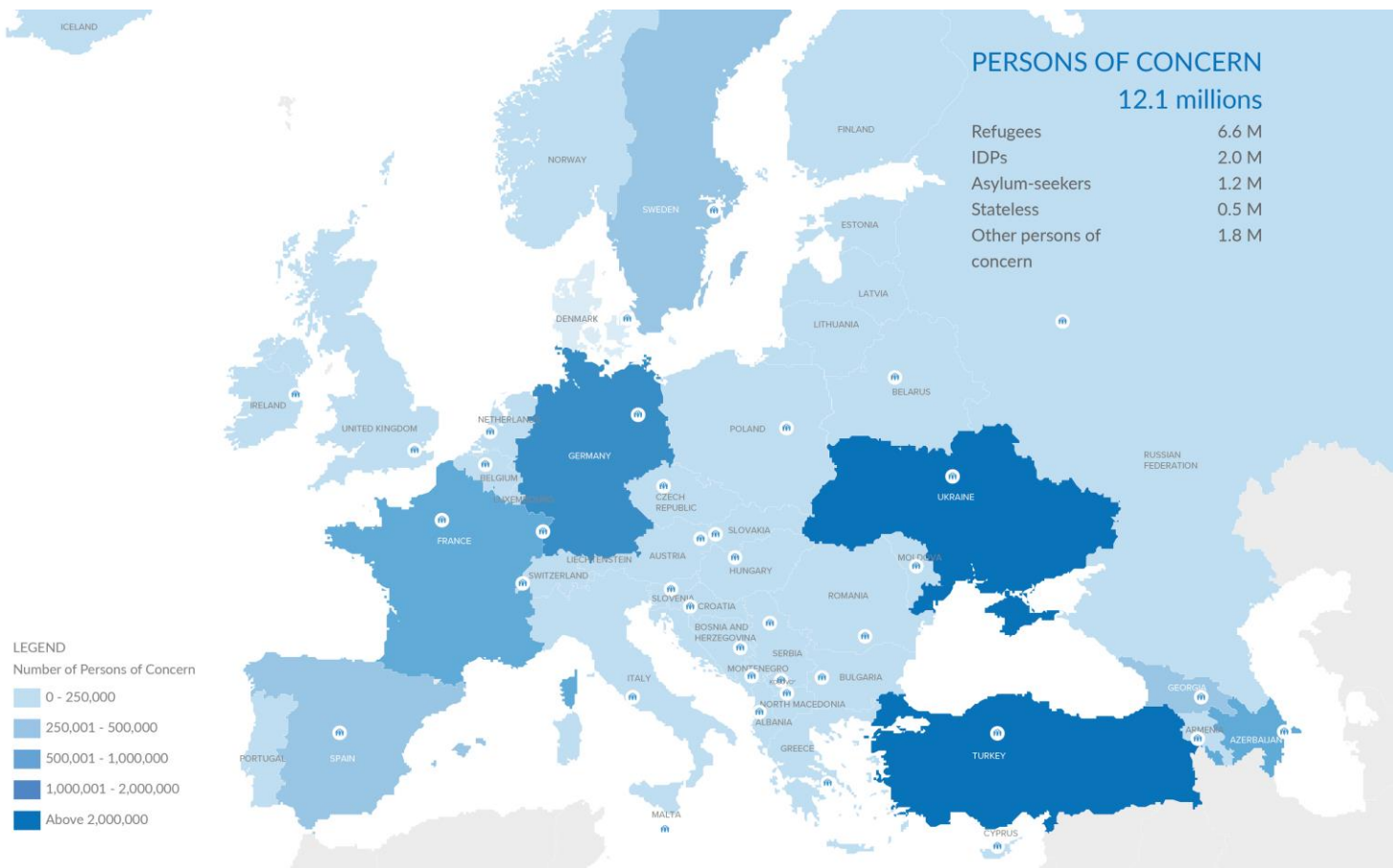# Regional Bureau for Europe

## UPDATE # 13

**1 – 20 July 2020**

Overall, continuous lifting of **border and movement restrictions** is expected to lead to a gradually better access to territory and international protection. However, in practice, a number of countries are invoking health imperatives as a justification to restrain access to both territory and asylum procedures.

