



Asia and the Pacific


5 August 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

Across the region, UNHCR's cash assistance programmes remain a vital lifeline for persons of concern who have in many cases been left with no source of income due to COVID-19. For example, UNHCR Pakistan continues to implement its emergency cash programme in target districts and has so far provided emergency cash assistance to more than 22,000 refugee families. The assistance is provided through Urgent Money Order Service of Pakistan Post. Overall, the programme aims to assist 70,000 refugee families. This support mirrors the Government's Ehsaas emergency cash programme, where vulnerable Pakistani families receive Rs.12,000 (approximately \$77) to cover a four-month period.

Highlights by country

South-West Asia

Afghanistan

- In Afghanistan, UNHCR is working with partners on COVID-19 awareness raising activities. Protection cluster partners have reached 1,756,529 individuals in all regions and Emergency Shelter/NFI partners have also reached 514,644 individuals in 14 provinces. UNHCR alone has reached some 1,464,002 people.

Islamic Republic of Iran

- Two tailored cash programs in Iran for COVID-19 using a simplified transfer modality (which has been in operation since April) have enabled UNHCR to address the negative economic impact of COVID-19 and cover basic shelter, nutrition, and hygiene needs of persons of concern quickly. As of end-June, 1,081 households (5,086 individuals) have been directly assisted with one-off Cash for Basic Needs covering three months of the minimum expenditure basket (MEB) (48 million Rial) through bank transfers. The MEB is an estimation of the average minimum expenditure required for a healthy, dignified life in the area concerned.

Pakistan

- UNHCR Pakistan is working with other UN Agencies in a joint program to engage young people in the COVID response. Several refugee youth are participating with Pakistani youth in training sessions that are aimed at fostering a better understanding of infection prevention and their responsibility within the wider community. The sessions also cover coping with the psychological and emotional challenges that have emerged, with a focus on building solidarity and supporting other youth. It is expected that youth will be fully engaged as educators and agents of change in their communities, thereby assisting with psychosocial support for the people who might have lost their confidence due to change on their livelihood/ economic support structures because of COVID.
- Restrictive measures and the more extensive use of smart lockdowns have continued in Pakistan. Educational institutions remain closed. Though officially all public gatherings for social or religious or any other purposes remain banned, demonstrations, protests and religious gathering were observed in the capital and the provinces.

South Asia

India

- UNHCR India has seen increasing numbers of Afghan asylum seekers and refugees wishing to return to their countries of origin during this period, the highest all year. The main reasons cited were the inability to cope financially in India and the need to support ailing family members in their home country.
- Following a stocktaking exercise on psychosocial support (PSS) interventions, the need to immediately strengthen individual, family and community psycho-social support was highlighted across all locations. Loss of livelihood, boredom, inability to attend schooling, inability to pay house rent and worry about family members in country of origin were all cited as key reasons for growing mental anguish amongst persons of concern. UNHCR has scaled up MHPSS support across all locations and population groups.
- UNHCR partnered with UNICEF to expand their partnership with the Ministry of Youth and Sports under the YuWaah platform – a platform focusing on youth in COVID times to promote volunteerism among India's youth.

South-East Asia

Bangladesh

- The Refugee Relief & Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC) in Bangladesh issued a guidance note for Camp in Charges (CICs) in mid-July, providing updated guidance on permissible humanitarian activities in the camps. Areas covered by the guidance include the limited re-opening of registration sites on a rotating basis and renewed activities around monsoon response, including shelter work and planting activities. UNHCR is examining how to safely resume some additional activities, while at the same time continuing to limit the footprint of staff and partners on the ground in line with public health considerations and the principle of “do no harm.”
- Rotational camp visits and engagement with refugee volunteers continue to be utilized for protection monitoring and response. With a reduced staff presence in the camps and either a lack of internet or unstable 3G/4G networks, referrals may take longer, and the number of refugees in need of legal assistance and mediation is increasing.
- Since the start of the COVID-19 response, UNHCR Bangladesh, its WASH partners, and other WASH actors in UNHCR-managed camps have ramped up hygiene promotion efforts, delivering messages on COVID-19 through household level visits, megaphone, audio/USB sticks, and via mosques. Some 65,400 handwashing tippy taps were installed with soapy water in the areas managed by UNHCR. A further 14,500 handwashing devices were installed near latrines and at high-use public spaces, such as distribution points. Over 80,000 households were reached up to the end of June with distributions of soap for personal hygiene as well as laundry soap, while over 91,000 female hygiene kits were distributed to women and girls.

The Philippines

- In the Philippines, as the Protection cluster-lead within the Humanitarian Country Team, UNHCR provided inputs to the revised Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) to implement a variety of COVID response activities in Mindanao, including strengthening the coordination of various protection actors in their COVID-19 response.
- Persons of Concern in the Philippines continue to raise the lack of support systems and available options to survive in the country, entering a fourth month of movement restrictions. Some have reportedly begun to explore options for onward movement or voluntary return to their countries of origin.

Thailand

- UNHCR Thailand's Multi Country Office recently conducted a COVID-19 Impact Assessment for urban refugees and asylum-seekers in Thailand. The report, which will be released soon, comprises both a multi-sector rapid needs assessment (RNA) for urban refugees and asylum-seekers and a post-distribution monitoring (PDM) of UNHCR's cash assistance programme for urban refugees.
- On 22 July, the Centre for Covid-19 Situation Administration (CCSA) in Thailand approved the extension of the state of emergency nationwide for another month until 31 August. The emergency decree allows the government to restrict arrivals, follow up suspected cases of Covid-19 and impose disease control measures on all business and activities.



Children wash their hands at a new handwashing facility in Nangarhar, eastern Afghanistan, in an effort to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Photo: BEST/U.Kazemi

Funding needs

UNHCR's revised COVID-19 emergency appeal was launched on 11 May, in line with the revised Global Humanitarian Response Plan. Of the USD 745 million total revised financial requirements for UNHCR, the total needs in Asia-Pacific stand at **USD 96.3 million**. The requirements per country to support COVID-19 preparedness and response in the region are as follows.

Afghanistan: USD 11,085,150 | **Islamic Republic of Iran:** USD 16,199,400 | **Pakistan:** USD 19,256,030

Bangladesh: USD 25,487,008 | **Myanmar:** USD 8,900,000 | **Indonesia:** USD 3,536,871 | **Malaysia:** USD 4,526,273 | **Philippines:** USD 450,000 | **Thailand:** USD 2,139,090

India: USD 2,077,500 | **Nepal:** USD 1,461,200

Kazakhstan: USD 270,000 | **Kyrgyzstan:** USD 470,000 | **Tajikistan:** USD 440,000

UNHCR continues to be grateful for the robust support from donors on the COVID-19 response including the Governments of **Australia, Canada, Denmark, Germany, Ireland, Japan, Norway, Sweden, UK, USA**, 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.

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