

# Regional Bureau for Europe

## UPDATE # 12

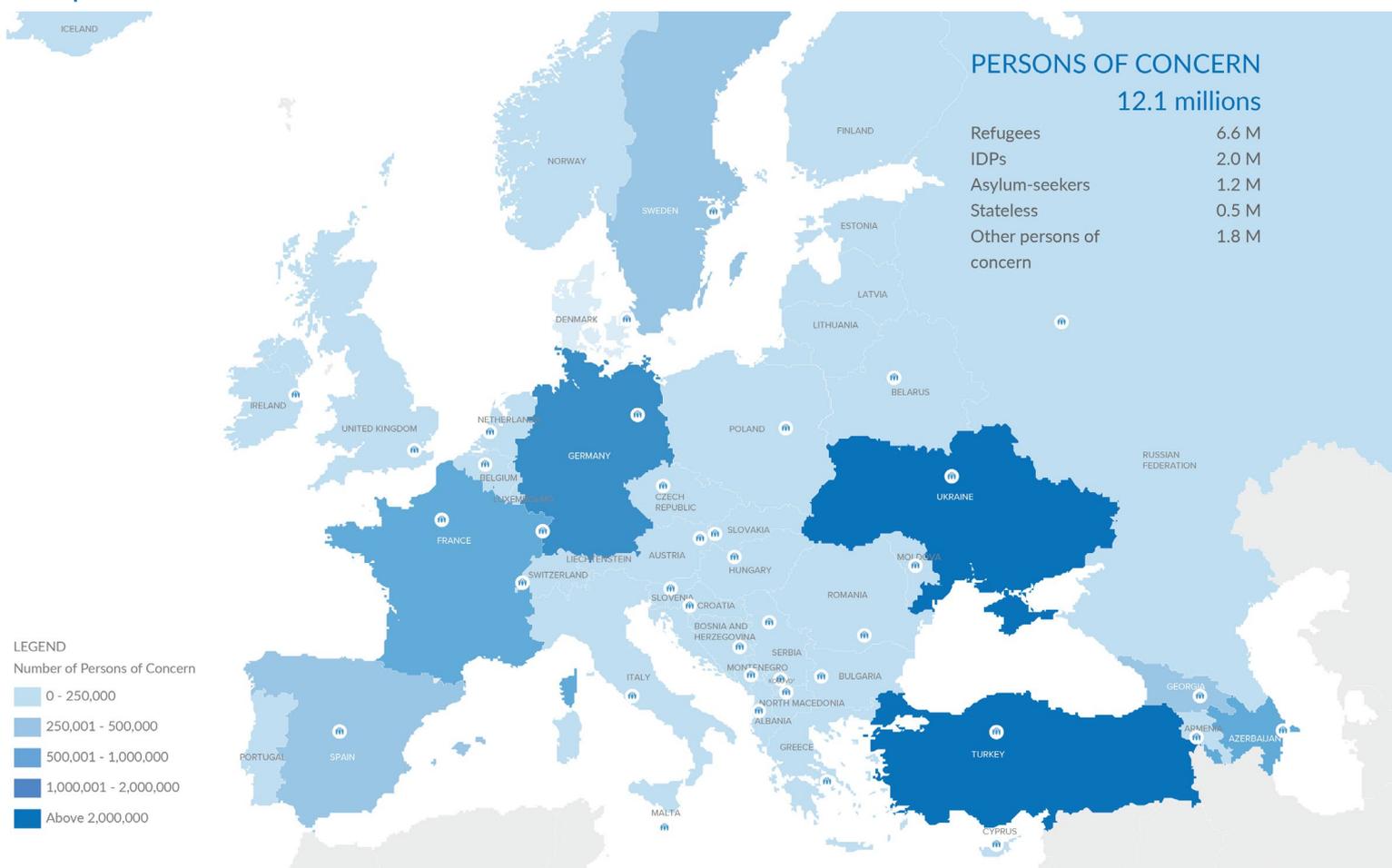
19 June – 1 July 2020

Across the region, further **movement and border restrictions** were lifted, which shall facilitate **access to territory and international protection**.

UNHCR staff is gradually moving back to office premises. After 24 offices shifted **from full-time to partial telework**, no UNHCR office is in full teleworking mode as of 1 July.