While UNHCR staff has gradually moved back to office premises, with **35 offices now on partial telework**, the recent increase in recorded cases in some countries has led **two offices to revert to full teleworking** mode as of 20 July.

**UNHCR and partners' physical access to persons of concern** has improved with the progressive lifting of movement restrictions, in compliance with COVID-19 preventive measures.

## Populations of Concern



PERSONS OF CONCERN
12.1 millions

| | |
|---|---|
| Refugees | 6.6 M |
| IDPs | 2.0 M |
| Asylum-seekers | 1.2 M |
| Stateless | 0.5 M |
| Other persons of concern | 1.8 M |

LEGEND
Number of Persons of Concern

- 0 - 250,000
- 250,001 - 500,000
- 500,001 - 1,000,000
- 1,000,001 - 2,000,000
- Above 2,000,000

*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.*

**SOURCE: UNHCR GLOBAL REPORT 2019**

## Operational Context

- All 49 countries and one territory in the region have reported COVID-19 cases among the general population. To date, 26 countries have reported cases among persons of concern, and some of them have already recovered. However, any figure or estimate needs to be taken with caution due to differing approaches to testing, data segregation and reporting.

- Most EU Member States have sustained the partial lifting of restrictions of external border controls and related travel restrictions with regards to travellers from non-Schengen countries starting on 1 July. However, as a result of COVID-19 flare-ups, some countries have reinstated border restrictions, postponing or even reversing the lifting of general restrictions.

- On 1 July, the Programme of the German Presidency to the European Council 'Together for Europe's recovery' was presented. It highlights Europe's response to the pandemic and emphasises coordination as means to overcome long-term consequences of the pandemic.

- At the Special European Council on 17-20 July, heads of state and government agreed to a historic EUR 1,074 billion long-term budget (Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027) and a EUR 750 million recovery plan to respond to the COVID-19 crisis, with a mix of grants and loans.

- UNHCR country offices are gradually resuming suspended activities, for example protection monitoring at borders. As of 20 July, 35 offices in the region are partially teleworking, while two offices have reverted to full 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 acceptable 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**

- **Access to territory:** As border restrictions and travel bans are being lifted, access to territory and international protection continues to improve. However, worrisome reports of push-backs at land borders and at sea persist. In **Greece**, alleged push-backs to Turkey from the land border and the islands, both at sea and after arrival on the Greek shores, were reported.

- The number of people transiting through **South Eastern Europe** continued to rise over the last two weeks, reaching pre-COVID-19 numbers in some countries. UNHCR remains highly concerned by numerous reports of push-backs while asylum claims among new arrivals are not registered. In some countries, reception and protection capacities are pressured by higher numbers of people in need of shelter. To avoid overcrowding, some centres do not allow any further entries. In other parts of the region, including EU Member States, onward movements have been observed as picking up again, with the related incidences of push-backs at the borders.

- In **Hungary**, where a new law undermining access to territory and asylum was adopted on 17 June, further reports of individuals intercepted and returned to neighbouring countries have continued, with a significant increase during the past weeks which remains of high concern to UNHCR.

- **Reception conditions**: Authorities have continued to implement preventive measures. In **Slovenia** for example, the Asylum Centre Vič is used to quarantine all newly arrived adults and families (274 at the moment), while unaccompanied or separated children (three to date) are quarantined in a different centre. However, conditions in the centre are such that it is challenging to ensure minimum protective standards (physical distance, hand washing).

