

Regional Bureau for Europe

UPDATE # 6

8 May – 12 May 2020

In most countries in the region, **restrictions of movements** are progressively being lifted in a phased approach but remain in place for people of concern in reception centres and private accommodations.

Five UNHCR Offices in the region have shifted from full to partial telework. 19 out of 34 offices continue to work fully virtually.

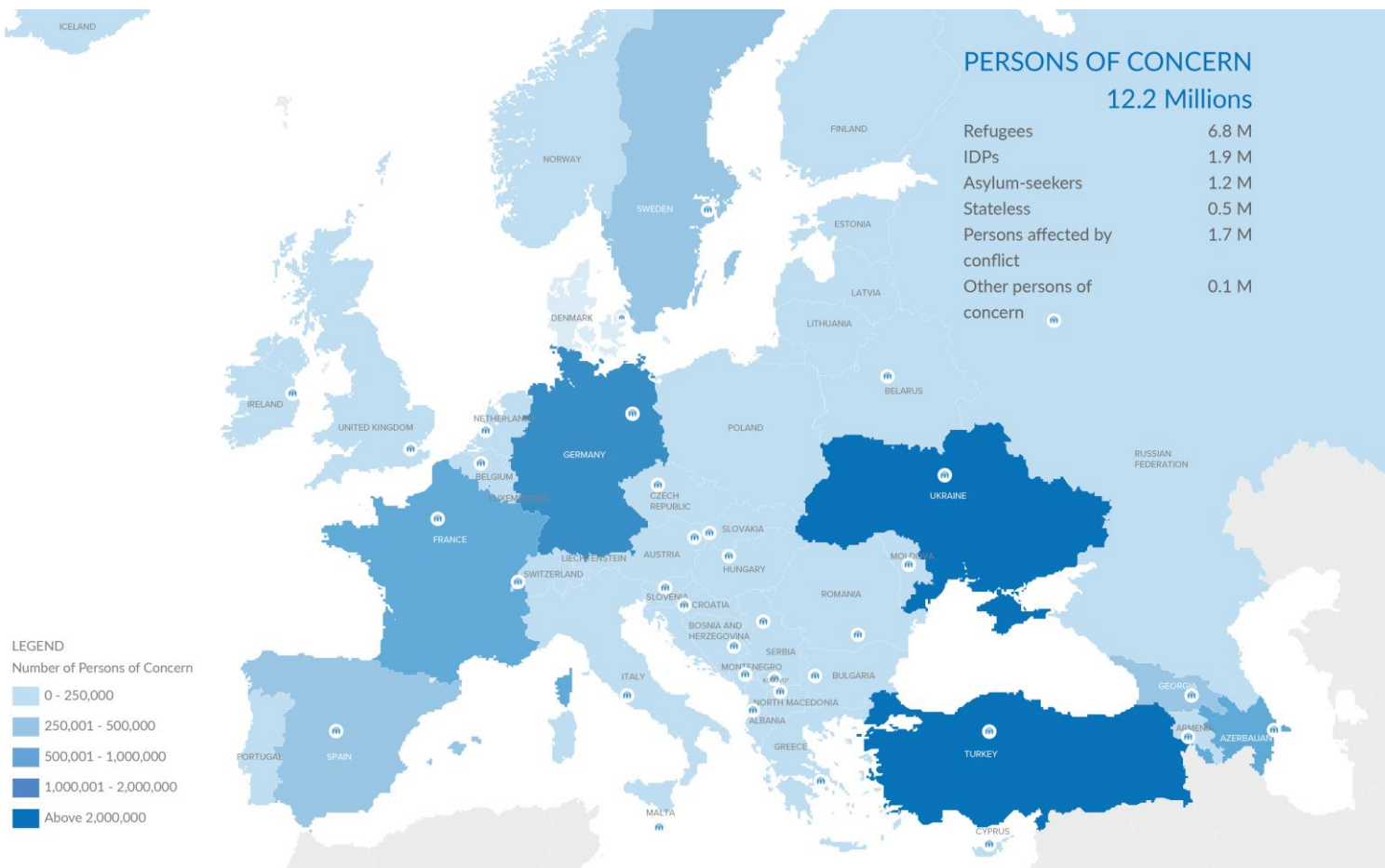
Access to territory remains limited through border closures or entry bans for foreigners, with only a few exceptions.