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

## Populations of Concern



SOURCE: [UNHCR GLOBAL REPORT 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. To date, 24 countries have reported cases among persons of concern, and some of them have already recovered. However, any figure or estimate need to be taken with caution due to differing approaches to testing, data segregation and reporting.
- As a result of lifted movement restrictions across the region, movements of populations of concern have picked up again, in some countries reaching pre-COVID-19 levels. Where a spike of COVID-19 cases was observed, authorities have postponed or even reversed the lifting of some restrictions.
- UNHCR country offices are gradually resuming suspended activities, for example protection monitoring at borders. As of 30 June, all 37 offices in the region are partially teleworking, meaning that the 24 offices that were on full telework at some point were able to ease partially return to office spaces.
- On the start of the German six-month Presidency to the Council of the EU on 1 July, UNHCR issued a [press release](#) in Brussels and Berlin recalling its [Recommendations to the 2020 Council Presidencies](#) to keep refugee protection high on the agenda. At the heart of the call are the preservation of access to asylum, fair and fast asylum procedures, together with an effective solidarity mechanism. To ensure a bold and robust response to forced displacement during the pandemic and beyond, UNHCR made [concrete proposals](#). The press release also recalled the [Recommendations for the European Commission's Proposed Pact on Asylum and Migration](#) and [UNHCR's 5 Key Calls to the EU on the COVID-19 response](#).

## 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 are being lifted, access to territory and international protection generally improves and population movements resume. However, concerning reports of push-backs on land borders and at sea persist. Where this is the case, offices are intervening with authorities. In light of a new law adopted in **Hungary** on 17 June, which further undermines access to territory and asylum, UNHCR shared its position with the authorities and issued a [press release](#) on 29 June calling on the government to withdraw the act and bring the asylum system into conformity with international refugee and human rights law as well as EU law.
- In some countries with arrivals by sea, authorities have developed protocols upon arrival to prevent the spread of COVID-19. **Italy**, for example, has identified locations to place new arrivals in a 14-day quarantine onshore but also offshore on a chartered vessel for this purpose. All arrivals are tested and, if positive, isolated. UNHCR has resumed activities at disembarkation sites, providing information to new arrivals and referring to the various multilanguage online platforms developed during the lockdown. Since the start of the mandatory 14-day quarantine for sea arrivals on 23 February, 5,114 individuals have been quarantined, of which 4,005 in onshore facilities and 1,109 offshore. As of 29 June, 890 people were still quarantined.
- 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. Some asylum and reception centres in the region are witnessing a quick turnover and a low occupancy rate. Reasons for departures, as reported by country offices, include misinformation about open borders, fear of movement restrictions, remoteness of the centres and lack of internet, as well as long waiting times for the processing of asylum claims.
- **Reception conditions:** While freedom of movement for inhabitants of reception centres has largely been restored, congested centres and lack of alternative accommodations remain a health risk factor, with reports of outbreaks in such centres persisting. Of particular concern are centres hosting asylum-seekers with specific needs that cannot be addressed adequately due to restricted access and reduced offer of services. UNHCR has been advocating to address these situations, and efforts have been made to improve conditions, for example by offering separate rooms to LGBTI residents (Melilla centre in **Spain**) or transferring unaccompanied children to dedicated shelters (Pournara camp in **Cyprus**) but remain insufficient in light of the needs. UNHCR teams have resumed visits to centres across the region, resulting in tailored support efforts, for example in **Romania**, where additional hygiene and essential protective equipment will be delivered to the country's six reception centres.
- **Asylum procedures** have also been resumed in most States. In many instances, initially, case processing is picking up at a slower than pre-COVID-19 pace, for example in **Italy**, where UNHCR also resumed remote quality monitoring of first instance decisions issued in 2020. Planning for a possible next lockdown situation, the National Commission for the right to asylum established a working group with UNHCR and EASO to discuss remote refugee status determination modalities. In the **Netherlands**, tele-hearings are carried out via remote secure connections and the numbers of weekly interviews are being scaled up. Asylum authorities are investigating means to reintroduce physical hearing within the framework of the health guidelines for vulnerable groups, for example children, for whom remote hearings are not suitable. Some countries resolved to use the lockdown time to tackle backlogs of pending decisions. In **Germany**, for example, the asylum authority managed to reduce a pre-COVID-19 backlog of pending decisions from some 60,000 in March to some 44,000 cases at the end of June.
- Based on current lower infection numbers in **Turkey**, access to persons of concern has improved for humanitarian actors. For example, the legal clinic staff working within the cooperation framework between the Union of Turkish Bar Associations and UNHCR was able to resume services in-office with rotational presence. Three legal clinics have resumed full services as of 22 June. Face-to-face legal assistance to

persons of concern upon appointment is being provided in line with measures recommended by authorities on physical distancing during intake, reception and service provision.

