

UNHCR Regional Bureau for Middle East and North Africa

COVID-19 Emergency Response Update #9

1 July 2020

Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, Western Sahara, Yemen, and Turkey¹

Key Figures



20

out of 20 UNHCR countries / operations are reporting COVID-19 cases in the region



16 million

2020 planning figure for people of concern in the Middle East and North Africa



21

COVID-19 cases reported among persons of concern in MENA²

Regional Developments

Operational Context

20 June marked **World Refugee Day**, dedicated to raising awareness of the plight of refugees around the world and recognizing the resilience it takes to rebuild their lives, while also paying tribute to the communities that so generously shelter them. UNHCR's '[Every Action Counts](#)' campaign emphasizes that everyone can make a difference in the effort to create a more just, inclusive and equal world. Considering the COVID-19 pandemic, it has become ever more important to call for greater global solidarity and action to include and support refugees, internally displaced and stateless people as well as their hosts.

Globally, refugees have taken action to fight the coronavirus in their hosting communities. In the [High Commissioner's statement to commemorate World Refugee Day](#), refugees' resilience was highlighted as inspiring, in their determination to overcome challenges and in their significant contributions, despite often living in extremely vulnerable conditions.

Across MENA, World Refugee Day was celebrated, albeit under different circumstances than other years. In **Turkey**, UNHCR cooperated with some 30 metropolitan and district mayors, as well as representatives of umbrella organizations and a high-profile supporter to produce video messages under the themes of Everyone Can Make a Difference and Every Action Counts. The video messages posted on UNHCR's social media accounts underline the impact of COVID-19 on host and refugee populations, the need for solidarity and the paramount role of towns and cities in creating inclusive communities and promoting hope. In **Morocco**, for World Refugee Day, UNHCR organized a public session on the psychosocial impact of COVID-19 and provided recommendations for refugees and asylum-seekers to help them deal with post-confinement.

¹ UNHCR Turkey reports to the UNHCR Europe Bureau, although operations in Turkey related to the Syria & Iraq Situations are included in the MENA update

² Iraq, Lebanon, Yemen, Israel and Mauritania

Lebanon



Midia Said Sido's contribution is making soap so that her children and other Syrian refugees living in her community in southern Lebanon can wash their hands regularly and reduce the spread of the virus.

"We need soap now more than ever," she points out.

Back in Aleppo, Midia used to watch her parents boil ingredients to make the region's renowned laurel soap. Through a course offered by UNHCR in Lebanon, she learned how to use a cold process to make soap at home. When asked if she would like to contribute to coronavirus prevention efforts by producing medical soap, she quickly agreed and joined an online training session.

"It's something good for me, and it can benefit other people too," she says. "I would like to teach other women how to make it."

Writing by Kristy Siegfried, with reporting by Warda Al-Jawahiry in Beirut, Lebanon. Photo by UNHCR / Houssam Hariri

Main Lines of Response



Continuing, adapting and delivering

protection and assistance to the most vulnerable



Strengthening communication with communities



Prioritizing immediate interventions

to prevent infections and supporting access to services and materials



Advocating for the inclusion of refugees, IDPs

and other marginalized groups into national public health and other responses, and supporting national systems to deliver assistance



Empowering individuals and families to make

the best decisions for themselves, through cash-based assistance

Highlights from the field

In **Iraq**, considering the increased number of confirmed COVID-19 cases, UNHCR continues efforts to limit the spread of the virus and preserve the well-being of vulnerable displaced families. In Sulaymaniyah governorate, health, WASH, and Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM) actors are working on reinforcing preparedness measures in camps, including re-starting mass information campaigns, and ensuring the WASH response is fully covered. UNHCR, CCCM, WHO and WASH partners, organized a site visit to Ashti and Arbat IDP camps along with Sulaymaniyah's Department of Health, to identify potential locations for quarantine and isolation. Furthermore, fumigation activities are ongoing in various IDP and refugee camps across Iraq, along with COVID-19 awareness raising sessions. As of mid-June, 32,400 brochures and 1,000 posters on COVID-19 preventive measures have been distributed to persons of concern, camp-based Primary Health Care Centres, camp management, and community outreach volunteers.

Across the border in **Jordan**, the rate of COVID-19 remains within acceptable parameters, with most new cases linked to the return of Jordanian nationals from abroad. UNHCR partner Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) completed the construction of the inpatient COVID-19 treatment centre for Zaatar refugee camp, including WASH facilities, recruitment of medical staff and procurement of necessary medical supplies. The treatment centre forms part of wider precautionary and preventative activities to ensure adequate response capacity in the event of COVID-19 cases being recorded in the camp. Moreover, random testing of the population as per Government procedures is also taking place regularly, with only negative cases reported to date.

The socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in **Lebanon** has been exacerbated by an already existing financial crisis. The Lebanese Pound has dropped to new lows against the U.S. dollar, further diminishing purchasing powers – particularly for the most vulnerable. While 55 per cent of the refugee population were below the extreme poverty line pre-crisis, this number is now estimated to have reached 75 per cent of the refugee population. The struggles faced by both refugee and host communities to cope with the multiple dimensions of the crisis in Lebanon has created tensions between and within community groups – over electricity supply, employment opportunities and the distribution of assistance. Food insecurity and lack of access to basic needs remain the primary concern of refugees, leading to an increase of women and children resorting to begging on the streets as well as

child labour, particularly in the agricultural sector. Meanwhile, reception centres are resuming prioritized activities; the scale of the resumption varying per centre, in addition to some activities at community centres. Measures have been put in place to manage the flow of visitors, ensuring safe distancing, and limiting participation to avoid overcrowding. UNHCR's COVID-19 temporary cash assistance targeting 11,000 Syrian families and 500 families of other nationalities with LBP 320,000 per month in May, June and July is ongoing.

In **Syria**, Sayeda Zainab, rural Damascus, an area which was locked down for about a month due to COVID-19, refugee needs remain high. UNHCR in cooperation with the World Food Programme and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent distributed food baskets for over 850 refugee families at the start of June. UNHCR outreach volunteers were present at the registration centre and distribution point to support with managing flows of people, verifying beneficiary names, delivering food baskets, and accompanying the most vulnerable cases. Meanwhile, most UNHCR partners in Syria resumed 30 per cent of their regular activities in community centres and started delivering limited protection services. In total since the start of the COVID-19 crisis, more than 614,000 individuals have been reached through risk communication and community engagement activities. This includes nearly 120,000 Syrians as well as refugees in Syria reached through outreach volunteers, and more than 75,000 Syrians and refugees reached through UNHCR mass communication campaigns, among other activities.

In **north-west Syria**, the UNHCR-led Protection Cluster is concerned about the impact of the economic downturn on affected communities. The crisis, combined with the COVID-19 pandemic and closure of some commercial crossings, is especially compounding the protection situation of displaced communities, which already faced obstacles in accessing livelihoods. Due to difficulties in addressing basic needs, households are at risk of adopting negative coping mechanisms, which often disproportionately affect children. Increases in gender-based violence (GBV) and child rights violations have also been reported by partners. Moreover, partners are concerned that persons with disabilities, particularly women and girls, are at an increased risk of experiencing violence, abuse and neglect.

In **Yemen**, UNHCR is carrying out a communicating with communities survey across the country, including on the results of UNHCR's and other Agencies' COVID-19 awareness-raising campaigns. In Hajjah and Hudaydah, the survey reached 400 beneficiaries, and 87 per cent of the respondents stated that they were aware of COVID-19 symptoms, precautionary measures and how the infection was transmitted. However, 40 per cent said that they could not afford to follow the prevention measures and were only able to wash their hands. Some 90 per cent responded that access to health facilities became a challenge due to fear of infection from hospitals. In Ibb, the survey reached 930 beneficiaries where 90 per cent of the respondents stated that they were aware about the COVID-19 symptoms, precautionary measures and how the infection was transmitted, but 35 per cent only resorted to washing their hands. Some 73 per cent believed that access to health facilities was more difficult since the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak, and 49 per cent of respondents stated that their daily financial incomes had been affected due to COVID-19.

As the conflict in **Libya** continues to drive displacement, UNHCR's Community Day Centre remains one of the few protection service delivery points available to displaced persons, albeit with continuous adaptation of working hours to comply with changing curfew regulations and movement restrictions linked to COVID-19. Additionally, UNHCR's four hotlines are being streamlined to be better equipped to analyse topics of reported calls, and to follow-up on referrals. Since 1 April, some 1,760 calls have been received, mostly relating to material and cash assistance as well as registration. Such calls have surged in recent weeks, indicating the growing challenges faced by people of concern and the further depletion of resources.