- In **Italy**, a significant peak and a subsequent drop in new arrivals (mainly by sea) was also noted during the reporting period. All have followed the COVID-19 prevention protocol in place upon disembarkation, and individuals who tested positive were referred to a hospital in Rome. However, current arrangements remain inadequate in some locations. the Lampedusa hotspot for example, which was expanded to host 200 people and used as transit space for testing, temporarily hosted 725 persons, before authorities could speed up the transfers to locations on mainland and Sicily. To better respond to the arrivals, the governmental reception centre in Brindisi (128 persons capacity) is being transformed to quarantine persons following disembarkation in Lampedusa. Since 15 July, the centre has been hosting two groups of 80 and 48 persons in quarantine. Since the start of the mandatory 14-day quarantine for sea arrivals on 23 February, 7,660 individuals have been quarantined, of which 6,521 in onshore facilities and 1,289 offshore.

- In **Cyprus**, the Pournara/Kokkinotrimithia camp remains a closed and overcrowded facility. However, the number of residents has dropped from 760 at the height of its occupancy to 308, of which 200 are in the main camp and the rest in quarantine or "safe zones" established after a Parliamentary enquiry on 22 June. The quarantine areas remain, however, insufficient to accommodate the frequent small number of arrivals. The operation has continued its advocacy efforts regarding the safe zones, screening of arrivals and the situation of unaccompanied or separated children at the camp and lack of measures to protect children and other vulnerable persons.

- In **Malta**, detention centres remain overcrowded, with some 1,400 asylum-seekers in the three existing installations. UNHCR and partners are working towards ensuring access to lawyers to challenge detention when possible, and to improve access to means of communication. UNHCR Assistant High Commissioner for Protection, Gillian Triggs, was to undertake a mission to Malta from 20 to 23 July.

- In **Spain**, local health authorities are proceeding with recently developed health and tracking protocols applicable in case of new arrivals. To date, the Melilla centre has no COVID-19 cases but is hosting 1,380 people, 179% over its capacity, exposing individuals to high risks in case of an outbreak. The additional reception site "Plaza de Toros" is hosting more than 400 people, including asylum-seekers, in worrying conditions, especially related to the sanitary set-up. The operation continues to advocate with authorities, offering support for solutions and reform of the reception system.

- **Asylum and other procedures** have been resumed in most States. However, in many instances, case processing picks up at a slower pace than usual, such as in **Spain**, where new applicants are facing up to six months of waiting periods to registration, since postponed registrations are being prioritised. The operation has continued to advocate towards

relevant authorities, stressing the need to seek an urgent solution. In **Italy**, while some locations have suspended formal registration of asylum applications until mid-September, authorities have started discussions with UNHCR and EASO to plan for remote RSD in case of future lockdowns.

- As a positive development, **Germany** and other countries have, in mutual agreement, resumed Dublin transfers from and to non-adjacent EU Member States as of early July, under application of health precautions. Germany's family reunification procedures were also reinstated as of 2 July.

- The office in **Sweden** reported on 15 July that resettlement travels will be gradually resumed in August, starting with symptom-free people who do not belong to a risk group. Furthermore, resettlement will only be carried out to Swedish municipalities and regions where the spread of COVID-19 and the current strain on health care facilities is low. The aim is to reach a total of 5,000 resettled refugees before the end of the year.

- **Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs):** In **Ukraine**, on 17 July, the de facto authorities in Donetsk Non-Government Controlled Area (NGCA) eased regulations concerning UN, ICRC and other humanitarian organizations' workers entering NGCA, upon provision of negative COVID-19 test results no older than three days, and self-isolation for seven instead of 14 days. In Luhansk NGCA, some organizations' staff are now exempted from self-isolating during 10 days upon entry if a negative e COVID-19 test no older than three days is presented, and a second test was taken 14 days after entry. This is expected to facilitate resumption of humanitarian activities. Currently UNHCR is the only UN agency officially operating in Luhansk NGCA, after receiving its new so-called 'registration' from the de facto authorities valid until January 2021. This allows UNHCR to resume field activities halted in June due to the 'registration' expiry.

