

Regional Bureau for Europe

UPDATE # 7

13 May – 19 May 2020

In most countries in the region, generalized **restrictions of movements** are progressively being lifted. However, concerns arise where movement restrictions for asylum-seekers, for example in reception facilities, are maintained.

Eight **UNHCR Offices** in the region have shifted from full-time to partial telework over the last two weeks.

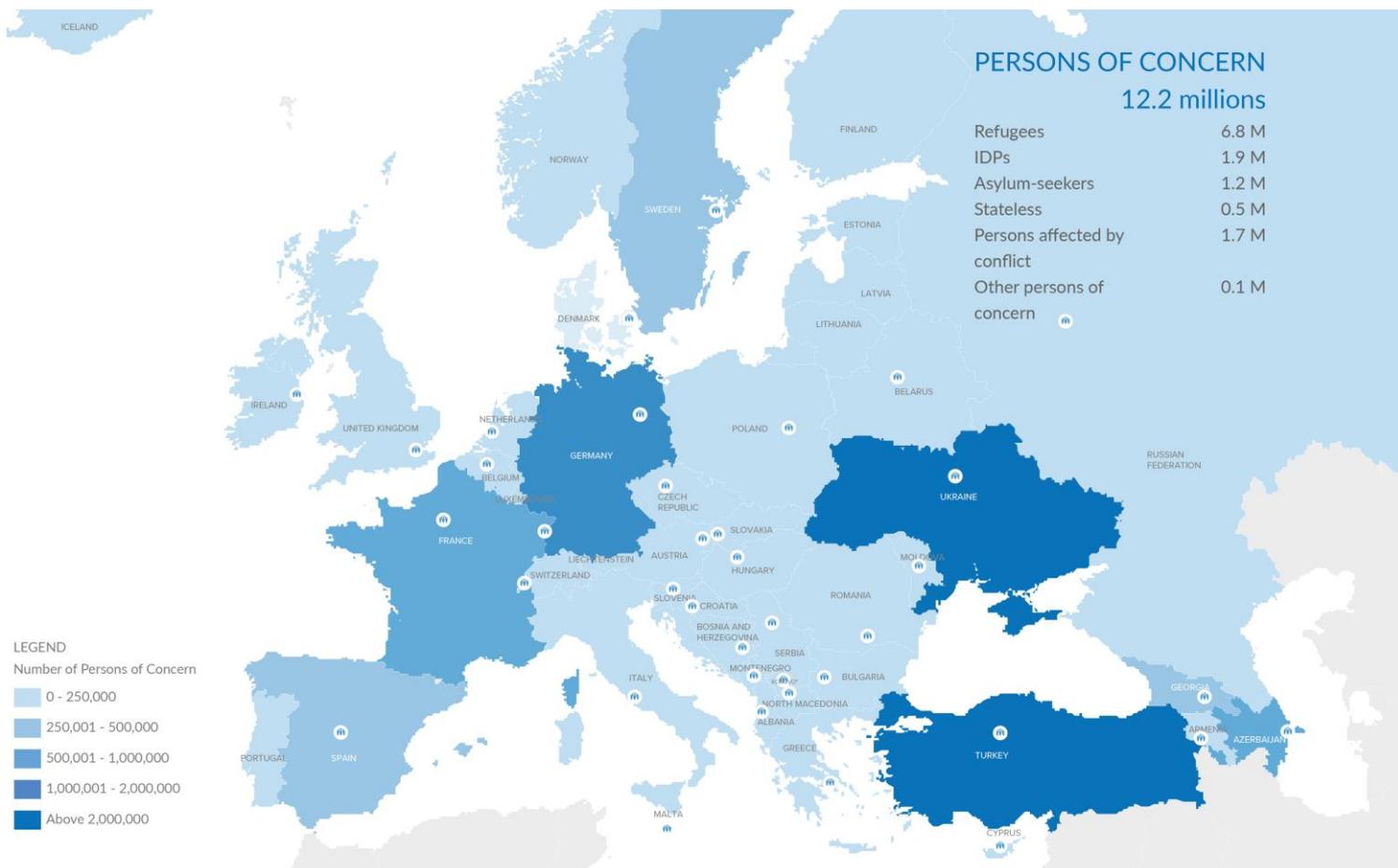
Access to territory remains limited through border closures or entry bans for foreigners, with only a few exceptions.