- **Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs):** In **Ukraine**, UNHCR completed its rapid analysis of IDP protection situation related to the COVID-19 outbreak. From May to June, UNHCR received 200 requests to support the most vulnerable IDPs facing serious protection risks as a result of quarantine measures. 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.
- On 18 June, UNHCR shared with Ukrainian authorities the **recommendations** developed by the UN Country Team related to the safe re-opening to civilian movement across the Entry-Exit Check Points (EECPs) along the 'contact line'. On 21 June, the de facto authorities in the non-government controlled area (NGCA) of Donetsk issued a decree on the opening of "borders" for NGCA residents with urgent humanitarian needs and for UN, ICRC, OSCE representatives to enter Donetsk NGCA.
- After opening on 22 June and allowing for hundreds of people to transit both ways, EECPs closed again on 27 June. Lack of information on entry requirements and of coordination on both sides of the contact line resulted in numerous people stranded for several days in the "grey zone". UNHCR coordinated the provision of tents, food and water together with Ukrainian authorities and NGO partner Proliska for people unable to enter the government-controlled area. Upon advocacy with regional authorities 29 stranded people were transferred to designated observation facilities where MSF provided COVID-19 tests. Further, in coordination with partners, 55 stranded people were transported through the NGCA side of the EECP to a safe location after UNHCR negotiated for their passage and provided NFIs and food.

**HEALTH**

- In **Greece**, three persons of concern have tested positive to COVID-19 since the last report, raising the number to 215 reported cases as of 29 June. Out of these, 207 are on mainland and eight on the islands. 164 people are in quarantine in the Mergala Therma area on Lesbos, four have tested positive.
- The transfer of older and immunocompromised asylum-seekers from island Reception and Identification centres (RICs) to alternative accommodations continued, where compliance with COVID-19 preventive measures is easier. By 28 June, 1,380 persons had been moved. Reception conditions on the islands remain dire for the 30,600 people living in overcrowded and unhygienic conditions in the RICs with a hosting capacity for 5,400 people.
- Three months into the COVID-19 situation, a combination of **proactive and reactive mitigating measures** is in place, but more work is required to develop the medical facilities in some of the locations and ensure an adequate response to a potential outbreak. Medical and quarantine areas have been identified in all locations hosting a RIC but only the Mergala Therma area on Lesbos is ready to use for quarantine. The overall country response, including activities coordinated by UNHCR, has mitigated the likelihood of an outbreak, however the impact of an outbreak would still have major consequences. Concerns with regards to the status of preparedness and capacity to screen and manage prolonged restriction of movements were shared in writing and at meetings with authorities.
- As part of the efforts to prepare for quarantines and outbreaks, in Chios RIC, UNHCR completed the installation of two rub halls with inner lining, flooring and partitions for a combined capacity of 30 rooms. Thirteen new WASH units were also delivered and their maintenance by the RIC management is monitored. Complementing these measures, UNHCR and authorities have set up a community volunteer team to raise awareness door-to-door and mobilize RIC residents for the appropriate use and maintenance of the facilities. Further, 20 kits with soap and dental hygiene items were handed over to the team of volunteering refugees on hygiene issues.

**COMMUNICATION WITH COMMUNITIES**

- 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. UNHCR sustains its support in the matter, for example in Romania, where a COVID-19 prevention brochure building on information by WHO and authorities was published in 7 languages and distributed starting on 23 June.
- The Council of Europe Intercultural Cities programme set up a [webpage](#) dedicated to asylum-seekers migrants, and refugees and the measures taken by cities in response to the pandemic. It highlights examples of inclusion like in Leeds (**UK**), where the government introduced [emergency measures](#) to prevent asylum seekers from being displaced and becoming homeless, and an [online information hub](#) functioning in more than 40 languages. Measures have also been put in place for victims of domestic violence. In **Ioannina (Greece)**, the local radio and the police provide information to migrants in native languages on prevention and response to COVID-19.

