

Regional Bureau for Europe

UPDATE # 4

25 April – 1 May 2020

Movement restrictions apply to some degree in most countries in the region, including for persons of concern, through restrictions on freedom of movement, curfews and mandatory quarantines. Some countries have started relaxing these measures and announced further gradual lifting of restrictions.

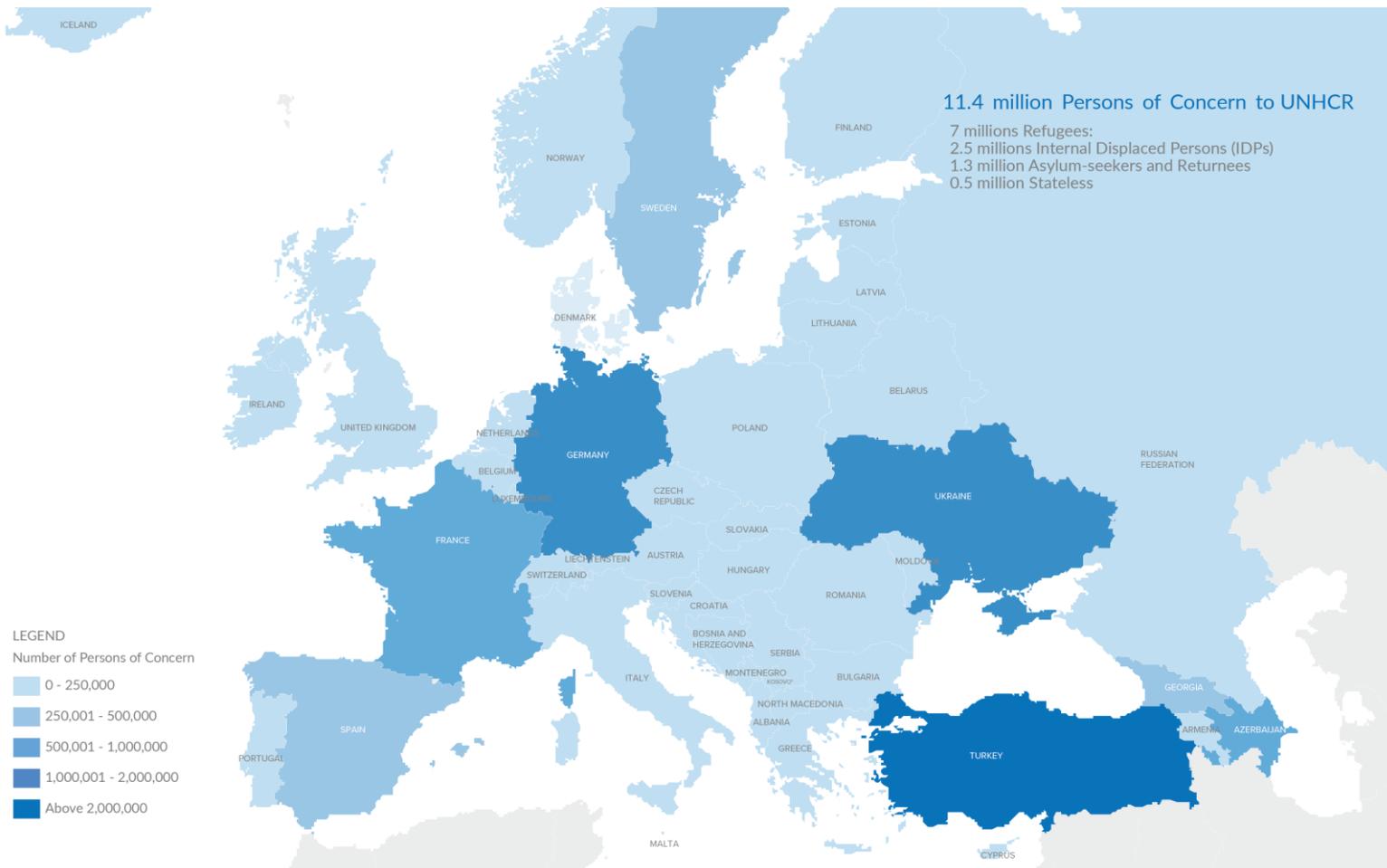
Access to territory is limited through border closures or entry bans for foreigners, with only a few exceptions.

Many countries in the region have managed to maintain access to **international protection** despite restrictions to access to territory.

UNHCR and partners' physical access to persons of concern has decreased. Communication with communities has been scaled up virtually.