Refugees and asylum-seekers in **Egypt** continue to contact UNHCR asking for a resumption of registration services, with many informing their phone numbers were being disconnected as their residency permits expire. Since the on-set of the crisis, UNHCR has been advocating with authorities for tolerance among refugees and asylum-seekers with expired cards or residence permits. UNHCR also advocated with the telecommunications sector to continue services for its people of concern. Additionally, refugees continue to report eviction by landlords, with some having water and electricity utilities cut as a means of expediting their departure. Meanwhile, residency procedures continue to be partially available for refugees and asylum-seekers in Egypt. While immigration authorities resumed activities as of 1 June, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) has not indicated a date for the resumption of services

that would enable refugees and asylum-seekers to obtain case numbers. Therefore, only those with valid UNHCR documents and MoFA case numbers can obtain residency permits. Following successful advocacy, authorities agreed to accept UNHCR documents with a validity of less than six months, with discussions ongoing with the Ministry of Interior for persons with expired UNHCR documents.

The operation in **Mauritania** continues to support distance learning for young refugees, in partnership with Save the Children and UNICEF in Mbera. Following the training sessions for trainers in April, the Operation is delivering some 700 textbooks for distance learning, edited by the National Centre for Distance Learning under the French Ministry of Education, to all the students at primary school level in Mbera camp.

In **Morocco**, protection interviews, counselling, psychosocial support and identification of persons of concern's needs are being conducted remotely through protection hotlines by UNHCR and partners. Over 1,500 cases have been processed so far through these hotlines. In parallel, UNHCR's office is progressively reopening to welcome refugees and asylum-seekers through appointments.

In support of the national health response to address COVID-19, UNHCR in **Algeria** has installed 40 handwashing stations in the Tindouf camps, as well as for 30 clinics and 5 hospitals. Meanwhile, UNHCR's partner continued the distribution of hygienic materials and bleach to health facilities around Tindouf.

To increase social protection of refugees and asylum-seekers most affected by the COVID-19 situation, UNHCR's has reinforced its regular cash assistance programme. So far in June, some 389 single refugees and asylum-seekers in **Tunisia** enrolled for cash assistance received a top-up, while all those temporarily enrolled in the assistance programme were extended until the end of the year. Moreover, 1,008 registered refugees and asylum-seekers whose cases are followed by UNHCR but who are not formally enrolled in the programme received cash payments to help them meet their basic needs.

In **Israel**, UNHCR's provision of emergency cash assistance that began in May continues. More than 250 households have received financial assistance so far. More vulnerable cases are still being referred to UNHCR by NGO partners and the refugee community, many of whom risk being evicted from their homes due to difficulties in paying rents.

Global Financial Requirements

UNHCR's [revised prioritized requirements to support the COVID-19 preparedness and response](#) in situation of forced displacement, including those for UNHCR MENA, has increased from USD 255 million to USD 745 million. **So far, a total of USD 264.5 million (34 per cent) has been contributed or pledged to the UNHCR Global Appeal out of USD 745 million required.**

MENA Financial Information

Earmarked contributions for the Coronavirus Emergency Situation in MENA amount to some USD 44 million, including:

United States of America 22.6M | Japan 9M | CERF 2.4M | United Nations Foundation 2M | Austria 1.8M | Qatar Charity 3.5M

Special thanks to the major donors of softly earmarked contributions and pledges at the global level to the Coronavirus Emergency Situation:

Germany 40M | United Kingdom 25M | Denmark 15M | United States of America 8M | Canada 6.4M | United Nations Foundation 4.8M | France 4M | Ireland 3.3M | Sweden 3M | Sony Corporation 2.9M | Norway 1.4M | Private donors in the UK 1.2M | UNO-Flüchtlingshilfe 1.1M | USA for UNHCR 1M

Special thanks to the major donors of 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

Contributed without restrictions on its use, unearmarked funding allows UNHCR critical flexibility in how best to reach refugees and other populations of concern who are in the greatest need and at the greatest risk.

Resources:

- [Economic misery engulfs Syrian refugees and their hosts](#)
- [Syrian family awaits end of lockdown to start new life in Norway](#)
- [Art provides comfort and hope to Eritrean refugee in Libya](#)
- [Syrian refugees profoundly hit by COVID-19 economic downturn](#)
- [UNHCR's Coronavirus Emergency Appeal \(Revision\)](#)
- [UNHCR MENA's comprehensive funding needs for the COVID-19 response](#)
- For MENA regional and country reports on COVID-19 response, please visit – [UNHCR Global Focus](#); [UNHCR Operational Portal \(Syria Regional Refugee Response\)](#); and [Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan website](#)
- Support UNHCR's COVID-19 preparedness and response plans: <https://giving.unhcr.org/en/coronavirus/>

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