention items, including over 3,200 masks distributed to schools in Meheba and nearly 2,000 in Mayukwayukwa refugee settlements. Schools also resumed on 2 June in the Republic of the Congo. To help prevent the spread of COVID-19, UNHCR and partners fumigated and disinfected several schools benefitting nearly 1,600 students. Meanwhile, schools remain closed in many other countries in the region, and UNHCR and partners

continue to take measures to help students keep up with their studies.

Europe

Across the region, further movement and border restrictions were lifted, which will facilitate access to territory and international protection. However, particular concerns remain in some countries, where reports of pushbacks on land borders and at sea have persisted over recent months. UNHCR and partners' physical access to persons of concern is also improving with the progressive lifting of movement restrictions and some country offices are further planning to gradually resume some of the suspended activities, for example protection monitoring at borders. Asylum procedures have also resumed in most countries. However, in many instances, resumption of interviews and accumulated backlog present a challenge. UNHCR has been advocating for enhanced backlog management from the moment procedures are resumed, in order to safeguard the quality of decisions. Similarly, with adoption of remote interviewing, UNHCR is documenting good practices. UNHCR Regional Bureau for Europe compiled [practical recommendations and good practices for States on remote interviewing across Europe](#).

In most countries in the region, freedom of movement for inhabitants of reception centres has been restored. However, centres remain congested pending availability of alternative accommodations and people continue being exposed to precarious conditions. Efforts to expand reception spaces continue in order to allow for better compliance with health regulations. In Ireland, for example, around 600 residents have been relocated to new accommodations to enable greater social distancing in centres and limit exposure of the most vulnerable to the COVID-19 virus. In addition, four offsite self-isolation facilities with

health and social care personnel have been opened with a capacity of 299 rooms in total.

Americas

Latin America is currently considered the epicentre of the health crisis and accounts for nearly half of the deaths and cases worldwide. Nevertheless, experts caution that the contagion curve is still far from having peaked (possibly in July or August depending on the territory). Brazil is now the country with the second highest number of confirmed cases and the third highest number of deaths in the world. In the north of Central America, the combination of hurricane season and COVID-19 is exacerbating humanitarian needs. In northern Central America, damage from tropical storms Cristobal and Amanda is still being reported. In Guatemala, 460,000 people have been affected, according to the National Coordinator for Disaster Reduction. In El Salvador, the joint response team provided humanitarian aid to 1,150 communities (over 35,00 people) and information to 1.2 million people and UNHCR delivered 2,200 hygiene kits to municipalities affected by the pandemic and the storm. In Guatemala, UNHCR delivered bulk beds, mattresses, and diapers for deportee shelters in Guatemala City. In Honduras, UNHCR delivered biosecurity supplies, health equipment (thermometers) and hygiene supplies to the National Migration Institute.

In Ecuador, HELP ACNUR, a WhatsApp information line launched in March which provides information to persons of concern about cash support programs, food, shelter, regularization issues, among others, has now registered some 9,000 people, and has sent around 460,000 messages by 11 June. Most of the queries received were about access to food. Since the onset of the emergency, UNHCR has assisted 30,500 people (77 per cent Venezuelans and 21 per cent Colombians)

through UNHCR protection lines in Ecuador. In two provinces, more than 90 per cent of the cases were related to food insecurity and the inability to pay rent.

Coordination and partnerships

UNHCR and WFP have joined forces in Libya in a project that aims to reach up to 10,000 food insecure refugees and asylum-seekers with emergency food aid this year. The partnership was launched in recognition of the severe socio-economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic in Libya as well as the effects of the ongoing conflict. Most refugees and asylum-seekers in Libya have been unable to find any daily work to support themselves as curfews have been introduced and food prices and the cost of basic goods have dramatically risen. The cost of a minimum expenditure food basket that would meet basic needs has increased by 24 per cent since March. A quick needs assessment of refugees seeking assistance conducted by WFP in phone interviews found that half of respondents had poor or borderline poor food consumption. A majority have resorted to negative coping strategies such as reducing the number of meals per day or limiting the size of meal portions. In the past 30 days, 77 per cent of respondents could not access supermarkets, and 70 per cent had no money to buy food. Among those who will be assisted under the project are refugees and asylum-seekers recently released from detention centres, with limited means of supporting themselves. Others will include refugees in urban settings facing severe challenges in accessing food. Some 2,000 refugees and asylum-seekers will be reached in the pilot phase. This innovative partnership will also go beyond emergency food support, extending to technology services which facilitate communication and exchange of information. The WFP-led Emergency Telecommunications Sector will be providing connectivity services to a UNHCR Community Day Centre in Tripoli to help refugees connect to their loved ones and communities.

