

UNHCR Regional Bureau for Middle East and North Africa

COVID-19 Emergency Response Update #4

8 May 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



4

COVID-19 cases reported among POCs in MENA

Regional Developments

Operational Context

Across the **Middle East and North Africa (MENA)** region, a number of countries, including **Tunisia, Jordan, and Lebanon** began announcing their plans for a progressive ease of lockdown and curfew measures.

There are four reported COVID-19 cases among persons of concern in the region (Lebanon, Iraq and Yemen). UNHCR is monitoring the situation and supporting national response plans to contain any further spread. Where possible, UNHCR is ensuring that isolation and quarantine protocols are followed to prevent the spread in refugee camps, IDP sites and in communities hosting displaced populations.

While national curfews are still limiting UNHCR's physical access to people of concern, in **Libya** on 26 April, UNHCR was

able to resume activities at Tripoli's Community Day Centre and the Serraj Registration Centre, after authorities granted humanitarian waivers allowing UNHCR and partner staff to move outside curfew hours. Reduced curfew hours effective since 28 April have also translated into higher attendance of refugees and asylum-seekers at both facilities. The delivery of services at these centres are still by appointment-only and incorporate social distancing measures, with new service hours and modalities communicated to refugees via social media and community contacts.

In **Israel**, the High Court of Justice ruled on 23 April that a 20 per cent deduction from asylum-seekers' salaries was unconstitutional – giving the State 30 days to return deducted amounts to people of concern – after over two years of the policy being implemented. This represents a significant development, given the severe economic hardships faced by asylum-seekers in Israel due to rapidly dwindling livelihoods as a result of COVID-19 affecting some 30,000 persons.

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

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

Supporting continued access to education

Since the COVID-19 pandemic has taken effect, governments instituted **full or partial closures of schools and education facilities**, impacting some 1.6 billion children and youth worldwide¹. As seen across the spectrum of consequences resulting from the COVID-19 crisis, **refugees, asylum-seekers, and other displaced people are at a particular disadvantage**.

In parallel, from the onset of the pandemic and schools' closure, several countries in MENA progressively implemented an array of solutions, such as activating national online learning platforms, or enhancing the use and access to platforms that existed prior to the crisis, providing TV and radio-based learning, as well as using more home-based learning paths. While these solutions have entailed numerous challenges and boosted innovation, equity in access to online learning is a major concern for children and youth from refugee, stateless, returnee and internally displaced communities, due to the considerable digital divide.

In the immediate term, school closures are impacting on **nutrition**, with many now missing out on school-feeding programmes. In parallel, **protection** concerns for children currently out of school are heightened, due to emotional distress caused by lockdown or confinement, trickle down effects of parental anxieties, and the increased risk of child abuse, neglect, violence or exploitation because of financial difficulties arising from shelter-in-place policies. An extension of school closures into the longer-term could also threaten to erode future school enrolment, particularly for girls.

Across the region, most educational institutions appear unlikely to reopen before the next academic year, as part of precautionary measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19. In **Syria**, more than four million primary and middle school students will not resume classes this academic year. According to the Ministry of Education, there are still plans to hold brevet and baccalaureate examinations, which are usually taken at the end of middle school and secondary school respectively, with strategies to increase the number of exam centres to ensure social distancing between students. In **Turkey**, the Minister of National Education announced an extension of school closures until at least until 31 May, during which remote education is expected to continue.

In the context of COVID-19 preparedness and response, **UNHCR in MENA is collaborating with national governments to advocate for the inclusion of refugees and other persons of**

concern in national response plans and supporting expansion of learning opportunities, at all levels, through connected education, to ensure that people of concern are not left behind (SDG 4).

In **Iraq**, all education activities including non-formal and vocational training remain suspended. Iraqi authorities are conducting efforts to roll out e-learning courses across Iraq, and UNHCR is working with the Education Cluster and other UN agencies to spread awareness of this effort and identify ways to support displaced families in accessing e-learning opportunities. Schools in southern **Yemen** have been closed since mid-March as a preventive measure. The Ministry of Education set up a distance learning platform that offers access to primary and high school curricula via the internet and two TV channels, as well as a digital library that holds online lessons and exam samples. The platform also offers psychological support materials to provide parents and students the tools to help them cope with the situation. UNHCR is raising awareness among refugee communities to ensure that families are alerted to these new educational modalities. In **Egypt**, based on the evidence obtained through a phone survey undertaken with 3,000 refugee families, UNHCR and its partner have been able to re-purpose the existing funds allocated for transportation allowances to enable refugee children to reach remedial, extracurricular activities and language classes, to instead assist families in procuring internet data packages to support access to online learning and examination activities.

In **Lebanon**, a multi-partner 'learning readiness' assessment was finalized; targeting 10,000 households, representing over 45,000 children – predominantly refugees. The assessment allowed partners and agencies to identify needs of children for accessing education via distance learning modalities. Results indicate that around 25,000 children are in need of some form of learning support, and 95 per cent of parents expressed a preference for non-formal education providers to communicate regularly with their children to support their learning. The requirements of technology and increased internet usage to follow distance learning programmes are also **financial barriers** for many refugee families.

