

UNHCR Regional Bureau for the Middle East and North Africa (MENA)

COVID-19 Vaccinations: Update #2

24 March 2021


Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, Yemen, and Turkey*.

* UNHCR Turkey is covered under the UNHCR Europe Bureau, although operations in Turkey related to the Syria and Iraq Situations are included in the MENA update.


Highlights

- UNHCR continues to advocate with all Governments to ensure that refugees, asylum-seekers, internally displaced persons and stateless people are included in national vaccination plans, in line with the World Health Organisation’s vaccination criteria and on par with nationals.
- So far, over three-quarters of the countries in the MENA region have confirmed the inclusion of refugees in their national vaccination programmes. Additional countries have shown positive indications that they will include refugees in their plans, though many are adopting a phased approach and some are still finalising their implementation plans.
- As of mid-March, vaccination programmes have started in at least 15 countries in the region.
- The world’s first vaccination centre in a refugee camp opened in Zaatari camp, Jordan, on 15 February.

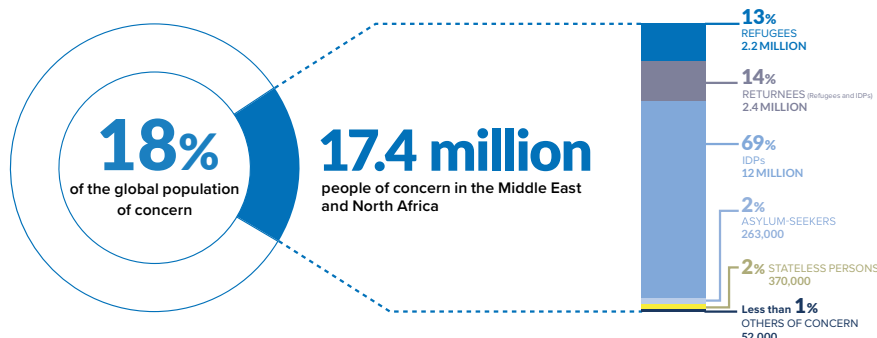
Key Figures

 **All** countries in the MENA region are reporting confirmed cases of COVID-19

 **17.4 million** million people of concern in the Middle East and North Africa**

 **6,839** cases of COVID-19 reported among persons of concern to UNHCR from March 2020 to February 2021, including fatalities

2021 PLANNING FIGURES FOR PEOPLE OF CONCERN **
in the Middle East and North Africa



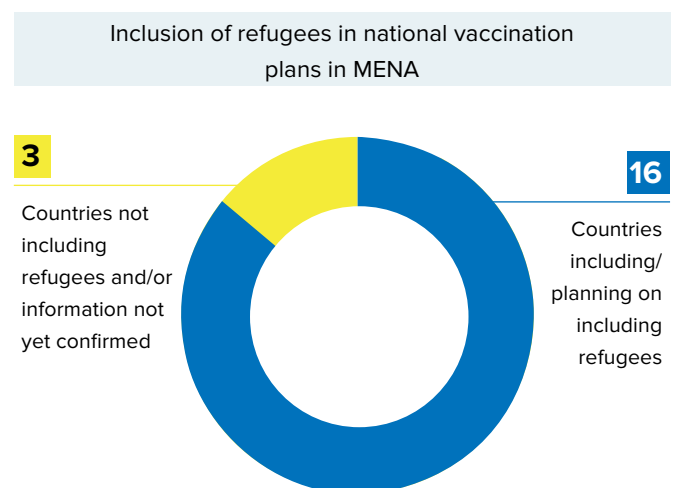
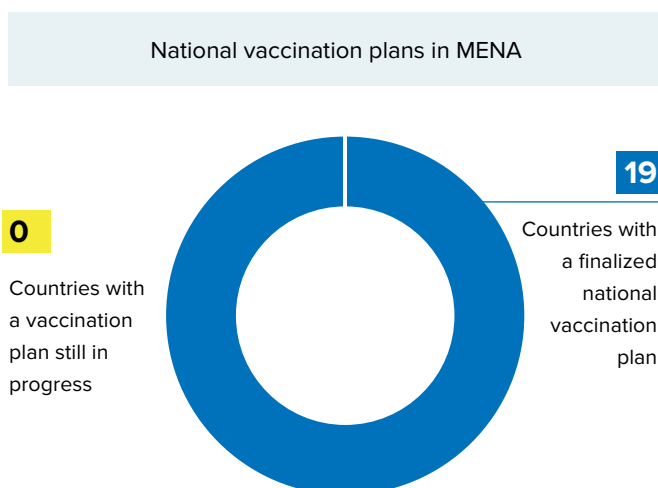
** Figures from the UNHCR Global Appeal 2021 (excluding Turkey, which hosts 3.6 million Syrian refugees).