**CASH-BASED AND IN-KIND ASSISTANCE**

- In **Turkey**, after the distribution of **one-off cash assistance** cards for two groups of more than 7,000 and more than 2,000 families started earlier this month, an additional list of 5,400 families is being processed for payment. UNHCR is working on a post-distribution monitoring tool to be ready in July.
- In **Ukraine**, UNHCR completed an analysis based on its **post-distribution monitoring** (PDM) to assess the impact of a one-time emergency cash assistance provided in May to 454 refugee and asylum-seeking families. The PDM was conducted through online focus group discussions in four regions of Ukraine. The recipients reported that they used the assistance primarily to cover rent and food expenses. They acknowledged that they still faced difficulties covering basic needs as restrictions of movement remain in force and prevent them from resuming all pre-crisis income-generating activities.
- Distribution of in-kind assistance continued in various areas in Ukraine. Critically needed NFIs were delivered to 11 medical facilities in the four localities along the ‘contact line’ in Luhansk oblast. On 17 June, UNHCR distributed sanitizers, contact-free thermometers and detergents to the Volodymyr Dahl East-Ukrainian National University to support during student enrolment.

## Stories from the Field

- This year, due to the pandemic, the commemoration of [World Refugee Day](#) on 20 June was observed across the region with events and happenings that were creatively adapted to these testing times. As part of the campaign “Every action counts”, UNHCR offices in Europe honoured and celebrated refugees fighting the pandemic on the frontlines, host communities and aid workers supporting them – because everyone can make a difference.
- In Cyprus, a virtual concert featured Alexia Vassiliou and other performers who shared messages of support from refugees and artists around the world. The concert was shown at reception centres in Cyprus and is available on [youtube](#).
- In a joint project, the Council of Europe, UNHCR in **Strasbourg**, the “Foyer Notre Dame” and the City of Strasbourg have produced a [videoclip](#) introducing some refugees living in Strasbourg who contribute to combat the COVID-19 spread, including thanks to the European qualifications passport for refugees.

- In **Greece**, UNHCR announced the results of the annual national student contest about refugees, this year entitled "Things that don't fit in a suitcase". The contest attracted participation from more than 1,300 primary and secondary school children across Greece, including refugee students.
- UNHCR Georgia launched an online photo exhibition "We are in this together!" with a selection of photographs submitted by Georgian photographers, UNHCR staff, refugees and other persons of concern.
- In **North Macedonia**, UNHCR produced a **video** in cooperation with state and NGO partners which was broadcast on national TV and social media.
- In **Switzerland**, the photo exhibition «Art Stands with Refugee Children» by the photographer, theatre director and comedian Audrey Cavellius, illustrated the situation of unaccompanied and separated children.

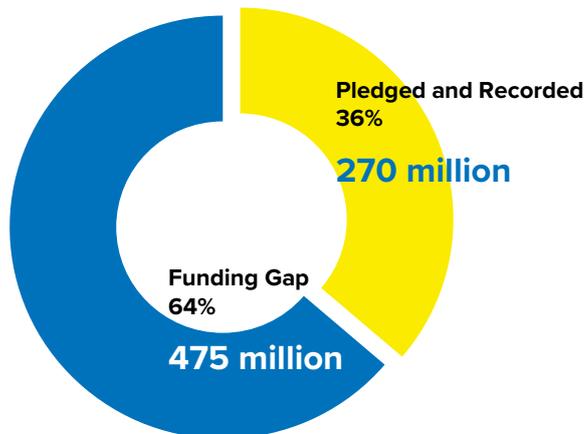


## Working in partnership

- 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.

## 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:****Total contributed or pledged to UNHCR COVID-19 appeal****USD 252 M (34%)**

Including: United States of America \$64.0M | Germany \$38.6M | European Union \$33.5M | United Kingdom \$24.8M | Japan \$23.9M | Denmark \$14.6M | United Nations Foundation \$10.0M | CERF \$6.9M | Private donors \$6.7M | 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

**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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Subscribe**CONTACTS**

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

[brass@unhcr.org](mailto:brass@unhcr.org)

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

[crespin@unhcr.org](mailto:crespin@unhcr.org)