For students in the Sahrawi camps around Tindouf in **Algeria**, TV-based education programmes were launched, covering multiple subjects for all educational levels, with a special focus on exam preparations. Meanwhile, all Sahrawi university students under the **DAFI programme** in Algiers are following

¹ <https://en.unesco.org/covid19>

distance learning platforms established by the Algerian Ministry of Education.

In **Jordan**, UNHCR has supported the Ministry of Education in its efforts to roll-out two online learning platforms that enable refugees and host communities to access online learning opportunities. In consideration of financial barriers to access materials online, both learning platforms have been zero-

rated by mobile phone operators in Jordan. UNHCR has also increased electricity hours in the camps to align with the Ministry's remote teaching hours.

Finally, as the focus of discussions progresses to schools' re-opening, UNHCR and its partners continue to support host governments in planning for a phased approach prioritizing health, well-being, safety and remedial learning, at all levels.

Child Protection

To address the possible **impacts of COVID-19 on child protection**, the **continuation of UNHCR's regular programming is critical to minimise risks**. In the absence or reduction of face to face contact with children of concern in this current climate, UNHCR MENA Operations have adjusted to remote case processing modalities, ensuring continuous coordination with child protection partners and due functioning of community outreach mechanisms.

In **Libya**, community outreach mechanisms are proactively engaged in coordination with other child protection agencies to communicate on COVID-19 to children and families while UNHCR community-based protection works to establish better systems for remote monitoring. Emergency child protection cases are addressed through the Community Day Centre in Tripoli or followed up remotely through partner case management staff. In **Syria**, at the end of April, UNHCR Child Protection partners in Damascus and rural Damascus

conducted around 50 follow up calls on identified cases of children at risk, aimed at follow up on children's well-being and provision of information on referral pathways and available services. In **Egypt**, where there are some 4,500 registered unaccompanied and separated children (as of 31 March 2020), UNHCR proactively engages in virtual coordination meetings with Child Protection partners to update on available assistance and services provided to these children during the COVID-19 response.

UNHCR together with the municipality of Rehovot in **Israel**, organized an online parental guidance meeting for asylum-seekers of specific targeted group of origin. The meeting was led by an educational psychologist from the municipality aimed at offering information and tools for parents to deal with children's psychological needs, and to share challenges and coping strategies between families during the COVID-19 crisis.



Internally displaced children, who with their families, have had to resort to living on an IDP hosting site (Al Rabat) in Lahj governorate, southern Yemen. IDPs living on hosting sites are at greater risk of contracting communicable diseases, including COVID-19. Photo by UNHCR / Almeqdad Mahfood

Global Financial Requirements

Since the publication of the [UN's COVID-19 Global Humanitarian Response Plan](#) in March, needs related to the COVID-19 pandemic have increased, including in countries not included within the initial Appeal. **On 7 May, the UN launched an updated Global Humanitarian Response Plan, expanding the global plan to fight COVID-19 in fragile countries and increasing funding requirements from USD 2 billion to USD 6.7 billion. UNHCR's revised total requirements to support the COVID-19 preparedness and response in situations of**

forced displacement, including those for UNHCR MENA, has increased from USD 255 million and now stands at USD 745 million. An updated UNHCR appeal will be issued on 11 May.

UNHCR is grateful to donors who have provided generous and timely support to the Coronavirus Emergency globally and to MENA. **So far, a total of USD 230 million (31 per cent) has been contributed or pledged to the UNHCR Global Appeal.**

USD 745 M

Requested for UNHCR's COVID-19 response globally

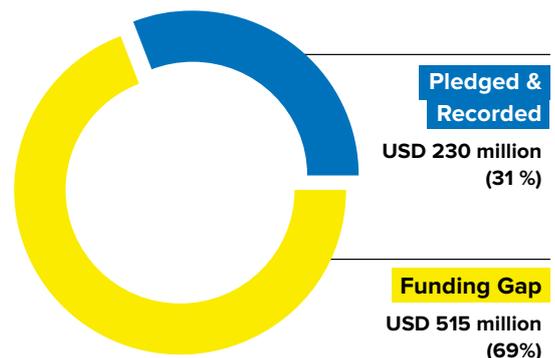
Total contributed or pledged

USD 230 million has been contributed or pledged including:

United States 64M | Germany 38M | European Union 31.8M | United Kingdom 24.8M | Japan 23.9M | Denmark 14.6M | CERF 6.9M | Canada 6.4M | Ireland 3.3M | Sweden 3M | Sony Corporation 3M | Finland 2.4M | Education Cannot Wait 1.8M | Private Donors 1.7M | Qatar Charity 1.5M | Norway 1.4M | Australia 0.8M | Monaco 0.2M | Iceland 0.1M | Portugal 0.1M | Liechtenstein 0.1M | Slovakia 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 16.4 M | Private donors in Republic of Korea 10.5 M



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:

- UNHCR Publication: [Supporting Continued Access to Education During COVID-19 - Emerging Promising Practices](#)
- UNHCR Media Briefing Note: [Displaced people urgently need aid and access to social safety nets as coronavirus causes severe hardship](#)
- UNHCR Media Briefing Note: [Shortfall threatens critical aid for nearly one million displaced Yemenis and refugees](#)
- UNHCR News Story: [Refugees across Arab world feel economic pain of coronavirus](#)
- 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/>

For more details, please contact UNHCR MENA Regional Office in Amman (Jordan) at: MENAreporting@unhcr.org