

# Regional Bureau for Europe

## UPDATE # 17

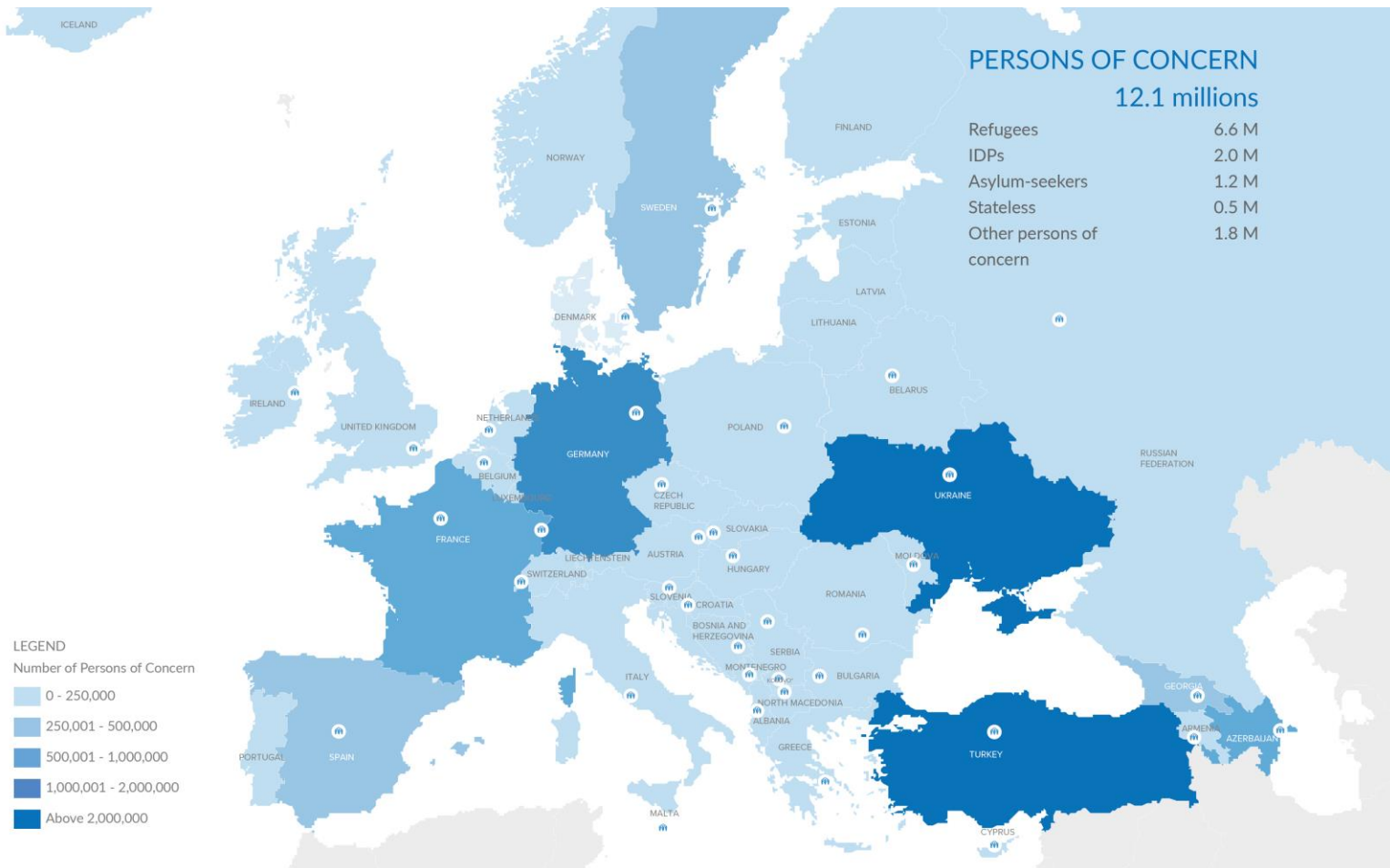
1 - 16 September 2020

As COVID-19 infection rates increase again across the region, many countries have reacted by reinstating some **movement limitations** as well as **targeted travel restrictions**.

