

UNHCR COVID-19 Preparedness and Response

Highlights

- In 2021, UNHCR will work to maintain the same levels of responsiveness, adaptability and flexibility in response to COVID-19, whilst strengthening resilience as staff and people of concern adjust to living and working with COVID-19 in the medium term. UNHCR published a [supplementary appeal](#) to respond to these needs.
- In a joint [press release](#), IOM and UNHCR chiefs stressed that COVID-19 underlines the urgent need for universal health coverage that includes migrants, refugees and internally displaced and stateless people.
- In a [recently published study](#), the World Bank and UNHCR estimate that 4.4 million people in host communities and 1.1 million refugees or internally displaced persons in Lebanon, the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, and three governorates in Jordan have been newly pushed into poverty by the pandemic.
- UNHCR and IOM jointly launched a [USD 1.44 billion regional plan](#) to respond to the growing needs of refugees and migrants from Venezuela and the communities hosting them. The onset of COVID-19 has dangerously strained national and local capacities across the region. Many refugees and migrants and their host communities now face a myriad of new challenges that worsen their already precarious conditions.

COVID-19 update



Over **38,500** reported cases of COVID-19 among forcibly displaced people



across **103** countries



increase of some **5,000** cases compared to the previous month

(numbers as of 17 December 2020)



Democratic Republic of Congo. UNHCR facilitates return of Burundian refugees
© UNHCR/Sanne Biesmans

Global Overview

According to [UNHCR's latest Mid-Year Trends](#), global forced displacement crossed the 80 million mark at mid-2020, more than 50 million of whom are forcibly displaced within their countries' borders. So far, governments, UNHCR, and other aid agencies have helped keep transmission rates among refugees at similar levels as those in host communities. With access and support to public health programmes critical to pandemic response efforts, UNHCR will continue to support the inclusion of people of concern into national health services and response plans and strategies, including into health insurance schemes.

As the world gears up to distribute COVID-19 vaccines, UNHCR continues to advocate globally, regionally and at country-level for the inclusion of refugees and other persons of concern in governments' vaccine allocation and distribution plans and ongoing essential health services. In Djibouti, for example, UNHCR joined a national committee that has been set up for the COVAX vaccine to contribute to discussions on identifying the target populations for the vaccine. UNHCR will provide refugee figures based on the selection criterion (e.g. persons over the age of 46, etc.). UNHCR is also strengthening its partnership with Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, with the overall goal of ensuring refugees and other forcibly displaced persons can access vaccines on par with nationals.

COVID-19 Supplementary Appeal 2021



On 18 December, UNHCR released its [COVID-19 Supplementary Appeal for 2021](#), asking for an additional USD 455 million for COVID-19 related activities.

UNHCR has 'mainstreamed' ongoing COVID-19 programming, particularly in the health, WASH, shelter, camp coordination and camp management and protection sectors into the [Global Appeal 2021](#). In addition to those activities, the COVID-19 supplementary appeal focuses on needs related to the exceptional socio-economic and protection impacts of COVID-19 and a few critical health, WASH and shelter needs for which there was no possibility to mainstream into the Global Appeal 2021.

UNHCR Response

Progress to date and Impact

- Thanks to extensive advocacy by UNHCR and partners, several host governments already committed to include refugees and other persons of concern in their national vaccination plans and roll outs.

Gaps and Challenges

- Since the COVID-19 pandemic, discrimination towards displaced communities has worsened in Yemen, with internally displaced people (IDPs) now often perceived as being among those who spread the disease. This stigma further narrowed job opportunities for IDPs who rely on unskilled daily labour to survive.
- On the occasion of the launch of the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence, worrying reports of a significant increase in cases of violence against women and girls during COVID-19 have been recorded. Addressing gender-based violence will remain an important component of UNHCR's COVID-19 response in 2021.

Middle East and North Africa (MENA)

The COVID-19 situation in MENA has stabilized in some countries, while in others, a resurgence of COVID-cases among populations is being observed.

Jordan

During November, the COVID-19 situation in Jordan deteriorated significantly, with the total number of confirmed cases more than doubling in one month and the number of deaths more than tripling. In response, the government has continued to expand health system capacities, including through designating additional hospitals to treat COVID-19 patients. The ongoing COVID-19 crisis has also resulted in continued limited livelihood opportunities for refugees and high levels of debt. To mitigate the impact, UNHCR has expanded the eligibility criteria for the winterization assistance this year to include additional Vulnerability Assessment Framework (VAF) scores like debt per capita.

Yemen

Hundreds of thousands of internally displaced Yemenis are at heightened risk of food insecurity as livelihoods have been lost to the combined effects of ceaseless violence and COVID-19 pandemic. According to the latest UN food security survey in Yemen, food insecurity is prevalent in areas of conflict, where half of Yemen's four million displaced population resides. Nearly 40 per cent of the most vulnerable displaced families say they have no access to income and 37 per cent were already eating less.

Libya

In Libya, after nearly a year of delays due to COVID-19-related worldwide border closures and movement restrictions, UNHCR evacuated a group of 79 vulnerable asylum-seekers to safety in Rwanda on 19 November.