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.
- On 14 May, [UNHCR and IOM issued a discussion paper](#) on COVID-19 and mixed population movements. The paper explores the implications of COVID-19 for human mobility, drawing on the trends that IOM and UNHCR have observed in their field operations, as well as data in the public domain. The focus is on the irregular flows of migrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers between Africa and Europe, but the paper also notes some emerging trends in relation to population flows towards Europe from south-west Asia and the Middle East.
- The European Commission has issued, on 13 May, a package of guidelines and recommendations to help Member States gradually lift travel restrictions across EU internal borders. While the intention is mainly to allow tourism businesses to reopen, these will also have an impact on movements of refugees and asylum-seekers in the region.
- As a result of lifted restrictions, some UNHCR country offices are planning to gradually resume some of the suspended activities, for example protection monitoring at borders. As of this week, 16 offices continue to work fully virtually, after eight have shifted from full-time to partial teleworking.

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

- In a welcome step, 16 unaccompanied children hitherto hosted in **Greece** were **reunited with their family members in Switzerland** on 16 May. Volunteering EU Member States aim at relocating a total of 1,600 unaccompanied and separated children from Greece.

- As movement restrictions are lifted for the general population, concerns remain where such restrictions remain in place for foreigners, including asylum-seekers. In **Serbia**, UNHCR [welcomed the decision](#) by the authorities on 14 May to lift stricter movement restrictions for refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants.
- In line with advocacy efforts towards easing the pressure on reception centres, some positive developments were observed in the region. In **Belgium** for instance, designated camps and parks will continue to serve for reception until further notice. In addition, a new reception centre with a capacity for some 377 persons opened on 5 May and welcomed the first 30 people on 12 May, including two unaccompanied children. In **Malta**, the quarantine of some 1,000 people in the Hal Far Tent Village ended, and 300 persons were transferred to the new Hal Far open centre. In **Spain**, 49 people with serious medical needs were moved from the Melilla centre to a hotel during the reporting period, which is a welcome step. UNHCR maintains regular contact with the persons of concern through the helpline, addressing their needs for information.
- Advocacy for persons with specific needs has continued across the region, as many persons with disabilities are at heightened risk of complications in the case of COVID-19 infection and particularly vulnerable to the effects of COVID-19 measures. In **Germany**, for example, the Office is exchanging with Handicap International on joint advocacy regarding adequate reception conditions and the need for more systematic specific needs' identification. In **Spain**, joint work is being done with the NGO Committee of Representatives of Persons with Disabilities (CERMI) to issue recommendations to authorities and entities working with asylum-seekers and refugees. In the Ceuta enclave, the Office is working with the only local LGBTIQ association to promote the engagement of social organizations and policy makers towards improving living and protection conditions of LGBTIQ persons of concern.
- Across the region, country operations are increasingly conducting impact assessments of COVID-19 and related measures on populations of concern and, where indicated, migrants. In **Albania**, a phone survey on the socio-economic impact and a desk review on gaps in the current legal and administrative framework of integration has been carried out and preliminary results are being discussed with relevant government counterparts. In **Germany**, the Office has been exchanging with IOM on undertaking a needs assessment among LGBTIQ migrants and persons of concern, as individuals and specialised counselling services have been raising problematic issues for LGBTIQ persons of concern, in particular, but not only, in reception centres.
- In **Italy**, since the introduction of a mandatory quarantine for sea arrivals on 23 February, 2,240 individuals have been quarantined (1,939 onshore and 301 offshore). Three boats with 121 new arrivals have reached shore in Italy since 11 May. All people are currently in quarantine.
- In **Spain**, UNHCR, IOM and ILO have issued a joint letter to the recently elected President of the Parliamentary Committee for social and economic reconstruction on the opportunities for a human rights-based and inclusive approach, adding an outline of concrete proposals.
- In **Turkey**, authorities have resumed their referral of resettlement cases to UNHCR for consideration, with nearly 1,400 individuals. This comes in the aftermath of consultations with resettlement countries to plan for resettlement processing and departures in light of COVID-19 circumstances.
- In **Ukraine**, as a result of several weeks of negotiations facilitated by humanitarian organizations, 52 persons were authorized to cross the 'contact line' in both directions at the Entry-Exit checkpoints (EECP) in Stanytsia Luhanska. This was the second authorized crossing of stranded groups on either side of the contact line since the suspension of movements on 22 March. UNHCR continues to support the remaining stranded people with protection counselling and cash-based interventions.