UNHCR staff across Europe has gradually moved back to working in office premises. 36 offices are now **partially teleworking**, while one remains in **full teleworking mode** as of 14 September.

**UNHCR and partners' physical access to persons of concern** has improved compared to the onset of the pandemic, 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, 34 countries have reported cases among persons of concern at some point, and some of the concerned individuals have already recovered. However, any figures or estimates need to be taken with caution due to varying approaches to testing, data segregation and reporting.
- In **Greece**, on 4 September, UNHCR's Assistant High Commissioners for Protection and Operations concluded a **four-day visit** to Athens and Lesbos, which focused on access to territory and asylum, living conditions for refugees and asylum-seekers, the COVID-19 response, child protection, detention alternatives, refugee integration and the transition of accommodation and cash programmes from UNHCR to the Greek State.
- On 8-10 September, [a series of fires broke out at the Moria Reception and Identification Centre \(RIC\) in Lesbos](#), and in the nearby fields known as "Olive Grove", where together some 12,000 persons were hosted, including 4,000 children. While all residents managed to evacuate in time and no casualties have been reported, the fires destroyed the shelters of thousands of asylum-seekers, parts of the medical facilities, and the containers used for administration and asylum services. More information in the box below.
- Country offices in the region are gradually resuming suspended activities, including protection monitoring at borders. As of 14 September, 36 offices in the region were partially teleworking, while one office remains in full telework mode. Field and on-site visits to reception centres have also gradually resumed.

## UNHCR Response

- UNHCR's response to the COVID-19 situation is focused on:
  - Continuing to **provide protection assistance**, including legal aid, support to 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;
  - Supporting authorities, in some operations, 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.

## Situation on Lesbos, Greece

As a result of the series of fires that broke out at the Moria RIC in Lesbos on 8-10 September, an estimated 12,000 asylum-seekers and refugees were initially left without shelter.

Greek authorities hold overall responsibility for the management and coordination of the response and have identified a site in the area of Kara Tepe, close to Mytilene, to temporarily house the most vulnerable homeless asylum-seekers. UNHCR is supporting the Government-led response upon request by assisting in setting up the new tented facility and providing technical advice on site planning. UNHCR teams and partners have in addition been identifying and assisting vulnerable asylum-seekers affected by the fires. As a result, some 50 single women and survivors of gender-based violence have been transferred to a safe shelter, and an estimated 400 unaccompanied or separated children were transferred to accommodations on the mainland.

UNHCR has also immediately dispatched emergency shelter and core-relief items (CRI). As of 16 September, 700 family tents had been set up, allowing families to sleep in the Kara Tepe site, while preparatory works, including gravelling, setting up of tents and site planning continues. Twenty-seven chemical toilets, eight double handwashing stations and two generators were also transferred from the Moria medical area to Kara Tepe. Two UNHCR Rubb Halls are currently being installed to be used for COVID-19 testing and for storage and distribution of 65,700 CRIs such as blankets, sleeping bags, mats, jerrycans, plastic sheets and hygiene items, which can meet the temporary needs of 12,000 people. The distribution of CRIs is currently being planned and coordinated with UN and NGO partners.



UNHCR and NGO partners are disseminating information to the asylum-seekers on the ongoing situation and availability of basic assistance. In addition, the identification of the most vulnerable asylum-seekers and persons with specific needs, such as single women, people with medical conditions, people with disabilities, pregnant women, older persons and families continues, as these groups are prioritized for shelter and support.