Populations of Concern

SOURCE: UNHCR STATISTICAL REPORT AS OF END OF JUNE 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. So far, 17 countries have reported cases among persons of concern, and some of them have already recovered. However, any figure or estimate at this point needs to be taken with caution due to differing approaches to testing, data segregation and reporting.
- At the [European Council on 23 April](#), EU leaders welcomed the European Commission's [roadmap towards lifting COVID-19 containment](#) measures and the [Joint Roadmap for Recovery](#). Leaders also agreed to work towards establishing a recovery fund within the new Multiannual Financial Framework to address the consequences of the pandemic.
- Some countries have started to relax and even gradually lift some of the COVID-19 prevention and mitigation measures. Plans to resume asylum and statelessness processing procedures, including appeal procedures, have been announced in several countries (e.g. Denmark, UK). The UK announced the temporary creation of regional asylum intake locations across the country to continue screening and registration in compliance with physical distancing requirements. Several States are considering introducing remote interviewing modalities as part of the resumption process.
- On 27 April, a UNHCR [press release](#) called on European countries to safeguard the many good practices developed across the region during the pandemic and take this opportunity to redouble efforts to strengthen asylum systems. The statement highlighted practices that ensure access to territory for people seeking asylum, adaptations of registration and asylum procedures, and modifications to reception capacities, which can contribute to more resilient asylum systems overall for the future.
- On 1 May, [UNHCR called for greater coordination, solidarity and responsibility-sharing](#), in view of the increased movements of refugees and migrants in the Mediterranean Sea. Despite the extremely difficult circumstances faced by many countries at present due to COVID-19, rescue at sea is a humanitarian imperative and an obligation under international law.

UNHCR Response

- UNHCR's response to the COVID-19 situation is focusing on:
 - Supporting national authorities in setting up **preparedness and response plans**, including improving access to water and sanitation where possible, enhanced reception capacity post disembarkation, and 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 minimum 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

Achievements and Impact

- Advocacy at country level continued on access to territory, decongestion of reception centres and non-discriminatory access to national assistance programmes. In several countries, such as **Armenia, Italy, Romania** and **Spain**, practical recommendations have been shared with ministries and local authorities.
- Some countries continue working on expanding capacities in reception centres, for example in **Belgium**, where additional space for 400 people is being created to decongest the regular centres. Advocacy to prevent risks of tensions and escalation in reception centres is pursued by many country offices (for example in **Cyprus, Malta, Serbia** and **Spain**). Where unaccompanied children are held with adults in large centres, advocacy interventions focus on transfers and referral of these children to adequate care arrangements (for example in **Serbia**).
- In some countries, for example **Serbia**, partners have taken legal avenues to contest restrictions of liberty of migrants and asylum-seekers, where these differed from the measures for the general population with discriminatory effects. Elsewhere, legal actors have contested centre living conditions, where these did not allow residents to follow government-mandated health measures (in **Germany**).
- As a result of advocacy with Vodaphone Ukraine, conflict-affected persons in Donetska and Luhanska near the “contact-line” were able to receive free phone credit top-ups to enable better access to critical information. Similar efforts to improve connectivity of persons of concern are being undertaken in other countries, for example in Serbia and Spain.
- As a result of strong advocacy efforts towards support to the most vulnerable individuals and persons in need, some municipal authorities have started distributing cooked meals and/or home delivery for this population in cooperation with local civil society organisations and/or the local Red Cross National Society (in **Cyprus**, for example). In several countries, offices are following up and pursuing advocacy with local authorities to ensure that adequate support to vulnerable people includes persons of concern (for example in **Armenia, Azerbaijan, Cyprus, Italy** and **Georgia**).
- Needs and impact assessments with persons of concern were conducted in several countries, some online or by phone (this is the case in **Spain** and **Turkey**), others in centres, respecting physical distancing imperatives (in **Germany**), and yet others through the UN System (in **Montenegro**). Resumption of procedures is cautiously probed and, where they remain suspended, decision making can continue in certain cases, as suggested by UNHCR’s practical recommendations and good practices to address protection concerns in the context of the COVID-19 Pandemic.
- In **Serbia**, the Ombudsmans office is preparing recommendations to improve living conditions in an informal settlement in the Čukarička forest, where 300 Roma have settled, due to serious concerns about their living conditions. With regards to this very same settlement, on 24 April, the European Court of Human Rights **advocated** with the Government, encouraging local authorities to provide urgent humanitarian aid and provision of potable water. As a result, on 27 April, public utility services placed a water cistern for the benefit of this population.
- Positive developments in countries with partially suspended administrative procedures include the extension of the validity of documents like asylum-seeker certificates, humanitarian statuses and permissions to stay, in line with UNHCR advocacy. In other countries, legislation has been approved to allow employers to hire foreigners without the usually required valid work permits, which benefits some persons of concern.

- In **Turkey**, further insights from the phone survey conducted with 1,500 refugees indicate that the main challenges faced by persons of concern in the Marmara region are related to escalating poverty. Job losses and workplace shutdowns lead to an inability to afford rent and basic needs, curtailed access to services, increased risk of school dropouts and challenges in identification of SGBV and child protection risks.
- In **Ukraine**, as a result of advocacy efforts, 47 persons were able to cross the contact line in both directions on 25 April. This is a welcome sign of slight improvement in the freedom of movement across the five Entry-Exit Checkpoints (EECPs), since passage was suspended on 22 March. In addition, a screening point with a full personal protection equipment (PPE) set-up and temperature screening devices has been installed at the crossing point used by inhabitants of the isolated village of Staromarivka in Donetsk.
- On 28 April, UNHCR published its third [Protection Monitoring Report of 119 isolated and conflict-affected localities in eastern Ukraine](#). This report is regularly updated with key findings reflecting changes in the humanitarian situation along the contact line, including access to food, WASH, medical assistance, cash, public transportation and telecommunication. The report also provides recommendations to the regional and local authorities in order to ensure that the critical needs of persons that are most at risk from COVID-19 are promptly addressed.


