


Asia and the Pacific


22 July 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

UNHCR's livelihoods partners in Bangladesh have completed the groundwork for cash distribution to host communities as part of the COVID-19 response. Some 6,000 host community households who already benefit from the livelihood programme will be assisted, with distributions planned to commence this week. The target list also includes 579 persons with specific needs referred from health and protection sectors.

In Myanmar, 10,000 COVID testing kits will arrive in Yangon in a specialised refrigerated cargo container on 25 July. The testing kits will be handed over to the Ministry of Health and Sports. Delivery will take place alongside a donation from WFP of a further 10,000 testing kits. Additionally, the delivery of four WHO-designed COVID-19 commodity packages which comprises 75 types of medical items including ventilators, medicine and 250,000 PPEs, has begun. The items will be donated to the Ministry of Health and Sports as part of nationwide efforts to prevent and respond to COVID-19 in Myanmar.

Highlights by country

South-West Asia

Afghanistan

- Hospitals and clinics in Afghanistan continue to report challenges maintaining or expanding their capacity to treat patients with COVID-19. These challenges relate to the inadequate supply of personal protective equipment (PPE), testing kits and medical supplies, as well as the limited number of trained staff, which is further exacerbated by the number of frontline staff falling ill. Current laboratory capacity in Afghanistan also remains limited.
- Preliminary results from the COVID-19 Protection Monitoring tool developed by the Protection Cluster highlight that 89% of the respondents reported that their families/communities have lost livelihoods as a result of COVID-19 and that 60% indicated that if not able to work, they have no savings to support their families. Moreover, 91% of respondents indicated that they have nowhere to self-isolate, if they would be required to do so. However, according to the reports, 98% of the respondents said that they did not experience discrimination linked to COVID-19.

Islamic Republic of Iran

- With the assistance of ECHO and the EU Humanitarian Air Bridge, over 95% of all PPEs and medical supply orders have been delivered to the Islamic Republic of Iran, with the rest expected to be delivered in the near future. Meanwhile, the Operations Management Team has decided to implement medevac through WFP/UNHAS' on-demand service.

Pakistan

- UNHCR is distributing additional emergency cash grants in the target districts. More than 17,000 refugee families received cash assistance through the Urgent Money Order service of Pakistan Post. UNHCR plans to distribute the emergency cash to a total of 70,000 vulnerable refugee families. This humanitarian support mirrors the Government's Ehsaas emergency cash program, where vulnerable Pakistani families receive Rs.12,000 (approximately \$77) to cover a four-month period.
- In line with the COVID-19 Socio-economic Assessment and Response Plan 2020, the United Nations Country Team supported the development of provincial-level socio-economic response plans. UNHCR

worked closely with relevant agencies to advocate for the inclusion of refugees within these provincial response plans.

South Asia

India

- UNHCR and partners in India have received reports of an increased number of attempts of self-harm due to increased frustrations in families around the lack of livelihoods and the inability to sustain basic needs as a result of the COVID-19 situation. Steps have been initiated to scale up mental health and psychosocial support interventions and corresponding community messaging throughout the country.
- Community representatives have stressed that UNHCR's persons of concern are no longer able to negotiate with landlords on rent. Ration support, alternative accommodation and financial assistance from private donors are being pursued. On a positive note, barriers to the utilization of CBI through bearer cheques or gift card modalities are being gradually resolved in most locations in India following relaxed lockdown measures.

Nepal

- UNHCR and a partner conducted education profiling for urban refugees and UNHCR is now repositioning funds to accommodate procurement of TVs to enable refugee children to take part in remote learning provided by the Ministry of Education.