UNHCR furthermore supports the Ministry of Health in establishing and coordinating the COVID-19 facility and the medical area at the new emergency site in Kara Tepe by setting up infrastructure and providing technical advice. WHO also facilitated the deployment of experts, including doctors and nurses, to provide health services over the next four weeks, while national health authorities will focus on COVID-19 prevention and mitigation activities. According to national health authorities, at the time of writing, 60 persons had tested positive for COVID-19 upon entering the emergency site and are isolated in the UNHCR-supported area, along with close family members.

Food and water are provided in one central distribution point in two daily shifts. Complementing these efforts, UNHCR is shipping over 6,000 dry food packages to Lesbos.

The operation has also provided an emergency, one-off cash top-up to some 4,470 families affected by the fire.

UNHCR continues advocating with the authorities to identify suitable options to support the decongestion of Lesbos and other Greek islands as part of the emergency response but also to prevent the occurrence of similar events.

For more information, please consult [UNHCR's briefing note](#) of 15 September and the [Greece Update](#) issued on 11 September.

## UNHCR Areas of Intervention



### PROTECTION

- As broad travel bans were lifted over the summer, access to territory and international protection was generally ensured in the Europe region. With many countries experiencing COVID-19 spikes, varying degrees of movement restrictions, mandatory testing and quarantine measures upon arrival were imposed.
- **Quarantine measures for new arrivals:** Most new arrivals in **Italy** were disembarked in Lampedusa and followed the COVID-19 prevention protocol in place, including a 14-day quarantine either onshore or offshore. **In light of the consistent new arrivals to Italy**, authorities have expanded the offshore quarantining capacity to five ferries (2,400 people), which together with efforts by local, regional and national authorities has helped easing the pressure on the Lampedusa hotspot. However, the number of people in the hotspot remains over its expanded capacity to accommodate 200 people. While authorities are planning to identify additional solutions for offshore quarantine and to further expand the quarantine capacities (including the set-up of a roster of ferries), concerns remain regarding the identification and referral of unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) to age-appropriate facilities and services.
- Significant numbers of refugees and migrants continued to arrive by land through the **Italy-Slovenia** border. As quarantine facilities close to the border have already reached full capacity, new arrivals, including some 135 unaccompanied children with no access to child-appropriate reception facilities, were reportedly made to observe quarantine on board buses, with sub-standard access to WASH facilities, food or NFIs. UNHCR has raised its concerns with authorities and is liaising with local community-based organisations to provide further support to the people in this situation.
- In **Spain**, after a surge in COVID-19 cases in Melilla, local authorities have announced, amidst host community protests, the set-up of a new facility to host refugees and migrants who will test positive or who need to quarantine. As of 11 September, 57 residents tested positive in the overcrowded Melilla reception centre, which is currently hosting some 1,400 people. While UNHCR reduced visits to the centre as a preventive measure, communication to provide support to residents continues via phone.
- **Detention conditions:** In **Malta**, three detention centres reported 73 additional COVID-19 cases in the past two weeks, with a high probability that several of them contracted the virus in detention, since there have been no disembarkations in Malta since 20 August. NGOs working with persons of concern in Malta have publicly raised concerns about the lack of access to reliable information about the prevalence of the virus in detention facilities and the restricted access to people in detention centres during COVID-19.
- **Reception conditions:** In **Cyprus**, the Pournara/Kokkinotrimithia camp remains a closed facility, and asylum-seekers are only allowed to leave if they can present a residential address. The average length of stay in the centre has decreased, and, as of 11 September, some 297 persons were reported to reside in the main camp, 120 less than the previous fortnight. Of these, 105 are children, including 20 UASC. In total, 254 persons are in quarantine. Authorities are reportedly planning to increase the quarantining capacity.
- **Access to territory:** Reports of pushbacks continue in **Central and South Eastern Europe**. UNHCR has in some cases scaled up advocacy efforts to ensure access to territory and asylum procedures for individuals who have expressed their intention to seek asylum. In **Italy**, at the border with France, increasing numbers of people are sleeping in the open without access to sanitary facilities, NGO-provided food or NFIs out of fear of interception by authorities. Following accommodation closures due to COVID-19, shelter options are scarce and precarious.
- **Access to asylum procedures:** In **South Eastern Europe**, as a result of challenges faced by asylum-seekers to register asylum claims and long wait times to access RSD procedures, more families are reportedly resorting to dangerous irregular onward movement with the assistance of smugglers. To address this situation, the operation in **Bosnia and Herzegovina** is intensifying advocacy with asylum authorities to prioritize claims and reduce the backlog, and permit focusing on those in need of international protection. Furthermore, to facilitate information about procedures for residents of centres, information sessions on asylum are being conducted, as well as continued advocacy with authorities for resumption of centre visits.