Many countries in the region continue to maintain access to **international protection** despite restrictions on access to territory.

UNHCR and partners' physical access to persons of concern remains limited. It is however anticipated that this will improve with the progressive lifting of movement restrictions, in compliance with COVID-19 preventive measures.

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, 18 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.
- Several countries have continued to gradually ease COVID-19 related measures and allow for the opening of public spaces, small shops and businesses, as well as cultural spaces starting on 11 May, but subject to social distancing measures. Border-related restrictions, including on European Union internal and external borders, remain largely in force.
- As a result of lifted restrictions, some UNHCR country offices are planning to gradually resume, at least partially, some of the suspended activities, for example protection monitoring at borders. As of this week, five UNHCR Offices in the region have shifted from full to partial telework. 19 out of 34 offices continue to work fully virtually.

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 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;
 - 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

- European States are increasingly resuming asylum procedures, including interviews and appeal procedures. Many are introducing or considering conducting interviews or hearings remotely for example with videoconference options. The introduction of this modality can be an opportunity and result in more robust national asylum systems in the future, as it may facilitate access to asylum procedures. Several country offices are proactively engaging their government counterparts to ensure this interviewing modality adheres to procedural safeguards.
- In **Montenegro**, based on the results of a Rapid Social Impact Assessment led by the UN, a set of recommendations was issued to address the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 on the most

vulnerable people in the country. One recommendation specifically provides for the inclusion of refugees, asylum-seekers and persons at risk of statelessness in all socio-economic response measures. According to the assessment, out of 186 households of asylum-seekers in private accommodation, refugees and persons at risk of statelessness, 77% report having lost their job/income, compared to 20% of the local population.

- People of concern have been as affected by unemployment as the host population. Some governments have taken measures to protect affected people and include them in national programmes. However, in some countries, only people with refugee status are entitled to support if they become unemployed due to COVID-19. The majority of other persons of concern, for example with subsidiary protection, temporary humanitarian protection or asylum-seekers, are not entitled to any aid. UNHCR has continued and scaled up advocacy with both national and local authorities to ensure that all persons of concern are included in their support measures.
- In **Ukraine**, in light of the current closure of Entry-Exit Checkpoint (EECP) along the contact line, authorities were called, by the UN Country Team, to de-link pension payments that benefit many older people currently in the non-government controlled area from their IDP registration requiring renewal in the government-controlled area. Meanwhile, individuals stranded by the EECPs and unable to return to their homes in non-government controlled areas are being assisted by UNHCR and its partner “Right to Protection” with legal support and cash assistance.