Asia and the Pacific

Nepal

The Government of Nepal is preparing to purchase COVID-19 vaccines from the international market as soon as they become available. UNHCR Nepal has coordinated with WHO to plan to include 20,000 refugees, approximately 23 per cent of whom are at heightened risk and are prioritized accordingly. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Health and Population has issued instructions that refugees with refugee documents shall be treated the same as Nepalese nationals when accessing COVID-related health treatment and will receive free COVID-19 testing and treatment.

Islamic Republic of Iran

In line with UNHCR's continued efforts to support the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran to strengthen the national health systems to which refugees have access, 13 portable ventilators (in addition to 66 ventilators which were previously procured) were imported and recently handed over to the government. These ventilators will be used in medical centers and hospitals in refugee-hosting provinces. This equipment is part of over 100 tons of medical equipment imported into the country by UNHCR since the beginning of the pandemic.

Even though many of UNHCR's persons of concern have returned to work or have managed to continue work during the pandemic, they are increasingly unable to meet their basic needs, especially regarding education and health services, due to inflation and reduced business. Many people borrowed money at the outset of the pandemic and, as it has lasted longer than expected, most have not been able to pay back their debts leading to tensions in families and communities.

West and Central Africa

Since October, the number of new COVID-19 cases marked a steady increase across West and Central Africa, triggering concerns over a second wave of infections in the region. As the Sahel conflict shows no signs of abating, UNHCR and its partners continue to cooperate with the national government in order to support the most vulnerable populations, particularly people who have been forced to flee, to address the dire socio-economic impact of COVID-19 and mitigate the risk of negative coping-mechanism, exploitation and trafficking.

[Mali](#)

Persistent insecurity and deteriorating economic conditions due to the COVID-19 pandemic have caused a steep rise in trafficking of children, forced labour and forced recruitment. According to the latest report of the UNHCR-led Global Protection Cluster, 220 cases of child recruitment were documented in the first half of 2020, compared to 215 cases in all of 2019. The victims are disproportionately boys working at eight mining sites. Women and girls are also victims of abduction, sexual assault and rape, and in the Mopti region alone more than 1,000 cases have been recorded in 2020.

[Ghana](#)

Undergraduate refugee students in urban settings have been trained and equipped to support the aged and physically challenged in their neighborhoods with COVID-19 public health safety protocols and prevention information to reduce their vulnerability to the diseases.

East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes

UNHCR and the World Bank have been collaborating to monitor the impact of COVID-19 on refugees using high-frequency phone surveys. The survey results are intended to inform the response of governments, humanitarian and development actors and other stakeholders aimed at mitigating the impact of the pandemic and improving the wellbeing of refugees during and after the COVID-19 crisis.

The Kenya high-frequency phone surveys show that a decrease in household income has significantly reduced access to food staples, with about 50 per cent of urban refugee households experiencing hunger. COVID-19 has also significantly reduced access to education among refugee households. Before the pandemic, about 97 per cent of urban refugee households sent their children to school. Only 3 per cent of households have sent back their children since school reopening (schools have only reopened for a few grade levels in Kenya), due to fear of COVID-19 infections.

[Ethiopia Emergency/East Sudan](#)

The ongoing conflict in Ethiopia has led to a humanitarian crisis, including for the Eritrean refugees who reside there, and with the arrival of some 50,000 Ethiopian refugees to Sudan in the last month. Efforts are being made to include COVID-19 precautions in the response to this new emergency such as temperature screenings at the entry point in Hamdayet. UNHCR also conducted awareness-raising sessions on COVID-19 prevention measures in Hamdayet, as well as safe water chain and food handling, and distributed informative leaflets in Tigrayan.

Americas

Despite pandemic-related restrictions, countries throughout the region are facilitating refugees' and migrants' access to protection and regular stays. By the end of November, Colombia had received over 15,000 applications for its new stay permit, which allows Venezuelans who entered the country regularly before 31 August 2020 to regularize their status. Costa Rica created a new special category of stay permit, based on humanitarian grounds, aimed at Venezuelans, Nicaraguans, and Cubans who had had their asylum claim denied.

As the pandemic drags on, a lethal mix of confinement, deepening poverty and economic duress is unleashing a renewed wave of violence that is hitting refugee, displaced and stateless women and girls particularly hard. The UNHCR-led Global Protection Cluster reported increases in gender-based violence in at least 27 countries. In Colombia, for instance, incidents of gender-based violence against Venezuelan refugees and migrants have increased by 40 per cent over the first three quarters of the year, compared to the same period last year.

Europe

As countries prepare plans for vaccine rollouts in the coming weeks and months, UNHCR is advocating with governments across the region to ensure the equitable inclusion of refugees and persons of concern in national vaccination plans. The Greek Ministry of Health, for instance, has confirmed to UNHCR that persons of concern will be included in COVID-19 vaccination campaigns once a vaccine is available.

COVID-19 prevention measures have resulted in suspended access by UNHCR and partners to reception centres. In Cyprus, for example, authorities closed reception and detention centres on 12 November to mitigate further COVID-19 spreads, thus limiting access by UNHCR and partners to the Pournara main camp. Similarly, as Greece entered a renewed lockdown on 8 November, movement in and out of refugee sites was suspended. UNHCR continues to monitor the implementation of measures in refugee hosting sites.