South-East Asia

Bangladesh

- On 30 June, the Bangladesh Cabinet issued a circular announcing new public health protection measures. While general lockdown has been lifted, selected restrictive measures have been retained, including a curfew, ongoing suspension of education institutions, a ban on public gatherings, and implementation of the zoning system. The latter involves the declaration of red zones and lockdowns in areas with widespread transmission rates, at the discretion of district administrations. Cox's Bazar has ceased to be designated as a red zone from 1 July and restrictive measures on movement of transport and operation of marketplaces have been lifted. Ukhiya and Teknaf, where refugee camps are situated, have likewise lifted movement restrictions.
- Insecurity in the camps remains a serious concern due to increased criminal activity, including extortion from refugees, shopkeepers and refugee volunteers working in the camps, and settlement of disputes among the population without respect for standards of fairness. In addition, protection incidents continue to be underreported – likely due to the reduced protection presence in the camp (including the reduced presence of authorities) – while medical issues are also underreported due to distrust, stigmatization and fear of healthcare facilities among the population. Consultations with adolescents, children, and parents/caregivers underscored that the absence of alternative recreational and learning activities due to the closure of facilities has contributed to incidents of physical abuse, aggressive behaviour amongst children towards family and others. The pandemic has exacerbated psychological distress, prevalence of domestic violence, physical abuse, child marriage, child labour and neglect. Some adolescents are developing negative coping mechanisms. There is an increased rate of children involved in income generating activities, with lack of supervision and care contributing to cases of trafficking, lost children and incidents of drowning.

Myanmar

- In Rakhine, UNHCR and other agencies continue to face access constraints adding to challenges to carry out regular as well as COVID-19 activities. The onset of the monsoon season also requires a scaling up of wet weather preparedness, shelter activities as well as continued emergency response to new displacement. UNHCR continues to undertake COVID-19 response activities, including awareness raising and distribution of hygiene items alongside regular activities. The emergence of positive COVID-19 cases in northern Rakhine has added to the challenges of operating in an already difficult context. In the North East, UNHCR continues to work with partners to ensure essential support and key activities continue. Access to IDP camps remains restricted by camp management agencies, with the aim of reducing exposure to COVID.
- The United Nations Framework for the Immediate Socio-Economic Response to COVID-19 (UN-SERF) has been finalised for an economic recovery response to COVID-19 alongside the Country

Preparedness and Response Plan (CPRP) and Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP). The targeted vulnerable population includes stateless people, IDPs, and those affected by conflict. The COVID-19 Addendum to the 2020 HRP (requesting an additional USD 58.8 million for partners) was released last week, seeking COVID-specific support for some 915,000 people.

- Distribution of a donation from Unilever of 608,000 bars of soap is ongoing across all areas of operation including the north-east, benefiting 70,763 persons and promoting hygiene in IDP camps across Kachin and northern Shan State.

Malaysia

- In recent weeks, there has been an increase in reports of evictions of UNHCR's persons of concern in Malaysia, with over 150 individuals approaching the UNHCR Office with their belongings, requesting assistance and many others reaching out to NGO partners. This follows the issuance of letters by the Federal Territories Immigration Department, and the Kuala Lumpur City Hall which sternly reminds premise owners not to rent to undocumented migrants. Since then, public discourse on refugee-related matters has reignited. However, the Government has stated that those recognized by UNHCR should be allowed to rent houses and not be evicted and the issue of mass evictions was also raised in parliament. The Prime Minister has also mentioned that Rohingya refugees will not be sent back to sea, and that the Government has appointed the Human Resources Ministry to head a committee to review issues surrounding legal work for refugees in Malaysia.
- While some are returning to work, many former and new employers are hesitant to take in refugees and asylum-seekers as a result of information advising against employing undocumented migrants. The terminology used in notices and the press is often the same for undocumented migrants and refugees/asylum-seekers, causing misunderstandings.

Thailand

- In July, UNHCR and its implementing partner held a three-day Cash-Based Intervention (CBI) Panel to assess 298 cases. This represents a record number of cases considered in one CBI panel by the Thailand MCO. The CBI Panel approved 292 cases, which included 477 direct beneficiaries and 886 indirect beneficiaries (i.e., other family members).



UNHCR Afghanistan is expanding the construction of handwashing facilities throughout the country. Adela, 12, in Balkh, says “I like to wash my hands. I also taught many children in the community and my family members how to wash their hands.”

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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