HEALTH

- In **Greece**, the transfer of older and immunocompromised persons of concern from island Reception and Identification Centres (RICs) continues; with 799 people having been referred as of 1 May
- On 28 April, the Government announced its plan to transfer 600 asylum-seekers from Lesbos (400), Leros (100) and Kos (100) to IOM-managed hotels on the mainland within days. This will include but will not be limited to the population already identified as being at high risk of COVID-19 complications. UNHCR will be supporting the logistics aspects, with an initial transfer of the 400 asylum-seekers scheduled for 3 May from Lesbos. The transfer will coincide with the opening of the new medical triage area currently being set up next to the Moria centre. Information about the centre has been disseminated among asylum-seekers via SMS.
- In **Ukraine**, as of 27 April, as part of the Community Support Initiative programme, approximately 21,000 masks have been produced by conflict-affected communities in Donetska and Luhanska, and over 10,200 medical masks were handed over to home-based health care providers, first aid medical points, ambulance centres and pharmacies. On 28 April, PPEs were distributed to service care providers at HIV health care facilities in various towns.
- In **Turkey**, UNHCR is providing in-kind support of PPE to public institutions, especially those located at the western borders. In addition, various temporary accommodation centres have been provided with non-food items and hygiene materials.

**EDUCATION**

- In some countries, prolonged remote schooling and lack of access to adequate tools have disproportionately affected refugee children. Some States have tried to address IT needs of children of vulnerable families. In others, such as **Bulgaria**, authorities have set up new online webservices, on which all children, parents and other caregivers can receive psychological support and professional support by other specialists.

Working in partnership

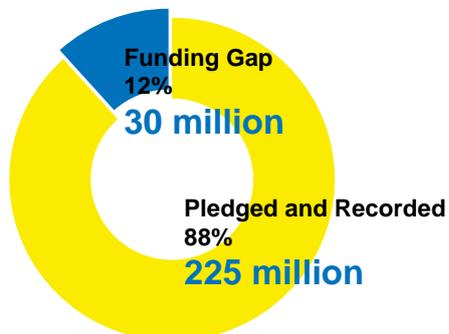
- UNHCR supports governments' efforts to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic through existing coordination mechanisms and by working closely with WHO and other partners. In addition, UNHCR is active on platforms such as the Issue-Based Coalition on Large Movements of People, Displacement and Resilience, to develop and advance collective advocacy 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 particular 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 authorities.
- In **Turkey**, UNHCR is also part of the COVID-19 Socio-Economic Impact and Response Task Team that has been established at the request of the UN Turkey Crisis Management Team and in follow-up to guidance by the UN Secretary-General, to assess the economic and social impact of the COVID-19 crisis in Turkey.

Financial Information

- On 25 March, the UN Secretary-General launched the COVID-19 Global Humanitarian Response Plan (GHRP), initially covering a period of nine months. UNHCR seeks USD 255 million to globally boost preparedness, prevention and response activities to address immediate public health needs of refugees and host communities. These appeals are currently being revised. 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. This is a fast-moving situation and UNHCR is reprioritizing certain activities in operations. The full amount of UNHCR's operational engagement will be updated as required, including for 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.

Financial requirements**USD 255M**

Requested for UNHCR's COVID-19 response globally until end of 2020.

**Total contributed or pledged to the COVID-19 appeal****USD 225M**

Including: United States of America \$64.0M | Germany \$38.0M | European Union \$28.7M | United Kingdom \$24.8M | Japan \$23.9M | Denmark \$14.6M | CERF \$6.9M | Canada \$6.4M | Ireland \$3.3M | Sweden \$3.0M | Sony Corporation \$3.0M | Finland \$2.4M | Education Cannot Wait \$1.8M | Qatar Charity \$1.5M | Australia \$0.8M | Private donors \$0.5M | Portugal \$0.1M | Liechtenstein \$0.1M

Unearmarked contributions to UNHCR's 2020 programme

Sweden 76.4M | Norway 41.4M | Netherlands 36.1M | Denmark 34.6M | United Kingdom 31.7M | Germany 25.9M | Private donors in Spain 20M | Switzerland 16.4M | Private donors in Republic of Korea 10.5M

Useful Links[UNHCR's revised Coronavirus Emergency Appeal](#)[UNHCR operations overview in Europe](#)[COVID-19: UNHCR's response](#)**CONTACTS**

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