Southern Africa

While reported active cases of COVID-19 are decreasing in the region, testing capacities are limited, linked to shortages of test kits, limited laboratory capacity, and delays in results being shared. This is especially worrying as restrictions for COVID-19 prevention are being lifted and chances of a resurgence still exist as people of concern along with the host community are returning to work and school.

[Malawi](#)

UNHCR is part of the National COVID-19 Vaccine Coordinating Committee, which has requested for vaccines amounting to 20 per cent of Malawi's population (estimated to be 19 million). The 20 per cent are for frontline health and social workers, individuals with co-morbidities and those aged above 60 years. Refugees and people of concern continue to be actively discussed as part of the national planning process.

Coordination and partnerships

Together with ICVA, UNHCR organized the monthly NGO consultations on “Mixed Movements and the COVID-19 response” on 7 December. Panelists discussed mixed movements in the context of COVID-19 and emphasized the need for refugees and migrants to have access to COVID-19 vaccination. Jeffery Labovitz, IOM Director of the Department of Operations and Emergencies provided an update about the Central Mediterranean, Atlantic, and Western Mediterranean routes that are being taken by migrants to reach Europe, highlighting how COVID-19 has brought new protection risks and economic challenges. Roberto Forin, Global Programme Coordinator of the Mixed Migration Center, shared the survey findings on reasons for migrants to leave their country of origin as well as findings on the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on migration journeys and decision to leave the country of origin. Vincent Cochetel, UNHCR Special Envoy for the Central Mediterranean Situation, highlighted the situation in Algeria and further discussed the drivers leading to an increase in displacement and migration, by also reflecting potential impacts of COVID-19 on trafficking and smuggling.

Global Protection Cluster High level event: The State of Protection in the COVID-19 era



On 30 November, the Global Protection Cluster, led by UNHCR, hosted a [high-level event](#) ahead of the launch of the 2021 Global Humanitarian Overview (GHO) to reflect on the state of protection in the Covid-19 era. The session brought to a close the 2020 [Global Protection Forum](#), a series of webinars and events over the last 4 months, that have examined contemporary and emerging

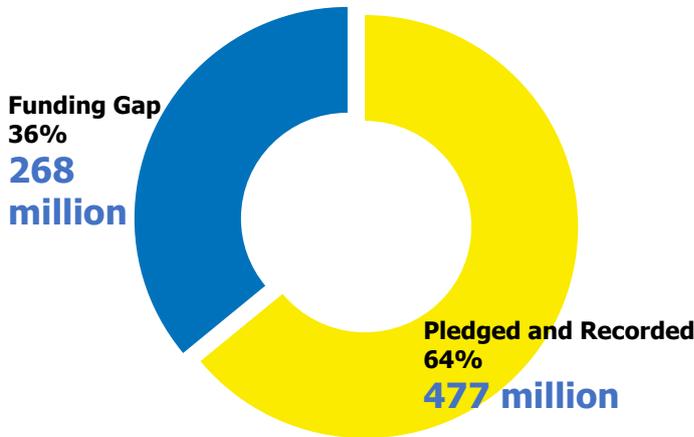
protection challenges from the wide ranging perspectives of protection service providers, humanitarian, peace and development partners, academics, and UN Member States.

Financial Information

UNHCR sought USD 745 million to support COVID-19 response in 2020, toward which a total of 477 million was received. On 18 December, UNHCR launched the [COVID-19 Supplementary Appeal](#), appealing for USD 455 million for activities in 2021 related to the exceptional socio-economic and protection impacts of COVID-19, as well as a limited number of critical health, WASH and shelter needs. In total, UNHCR’s financial requirements for COVID-19-related activities in 2021 will be approximately USD 932 million considering activities already mainstreamed into the Global Appeal, plus supplementary needs.

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 | Private donors Spain 73.5M | United Kingdom 45.7M | Norway 41.4M | Private donors Republic of Korea 37.5M | Netherlands 36.1M | Denmark 34.6M | Private donors Japan 27.8M | Germany 25.9M | Japan 23.8M | Private donors Italy 17.6M | Switzerland 16.4M | France 14M | Private donors Sweden 12.8M | Private donors USA 10.8M | Italy 10.6M

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 477M

Including:

United States	\$186.3M
Germany	\$62.7M
European Union	\$34.1M
Private donors	\$26.6M
United Kingdom	\$26.4M
Japan	\$25.1M
African Development Bank	\$18.3M
Denmark	\$14.6M
United Nations Foundation	\$10.0M
Unilever	\$8.3M
CERF	\$6.9M
Canada	\$6.4M
France	\$4.6M
Education Cannot Wait	\$3.9M
Qatar Charity	\$3.5M
Spain	\$3.4M
Ireland	\$3.3M
Austria	\$3.1M
Saudi Arabia	\$3.0M
Sweden	\$3.0M

More information:

[Global Humanitarian Response Plan COVID-19](#)
(launched 17 July 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)



Contact:

Lea Moser, moserl@unhcr.org