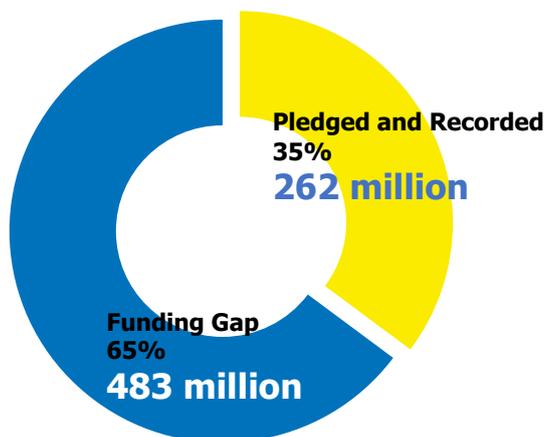
On the policy side, UNHCR and IOM joined forces to brief the UN Crises Management Team on the impact on refugees, internally displaced people (IDPs) and migrants of COVID-19. In the briefing, UNHCR highlighted that three aspects are of particular relevance for policymakers. Firstly, the impact is disproportionate, exacerbating inequalities for refugees, IDPs and migrants. Secondly, it poses a serious protection crisis, highlighting the impact of border closures and restrictions on people on the move, who are stranded or trapped, or prematurely returned to countries, and many are subjected to stigmatization and xenophobia. Thirdly, refugees and migrants face more fragile employment and are also typically employed in the informal economy, with limited or no access to social protection measures, particularly women. UNHCR also underlined that there was a profound threat to the underlying normative refugee framework and that practical work on supporting countries was necessary to ensure that some temporary restrictions introduced during the pandemic do not become permanent.

Financial Information

On 7 May, the first revision to the COVID-19 Global Humanitarian Response Plan was launched, seeking USD 6.7 billion to support global humanitarian response through December 2020. UNHCR seeks USD 745 million for all refugee and IDP operations worldwide. While the initial appeal focused on preparedness and prevention, the revised appeal is increasingly focused on response activities to address the immediate public health, protection and humanitarian assistance needs of refugees, the internally displaced and host communities prompted by the spread of COVID-19. More detailed information on UNHCR requirements within the GHRP was shared in the [11 May revision to the UNHCR Coronavirus emergency appeal](#).

USD 745M

Requested for UNHCR's COVID-19 response globally until the end of the year:



Unearmarked contributions to UNHCR's 2020 programme:

Sweden 76.4M | Norway 41.4M | Netherlands 36.1M | Denmark 34.6M | Private donors Spain 33.1M | United Kingdom 31.7M | Germany 25.9M | Private donors Republic of Korea 17.3M | Switzerland 16.4M

Contributed without restrictions on its use, unearmarked funding allows UNHCR critical flexibility in how best to reach refugees, the internally displaced, stateless persons and other populations of concern who are in the greatest need and at the greatest risk.

