

Regional Bureau for Europe

UPDATE # 14

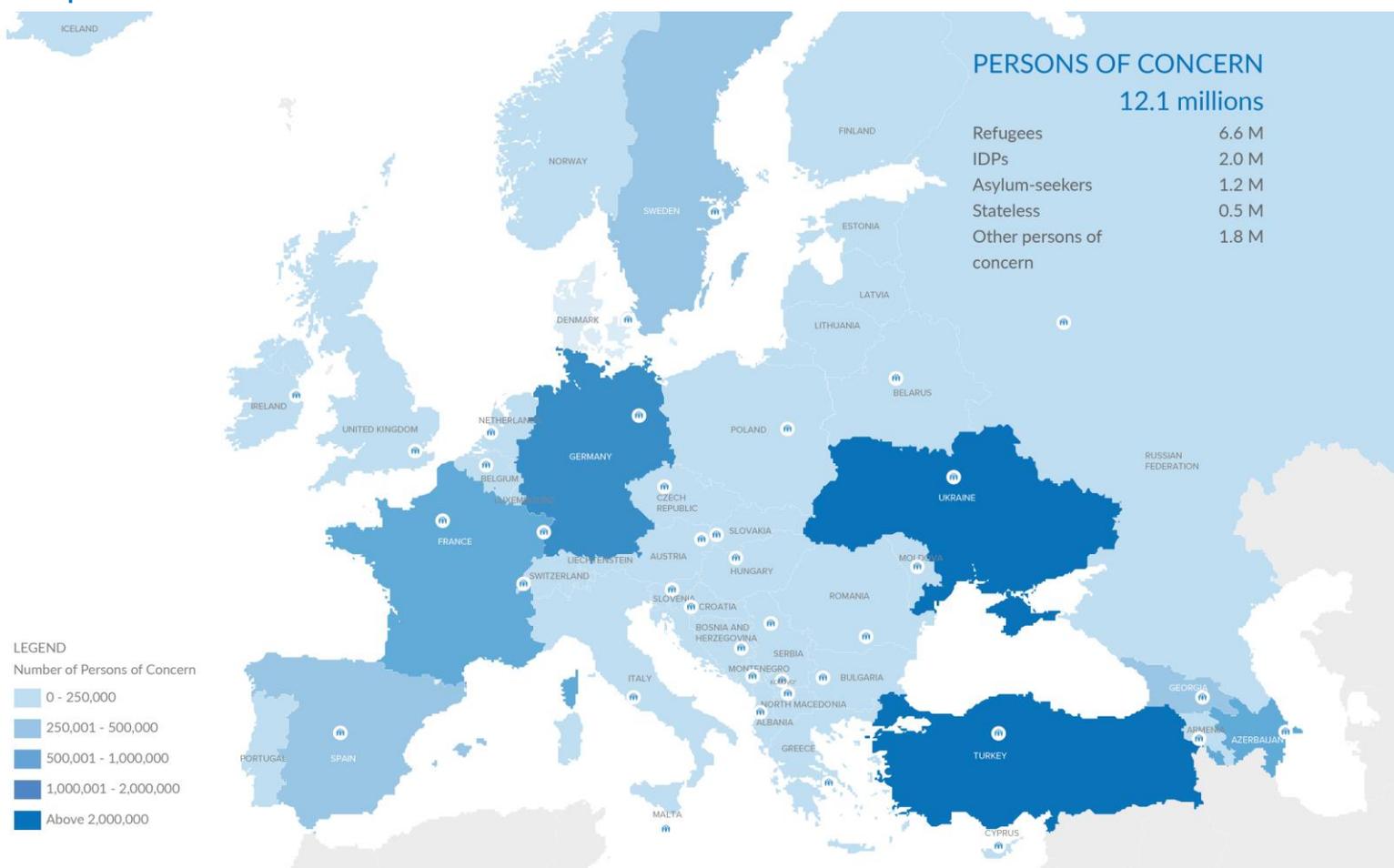
21 July – 3 August 2020

Across the region, countries continue to **lift movements and border restrictions** facilitating **access to territory and international protection**. However, due to renewed COVID-19 spikes, certain countries have postponed or even **reversed lifting of some restrictions**.

UNHCR staff across Europe is gradually moving back to office premises. 35 offices are now **partially teleworking**, while 3 offices reverted to **full teleworking mode** as of 3 August.