HEALTH

- In **Greece**, two COVID-19 cases amongst people of concern on the islands were confirmed on 12 May. They belong to the group who had arrived in Lesvos on 6 May and put on quarantine, along with 68 other new arrivals.
- On Lesvos, the additional site of Apanemo has been opened on 8 May to host the new arrivals on the island (70 individuals in total on 6 and 10 May) and to undertake a mandatory 14-day quarantine period. The operation provides hot meals and core relief items to these individuals. These new arrivals on Lesvos are the first sea arrivals to the islands since 1 April.
- As of 12 May, over 1,000 mostly older and immunocompromised persons of concern had been moved from crowded island Reception and Identification Centres (RICs) to ESTIA apartments on the mainland, islands, and hotels on islands, where they can be accommodated in a way that allows them to respect protection guidance. However, reception conditions on the islands remain dire for the 34,200 people living in overcrowded and unhygienic conditions in the RICs with a hosting capacity of some 5,400 persons.
- On 8 May, the operation delivered 39 palettes of hygiene items, including corporal hygiene item, sanitary napkins, dental hygiene sets and baby kits to the RICs on Lesvos. In addition, ten chemical toilets, ten showers and five hand-washing stations were provided to MSF, to be used at their COVID-19 isolation area near the RIC in Moria (Lesvos).
- In **Ukraine**, the operation and its NGO partners jointly distributed 4,550 **masks** to the first aid points and pharmacies in the conflict-affected localities along the contact line in Luhanska oblast. This is a positive outcome after the operation had provided sewing machines and fabric to 14 communities along the contact line following the declaration of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- As of 8 May, 132 **hygiene kits** were distributed jointly by UNHCR and NGO partners to 43 collective centres for internally displaced persons. These facilities are located in five regions of Ukraine, where approximately 4,000 individuals displaced by the conflict in eastern Ukraine currently reside. Each kit contains disinfectants, paper towels and cleaning products to ensure that these facilities will be properly cleaned and regularly disinfected.

- On 9 May, **medical items and personal protective equipment (PPE)** were delivered to a city hospital in Donetska oblast (150 respirators, 1,000 masks and caps, gloves, thermometers and various sanitizing products) to increase the capacities of hospitals within 2 km from the contact line. Further, **the first 10 out of 35 electric bicycles** are distributed this week to social, community and medical workers along the contact line, to increase the mobility of these home-based care providers to elderly persons residing in conflict-affected and isolated localities along the contact-line.



COMMUNICATION WITH COMMUNITIES

In [France](#), where the first phase of the end of the lockdown started on 11 May, the 22 NGOs and institutions that constitute the “Sharing information and maintaining social ties” working group gathered on 5 May to prepare for anticipated needs of persons of concern in the new phase. Topics discussed included connectivity issues faced by persons of concern, and recruitment needs in agriculture. UNHCR continues holding online meetings with refugee and asylum-seeker volunteers to stay abreast of their concerns throughout the lockdown and deconfinement period. As done by other country operations, a survey will help assessing further needs among persons of concern, including in relation to their access to various communication means.



CASH-BASED ASSISTANCE

- In [Ukraine](#), as of 8 May, UNHCR had provided an additional one-time **emergency cash assistance** to 454 refugee and asylum-seeking families (761 individuals) living in vulnerable households, including persons with serious medical conditions, those who lost their primary source of income due to COVID-related measures, and persons at heightened risk of homelessness. The households will receive on average approximately USD 130 to cover most urgent needs.
- In the [South Caucasus](#) countries, a one-time emergency cash assistance is being delivered after a comprehensive needs assessment detected new emerging vulnerabilities as a result of the COVID-19 mitigating measures introduced by the governments in [Armenia](#), [Azerbaijan](#) and [Georgia](#). The measure intends to meet urgent needs of families who were already receiving cash assistance, as well as newly identified households with no access to the state-introduced support schemes. In [Armenia](#), distribution of emergency cash assistance to 500 most vulnerable households is ongoing. UNHCR continues to advocate for the inclusion of other vulnerable persons of concern in the state-run social assistance schemes and projects run by non-state actors. In [Azerbaijan](#), the cash assistance complements the Government response plan, which provides for health- and education-related needs of persons of concern. Access to food assistance is being ensured through the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare and non-state actors, such as commercial companies and volunteers. In [Georgia](#), the scope of cash assistance for refugees and asylum-seekers was expanded. Cash assistance is also provided to address urgent and critical needs of vulnerable IDP returnees in Abkhazia, whose livelihoods and resilience have been severely jeopardized by COVID-19 related measures.

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.

- 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 the 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

- 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.

Total contributed or pledged to UNHCR COVID-19 appeal

USD 230M

Including: United States of America \$64.0M | Germany \$38.0M | European Union \$31.8M | 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 | Private donors \$1.7M | Qatar Charity \$1.5M | 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 \$16.4M | 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](#)

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