Total contributed or pledged to the COVID-19 appeal:

USD 262M

Including:

| | |
|---------------------------|---------|
| United States | \$64.0M |
| European Union | \$43.0M |
| Germany | \$39.8M |
| United Kingdom | \$24.8M |
| Japan | \$23.9M |
| Denmark | \$14.6M |
| United Nations Foundation | \$10.0M |
| CERF | \$6.9M |
| Private donors | \$6.6M |
| Canada | \$6.4M |
| Ireland | \$3.3M |
| Sweden | \$3.0M |
| Sony Corporation | \$2.9M |
| Finland | \$2.4M |
| Austria | \$1.8M |
| Education Cannot Wait | \$1.8M |
| Qatar Charity | \$1.5M |
| Norway | \$1.4M |
| USA for UNHCR | \$1.0M |

More information:

[Global Humanitarian Response Plan COVID-19](#)
(launched 07 May 2020)



[Global Focus COVID-19 Situation page](#)
(including UNHCR's Coronavirus emergency appeal and sitreps)



[UNHCR Covid-19 data portal](#) (including global guidance, sitreps and links to other UNHCR COVID-19 related sites)



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Specific country examples

Colombia

In Colombia, three call centres (Medellin, Cucuta and Bogota) and 26 helplines continue to provide daily support to people of concern with updated information on access to rights and services.

Brazil

In Brazil, guidance material based on WHO orientations was designed with Warao indigenous communities in order to guarantee their safety, preventing COVID-19 contamination during burials.

Malta

In light of the lifted restrictions and shifting health requirements, authorities and partners continue informing persons of concern of new developments, especially regarding their rights and obligations. In Malta, UNHCR continues to compile, translate and disseminate relevant information as restrictions are progressively relaxed, and it has also produced specific information materials, including a list of online multimedia resources to support refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants in accessing information and content for children, education and health.

Mali

In Mali, UNHCR has pursued its information and sensitization efforts on COVID-19 prevention. In the past week only, over 1,000 returning refugees and internally displaced people were reached during a dozen sensitization sessions organized by UNHCR and its partners in three regions.

Chad

In preparation for the return to school in Chad, UNHCR's partner JRS completed the construction of eight classrooms, an office and a library room in the Bredjing camp in Farchana. These infrastructures will reduce the overcrowding of students in the future.

Angola

In Angola, the sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) team, made up of UNHCR and partner organizations, held four training sessions with teachers and assistants about identifying and reporting early warning signs of risk and violence related to SGBV, child protection and mental health issues during the COVID-19 period, and to be familiar with referral pathways for each of the different cases.

Turkey

In Turkey, partners continue to conduct online recreational activities with refugees, including women solidarity group meetings, regular speaking clubs, story-telling activities for adults, dance workshops with children groups, as well as psycho-social support and counselling for adolescents, group counselling on access to social assistance and health services during COVID-19.

Lebanon

As part of the expanded national testing campaign, UNHCR Lebanon is supporting the Ministry of Public Health to conduct testing for COVID-19 in selected informal settlements and collective shelters hosting refugees. More than 1,800 samples have been collected and so far, all test results have been negative.

Uganda

In Uganda, UNHCR and partners continued to support at least 18 quarantine facilities within the settlements and at transit centres across the country, including by covering the costs of medical supplies and personal protective equipment, site management, food and logistics.

Zambia

In Zambia, UNHCR is distributing masks in a refugee-hosting community in Lusaka, benefitting up to 15,000 host community members and refugees that will be distributed in Lusaka in the coming week as part of a social cohesion initiative.

India

Working through a partner, UNHCR continues to facilitate COVID-19 testing and admission through national systems for cases in need of hospitalisation. However, in parts of India, it is becoming increasingly challenging to find beds and testing given the increased demand.

Myanmar

In Myanmar, UNHCR delivered 260 beds to the Kachin State Government to be used in quarantine facilities across the state.

Yemen

In Yemen, UNHCR has been procuring personal protective equipment (PPE) or partnering up with displaced communities to produce PPE. In Sana'a, UNHCR will work with 14 refugee and internally displaced tailors to produce 30,000 face masks, out of which 9,000 will be distributed to displaced communities and frontline workers. The tailors will be able to sell the remaining masks at a lower price than that of the market, so that they are more affordable to those with lower incomes. At a time when the socio-economic situation is so fragile, the production of masks represents an important livelihood opportunity.

Somalia

In Somalia, UNHCR has raised awareness about prevention and response to COVID-19 among 240,000 persons, distributed hygiene kits to 31,000 persons, and installed 48 handwashing stands in front of health centres/hospitals/reception centres (used by some 1,000 persons per day).