- After a first opening in June, the Entry-Exit Checkpoints (EECP) Novotroitske/Olenivka opened four times during the reporting period, allowing for hundreds of people who met the respective entry requirements to cross both ways. However, some people ended up stranded in the grey zone, due to lack of approval by the de facto authorities and hurdles to meet the Government Controlled Area (GCA) entry conditions. UNHCR's and partners' presence on both sides allowed UNHCR to continuously advocate with Ukrainian and de facto authorities for solutions for stranded persons. To improve conditions at the Stanytsia Luhanska EECP, UNHCR installed benches near the Oschadbank office in the waiting areas, where hundreds of people retrieve their pensions on a regular basis, and distributed hand sanitisers to the State Border Guard Service officers.

- UNHCR completed its rapid analysis of the IDP protection situation related to the COVID-19 outbreak. From May to June, 200 requests to support the most vulnerable IDPs facing serious protection risks were received. 72% reported risk of eviction as a result of loss of income, while the 13% answering to have experienced a gradual decrease of income also reported the deterioration of health situation of one or more family members.

**HEALTH**

- In **Greece**, one additional person of concern has tested positive to COVID-19 since the last report, raising the number to 216 reported cases as of 13 July. Out of these, 207 are on mainland and nine on the islands.

- Four months into the COVID-19 situation, while medical areas have been identified in all locations hosting a reception and identification centre (RIC), two sites on Lesvos are operational for quarantining new arrivals. As of 20 July, 90 people were quarantined in Kara Tepe and 162 in Megala Therma, where quarantine was extended by yet another 14 days upon identification of one positive case, since there are no physical partitions or other possibilities for effective isolation in the installation. To date, 55 people have reportedly spent nearly two months on the site, due to consecutive quarantine extensions upon new arrivals. As a result of a lack of alternative sites, 77 people of boat arrivals to Lesvos have remained near the landing points since 13 July, sleeping in the open. UNHCR provided three hot meals a day to this population, as well as blankets and sleeping bags, while the authorities set up some shading. However, these people have no access to water, toilets or tents. UNHCR has raised concerns over the slow progress in preparedness and screening, and prolonged restriction of movement and the management of new arrivals over health-related issues.

- As of 19 July, accommodation and protection services were provided to 1,549 asylum-seekers vulnerable to COVID-19 complications, moving them out of island RICs alternative accommodations. The population of concern on the islands

has dropped to 31,700; the number of asylum-seekers in the RICs dropped to 26,900. However, the capacity of the five RICs is of 5,400 individuals only and the sites remains overcrowded with unhygienic conditions.

- In **Ukraine**, the operation procured over 3,000 pieces of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) items for 18 primary health care facilities along the 'contact line' in Donetska oblast. On 16 July, a distribution of basic non-medical NFIs (soap, sanitizers, medical couches) to 13 front-line medical points in Luhansk GCA was completed, as part of UNHCR's Quick Impact Projects (QIP) intended to increase the preparedness of medical centres. A further QIP was completed with the distribution of 50 water tanks to social institutions (special needs schools and geriatric homes) in Luhansk NGCA.

## COMMUNICATION WITH COMMUNITIES

- To facilitate communication with communities, operations across the region have supported or led efforts to ensure two-way communication with populations of concern. A recent example comes from **Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH)**, where an online tool was launched to communicate with asylum-seekers and persons awaiting registration of their asylum claim. The online site is also used as a legal information channel on the asylum system in BiH.

- In **Greece**, as asylum offices have gradually re-started their services, the operation has supported the efforts of the Asylum Service by sending text messages to 150,000 asylum-seekers with information on procedures.

- In **Spain**, to further overcome obstacles to accessing information, as a result of the office's advocacy and collaboration with relevant stakeholders, a long-awaited WIFI network was installed at the centres in Ceuta and Melilla.

## CASH-BASED AND IN-KIND ASSISTANCE

- In **Azerbaijan**, complementing the emergency cash assistance delivered to 354 households between April and June, multi-pronged advocacy effort resulted in the mobilization of solidarity from various actors, including government, private sector and private individuals, to provide further 130 food packages in July. UNHCR ensured identification of beneficiaries and logistics to deliver over 1,500 food parcels so far.