- **Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs):** In **Ukraine**, during the reporting period, 14,000 persons crossed the 'contact line' from the Non-Government Controlled Area (NGCA) to the Government-Controlled Area (GCA) at the **Stanytsia Luhanska** Entry Exit Checkpoint (EECP), 7,000 persons less than in the previous fortnight. While on most days the smart phone application required to enter the GCA functioned, 300 people were unable to cross on 10 September and were blocked between the areas. The **Novotroitske/Olenivka** checkpoint remains the only one functioning in Doneska oblast and continued operating twice per week for people on the pre-approved lists prepared by the de facto authorities. 430 persons were permitted to cross to the GCA and 836 persons to the NGCA during this period. On 9 September, the requirement of 14-day self-isolation for students and their parents/guardians entering the government-controlled areas (GCA) from the nongovernment-controlled areas (NGCA) was waived.



#### HEALTH

- In **Greece**, 377 persons of concern had tested positive for COVID-19 as of 14 September. Out of these, 269 were on mainland and 108 on the islands.
- General movement restrictions on refugee-hosting sites across Greece remain in place but are implemented differently in each site. On the mainland, nine sites are under quarantine following the identification of COVID-19 cases amongst their residents. In addition, a lockdown was imposed by the authorities on an ESTIA accommodation on 9 September. Following the identification of the first two COVID-19 cases, Vathy RIC in Samos has, according to media, likewise been placed under lockdown on 15 September. The quarantine in Fylakio RIC in Evros has been extended until 30 September.
- In **Turkey**, the operation has received a donation from Unilever comprising 300,000 bottles of disinfectants and 150,000 soaps, worth some USD 400,000, to be distributed to the refugees and members of the host community.



#### CASH-BASED AND IN-KIND ASSISTANCE

- In **Ukraine**, 82 refugee and asylum-seeking families received cash assistance in time for the new academic year in order to procure the necessary setup for distance learning. Work is being done to identify additional refugee and asylum-seeking school-age children in need of support to follow classes remotely.
- In-kind assistance also continued during the reporting period, with non-medical NFIs delivered to a hospital in the GCA area of Luhanska oblast, distribution of personal protective equipment (PPEs) to primary health care facilities along the contact line in Donetska oblast and 123 bicycles to health care and social workers in the NGCA of Luhanska oblast to increase their mobility to reach people with special needs in remote areas.
- As a positive development, on 10 September, one humanitarian convoy with 90 tons of assistance, including construction materials for a shelter programme in Luhanska oblast, was transported through Donetsk NGCA. This was the first time since the onset of the pandemic. All previous convoys to Luhansk NGCA were delivered through the pedestrian-only EECP in Stanytsia Luhanska when the humanitarian aid had to be transferred manually through the bridge between the two sides of the checkpoint.



## COMMUNICATION WITH COMMUNITIES

- As new measures are gradually being introduced by countries to address mounting COVID-19 infection rates, UNHCR keeps gathering, translating and disseminating relevant information among communities of concern, for example in **Armenia**.