HEALTH

- In **Greece**, 208 persons of concern have reportedly tested positive to COVID-19 to date (4 on Lesbos, 197 in mainland sites/hotels and 7 in UNHCR's accommodations). With UNHCR's logistical support, the four cases on Lesbos are in the quarantine area of Megala Therma in the Apanemo site recently opened and therefore isolated from other new arrivals. Separate tents, dedicated toilets and showers were

provided, as well as access to clean water through water tanks and jerry cans. So far in May, 106 people have arrived by sea and are sheltered in the recently opened Apanemo site. UNHCR is providing them with hot meals and relief items.

- Older and immunocompromised persons of concern continued being transferred from island Reception and Identification Centres (RICs) to accommodation that allow them to respect protection guidance. As of 17 May, 1,022 asylum-seekers had been moved to alternative accommodations on mainland and the islands. However, living conditions on the islands remain dire for the 33,000 people remaining in overcrowded and unhygienic conditions in the RICs with a hosting capacity of some 5,400 persons.
- In **Ukraine**, the NGO Tenth of April initiated online psychosocial consultations to support refugees and asylum-seekers in coping with stress related to quarantine restrictions. The video sessions were translated into five languages and posted online.
- Key findings of a survey conducted in April by NGO partner R2P, targeting stateless persons and people with undetermined citizenship, including at risk of statelessness, indicate that 60% of interviewees lacked the money to purchase food or medicine. The purpose of the survey was to identify challenges for persons lacking identity documentation in accessing medical care and psycho-social support due to COVID-19 restrictions. Based on the survey outcome and on responses by the National Healthcare Service, the Ministry of Healthcare and regional healthcare departments, the NGO R2P developed and shared **guidance** about access to medical care for people without identity documents.
- During the reporting period, UNHCR continued delivering hygiene kits to collective shelters in western and central Ukraine, medical supplies to health care facilities along the contact line, sanitizing products to institutions for homeless persons in conflict-affected areas, and electric bicycles to social and medical workers along the contact line.



COMMUNICATION WITH COMMUNITIES

- In **Turkey**, livelihoods partners continue to offer their vocational and language courses via online platforms. One of the partners started providing Turkish language courses through an online platform this week and in beneficiaries are supported with access to internet. UNHCR is seeking collaboration with a number of entities to generate a new curriculum and an online platform for all the specified courses and use this platform across the various livelihoods initiatives since the courses cover all the necessary skills for accessing the labour market.



CASH-BASED ASSISTANCE

- In **Greece**, after access to ATMs near the RICs was curtailed for asylum-seekers due to health measures at the earlier stages of the pandemic, all ATMs are now operational in all RICs, while crowd management measures by authorities are in place. Access to ATMs will continue in compliance with authorities' measures. However, as only one ATM is available per RIC to serve the thousands of asylum-seeking residents, UNHCR continues to advocate with the authorities for better solutions.

Stories from the field



Since mid-April, in **Eastern Ukraine**, UNHCR and its partner Proliska have been supporting a **community-based initiative producing face masks to limit the spread of COVID-19**. In this conflict-affected area, access to some goods (especially masks) remain limited, in particular in isolated villages. The community members were provided with sewing machines as well as fabrics and other items needed for face mask production. To date, this initiative counts thirteen people, including two internally displaced persons (IDPs), and who are able to produce 4,000 protective facemasks every day, out of which 600 are distributed, free of

charge, to the local hospital, which serves more than a thousand people.

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 **France**, three refugees and one asylum-seeker received the Council of Europe's *European Qualifications Passport* (EQPR) following successful assessment by national medical authorities. UNHCR is a strategic partner in the innovative programme and is working closely with the Council of Europe in response to the call by several States in Europe for the identification and participation of skilled refugee health practitioners in the response to COVID-19. UNHCR and the Council are working with national authorities in France, Germany, Italy and the UK to increase access to online qualifications assessments. The EQPR does not replace national-level certification, but creates a pool of assessed professionals who can be deployed in different ways in the health response, and identified for eventual national recognition.
- 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 235 M**

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 | Luxembourg \$2.7M | Finland \$2.4M | Education Cannot Wait \$1.8M | Private donors \$2.8M | Qatar Charity \$1.5M | Norway \$1.4M | USA for UNHCR \$1.0M

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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