- In **Moldova**, UNHCR is assessing one-off cash assistance applications by refugees and asylum-seekers who lost their primary source of income due to the economic consequences of the pandemic. So far, 189 asylum-seekers and refugees received financial support from UNHCR during the COVID-19 pandemic.

- In **Turkey**, as of 10 July, 80% of the 15,255 households who had been approved to receive one-off cash assistance to address needs arisen due to COVID-19 had collected their card. Vulnerable families with severe disabilities will receive the cards delivered at their homes. The second cohort of recipients will comprise some 12,000 households.

## EDUCATION

- In **Turkey**, the operation continued to work with the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) on the planned resumption of activities in Public Education Centres. In addition, discussions have been initiated with MoNE for a possible online learning curriculum with social cohesion and Turkish language. This is part of MoNE's efforts to expand online learning opportunities for refugees, supporting continued learning and positive engagement.

## Stories from the Field

- In **Ukraine**, a procedure signed by the President establishes statelessness determination procedure. The law was drafted by the Parliament's Human Rights Committee, with inputs from experts in the President's Office, civil society and UNHCR, and was adopted by Parliament on 16 June 2020. The procedure is expected to help an estimated 35,000 people, who are either stateless or at risk of statelessness, to emerge from legal limbo. Recognised stateless individuals will obtain a temporary residence permit, valid for one year and will be able to enjoy basic rights, such as freedom of movement, access to work, education and health care. It will also enable them to apply for permanent residence and, after five years of permanent residence in Ukraine, to apply for naturalization.
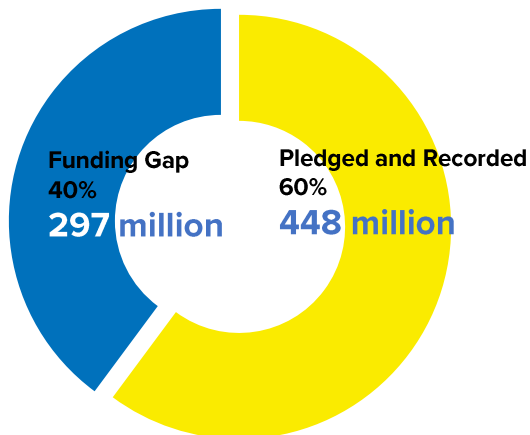
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## Working in partnership

- 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 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.

- UNHCR Regional Bureau for Europe co-organized with ECRE and ICVA its first virtual Dialogue with NGOs in Europe on 6 July. The Director presented UNHCR's priorities and strategic directions in Europe. While the discussions touched upon various issues, the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the protection space in Europe and the required collective response to address these were also raised.

## 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.

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

Funding Gap
40%
**297** million

Pledged and Recorded
60%
**448** million

**Total contributed or pledged to UNHCR COVID-19 appeal**

**USD 448 M (60%)**

Including: United States of America $186.3M | Germany $61.9M | European Union $43.5M | United Kingdom $33.0M | Japan $23.9M |African Development Bank $19.4M | Denmark $14.6M | United Nations Foundation $10.0M | Private donors $8.1M | CERF $6.9M | Canada $6.4M | Qatar Charity $3.5M | Spain $3.4M | France $3.4M | Ireland $3.3M | Sweden $3.0M | Sony Corporation $2.9M | Austria $2.5M | Finland $2.4M | Education Cannot Wait $1.8M | UNO- Flüchtlingshilfe (Germany) $1.7M | 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 | Private donors Spain 33.1M |
United Kingdom 31.7M | Germany 25.9M | Private donors Republic of Korea 17.3M | Switzerland 16.4M |
France 14 M | Private Donors Japan 11.7 M

## Useful Links

UNHCR's revised Coronavirus Emergency Appeal

UNHCR operations overview in Europe

COVID-19: UNHCR's response

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## CONTACTS

**Nicolas Brass**, Senior External Engagement Coordinator, UNHCR Regional Bureau for Europe

brass@unhcr.org

**Delphine Crespin**, Donor Relations Officer, UNHCR Regional Bureau for Europe,

crespin@unhcr.org