## EDUCATION

- On 9 September, the operation in **Azerbaijan** announced the opening of a call for applications regarding financial support for tertiary education of refugees and asylum-seeking students who are not supported by the DAFI Scholarship Program. This ad-hoc assistance is provided taking into account the livelihood situation of students which has deteriorated due to the pandemic and the quarantine regime in the country.
- In many countries, the school year resumed. In **Belgium**, over 6,100 young applicants for international protection hosted in reception centres have resumed classes alongside all other school-age children in the country, with specific and adapted prevention arrangements, including remote classrooms with computers in reception centres, for example.
- In **Croatia**, a prevention protocol requires children in reception centres to undergo mandatory medical check-ups before school enrolment.
- In **Turkey**, the school year began with online and TV learning avenues. The Education Information Network (EBA) of the Ministry of National Education offered orientation programmes for pre-school and primary school, followed by face-to-case options starting on 21 September. EBA is available for all refugee children enrolled in Turkish public schools; however, many may find themselves at a disadvantage, since the courses are in Turkish and many refugee children have limited means and equipment to fully access the online courses. Furthermore, the reduced interaction with peers is likely to affect opportunities for social cohesion with the host community. As a positive outcome, it is foreseen that the online academic year will generally increase digital literacy of refugees.
- Where COVID-19 cases were detected upon school openings, protocols were enacted, for example in **Ukraine**, where students of 155 classes were required to self-isolate and switch to distance learning.

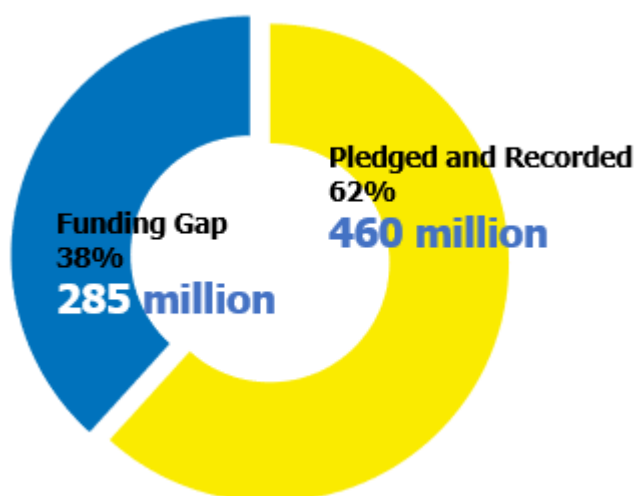
## Working in partnership

- 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. UNHCR Regional Bureau for Europe attended and addressed the 70<sup>th</sup> WHO Regional Committee for Europe, held on 14-15 September. UNHCR stressed the important role played by WHO in coordinating the health-related response within the UN system and highlighted UNHCR's efforts to support the Government's response to the pandemic, in order to ensure people of concern were included in national response plans and were allowed access to territory and international protection.
- In **Greece**, UNHCR 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 460 M (62%)

Including: United States of America \$186.3M | Germany \$62.7M | European Union \$45.5M | United Kingdom \$26.3M | Japan \$25.1M | African Development Bank \$18.3M | Private donors \$16.1M | Denmark \$14.6M | United Nations Foundation \$10.0M | CERF \$6.9M | Canada \$6.4M | Unilever \$5.8M | Education Cannot Wait \$4.7M | Qatar Charity \$3.5M | Spain \$3.4M | France \$3.4M | Ireland \$3.3M | Sweden \$3.0M | Sony Corporation \$2.9M | Austria \$2.5M | Finland \$2.4M

### Unearmarked contributions to UNHCR's 2020 programme

Sweden 76.4M | Private donors Spain 52.9M | Norway 41.4M | Netherlands 36.1M | Denmark 34.6M | United Kingdom 31.7M | Private donors Republic of Korea 27.2M | Germany 25.9M | Private Donors Japan 17.9M | Switzerland 16.4M | France 14 M | Private Donors Italy 12.4M | Italy 10.6 M

## Useful Links

[UNHCR's revised Coronavirus Emergency Appeal](#)

[UNHCR operations overview in Europe](#)

[COVID-19: UNHCR's response](#)

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