Situation overview

- **COVID-19 remains a global challenge and must be addressed through solidarity and cooperation.** UNHCR has been advocating for the equitable inclusion of refugees, internally displaced and stateless populations through the COVAX Facility, a global initiative that brings together governments and manufacturers to ensure that COVID-19 vaccines eventually reach those in greatest need.
- **Inclusion is key to protecting refugees, IDPs, stateless people and their host communities.** To protect refugees, IDPs, stateless people and their local communities, they need to continue to be included in all phases of the national response plans, alongside national citizens. Safeguarding their health also protects the health of their host communities and societies. The pandemic will only be brought under control when vaccines are available on an equal basis to all people regardless of their status.
- **The cumulative impact of COVID-19 has induced an unprecedented protection and socio-economic crisis on communities at large and more specifically for refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs) and stateless people.** From restricted access to asylum, spiraling gender-based violence, worsening poverty, rising xenophobia, health risks and more – the consequences of the pandemic are threatening the rights, safety and lives of millions of refugees, IDPs and stateless people.
- **As of mid-March, vaccination programmes have started and are underway in at least 15 countries in the MENA region.** As countries across the region roll out their national vaccination campaigns, governments continue to implement varying levels of restrictions to limit the spread of COVID-19, including curfews and partial lockdowns.

UNHCR persons of concern in national vaccination plans in MENA

- **UNHCR is advocating with Governments in the MENA region to include refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced and stateless persons in their COVID-19 national vaccination plans.** So far, over three-quarters of the countries in the MENA region have confirmed the inclusion of refugees in their national vaccination programmes. **Additional countries have shown positive indications that they will include refugees in their plans**, though many are adopting a phased approach and some are still finalising their implementation plans.
- **UNHCR continues to support countries through other COVID-preparedness and response interventions.** Among these are critical health, sanitation, hygiene and logistical support as well as personal protective equipment. However, UNHCR is not procuring vaccinations as this remains the prerogative and responsibility of governments.
- **Of the 19 countries in the region for which UNHCR has information**, all 19 have now finalized their national vaccination plans and 16 have so far confirmed the inclusion of refugees:



Country highlight: Jordan

Jordan started its national vaccination campaign on 13 January and refugees have been included since the start. On 15 February, a vaccination centre opened in Zaatari camp, becoming the world's first vaccination centre in a refugee camp. On 15 March, a vaccination centre also opened in Azraq refugee camp. As of mid-March, over 1,000 refugees living in camps in Jordan have been vaccinated against COVID-19, although the number of refugees vaccinated in the country as a whole is likely to be higher due to the fact that refugees can simply approach Ministry of Health facilities independently of UNHCR when issued with an appointment.



Ali, 66, a Syrian refugee living in Zaatari camp receives his COVID-19 vaccine, after the opening of the COVID-19 Vaccination Centre in Zaatari refugee camp. © UNHCR/Lilly Carlisle

Prior to the opening of the centre in the camp, refugees were having to travel to the nearby town of Mafraq to receive the vaccine. Due to the fact that the refugees being prioritized for the vaccine are elderly, this presented some difficulties. With the opening of the centre in the camp, UNHCR expects that the numbers of refugees receiving the vaccine will increase. Mobile missions to vaccinate refugees at home have also taken place within refugee camps to facilitate access to the vaccine for the elderly and those with disabilities who struggle to reach the vaccination centre.

Around 2,000 of the 80,000 residents of Zaatari camp have already signed up to receive the vaccine. Some 1,200 of them qualified under the country's priority system for health workers, those aged over 65 and those with underlying health conditions.

UNHCR Jordan continues to support the Ministry of Health with its vaccination campaign and is raising awareness about the vaccine among refugees.

Country highlight: Egypt

As an outcome of joint advocacy efforts by UNHCR and other UN agencies – particularly WHO and UNICEF – Egypt's national COVID-19 vaccination plan that comprises foreign residents includes refugees and asylum-seekers registered with UNHCR.

On 28 February, the Ministry of Health and Population (MoHP) launched a website for Egyptians and non-Egyptians to register for the COVID-19 vaccination: <https://egcovac.mohp.gov.eg/#/registration>.

In a first phase, registration is open under three categories: health workers, people with chronic diseases and elderly people (with prioritization of people aged 65 years and above). Refugees and asylum-seekers who fall under these categories are able to register using their UNHCR identity document.



A refugee woman at the Caritas healthcare clinic in Cairo, Egypt. Caritas implements health activities on behalf of UNHCR. ©UNHCR/Pedro Costa Gomes

Once registered, applicants may check status updates on the website. Building on the Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE) platform, UNHCR is closely collaborating with WHO and other partners to inform and assist the community to register. UNHCR Egypt recently developed an [instructional video](#) to help persons of concern register online for their COVID-19 vaccination.

Global Financial Requirements

In 2021, UNHCR is seeking USD 924 million for COVID-19 related activities, of which over 50 per cent have been mainstreamed in the annual budget and some USD 455 million is sought through the [COVID-19 Supplementary Appeal](#) for activities in 2021 related to the exceptional socio-economic and protection impacts of COVID-19. As of 16 March, the COVID-19 Supplementary Appeal is **6 per cent funded**, with **USD 28.4 million received**, of which **USD 3 million is for the MENA region**.

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.

For more information

- [UNHCR's 2021 Supplementary Appeal](#)
- For MENA regional and country reports on COVID-19 response, please visit – [UNHCR Global Focus](#); [UNHCR Operational Portal \(Syria Regional Refugee Response\)](#); and [The Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan website](#)
- Support UNHCR's COVID-19 preparedness and response plans: <https://giving.unhcr.org/en/coronavirus/>



The COVID-19 vaccination centre in Za'atari refugee camp operated by the Jordanian Ministry of Health opened on 15 February 2021.
Photo: ©UNHCR/Lilly Carlisle

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