UNHCR and partners' physical access to persons of concern is improving with the progressive lifting of movement restrictions, 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, 27 countries have reported cases among persons of concern, and some of them have already recovered. However, any figure or estimate need to be taken with caution due to varying approaches to testing, data segregation and reporting.
- As a result of the partial lifting of lockdowns and travel restrictions, movements of populations of concern resumed, in some countries reaching pre-COVID-19 levels. However, due to renewed COVID-19 flare-ups observed in a few countries, some border restrictions were reinstated, for example in Hungary and Slovenia. Other countries, for example Belgium and the UK amongst others, have also strengthened their quarantine measures for travellers from certain countries, and in exceptional cases, in Italy for example, the state of emergency has been extended for a few months.
- On 22-23 July, the '[Vienna Declaration on effectively combating irregular migration along the Eastern Mediterranean Route](#)' was agreed with a focus on border management in view of combating irregular migration and return, as well as asylum systems. Under the auspices of an Austrian initiative, Ministers of Interior of 18 countries attended the conference, and a plan to establish an 'Operational Platform – Eastern Mediterranean Route' was also mentioned, with the aim of improving practical cooperation. The Ministers will review progress at a follow-up Ministerial Conference in autumn.
- On 21 July, the [European Council issued its conclusions](#) on the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF). EU leaders agreed on an overall lower financial envelope in Budget Headings relevant to UNHCR compared to the [2018 Commission proposal](#). The conclusions allocate EUR 22.7 billion to Budget Heading 4 – Migration (EU internal) and Border Management, and EUR 98 billion for Budget Heading 6 – Neighbourhood and the World.
- To enhance the UNHCR advocacy and collaboration with partners, the Assistant High Commissioner for Protection (AHC-P), Gillian Triggs, accompanied by UNHCR's Regional Bureau for Europe staff, visited Malta on 20-23 July. In an interview with Malta Today, the AHC-P requested the EU Member States to continue fulfilling their international obligations, despite facing tremendous challenges due to COVID-19, and stressed that countries can both protect the nations from the virus, while saving lives and respecting the right to seek asylum.
- On 29 July, the Chairperson of the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons, PACE Mr Pierre-Alain Fridez (Switzerland, SOC) [published a statement](#) on the eve of the World Day against Trafficking in Human Beings. He stated that the lifting of Covid-19 restrictions and the opening of national borders do not remedy the human suffering of trafficked persons. He concluded by saying that trafficking in human beings is like a global pandemic that must be stopped at international level in order to save what the UN estimates at hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of faceless victims.
- UNHCR country offices are gradually resuming suspended activities, including protection monitoring at borders. As of 3 August, 35 offices in the region were partially teleworking, while two offices were in full telework mode.

UNHCR Response

- UNHCR's response to the COVID-19 situation is focuses 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.

UNHCR Areas of Intervention



PROTECTION

- As border restrictions are being lifted as well as travel bans, access to territory and international protection continues to improve in parallel to exemptions to entry restrictions for asylum-seekers, therefore enabling population movements to resume. However, countries experiencing COVID-19 spikes have systematized mandatory testing and quarantine measures for new arrivals, although practices regarding the timing of COVID-19 testing vary from one country to another. This is particularly the case for new arrivals by sea. In **Sicily** for example, new arrivals undergo serological testing either on board the vessel or at disembarkation, prior to entering quarantine; individuals who test positive are placed in isolation and also undergo swab testing, while in **Apulia**, swab testing is imposed on new arrivals only towards the end of their quarantine. It should also be noted that some countries, faced with a high number of new arrivals that exceeds quarantine facilities capacity, are not able to provide adequate space for all, increasing the risk of lacking access to services and information relevant to specific needs of vulnerable individuals (children for example), as well as the lack of adequate follow-up on their cases.
- In view of tackling this challenge, some countries are seeking alternative solutions. In **Malta** for example, the authorities have issued a call for ships to be used as quarantine facilities to isolate people who have been rescued at sea. This new development is reported after 88 out of 127 recently disembarked persons were tested positive to COVID-19 on 30 July (source: Malta Today). Currently, no further information has been shared by the authorities on the capacity of the ship, the intended location, or other details.
- More worrisome is the fact that UNHCR continued receiving reports of push-backs at land and sea borders in many countries across the region. In addition to this, in contrast to movement restrictions for the general population and other international travellers which have gradually been lifted since May, discriminatory movement restrictions for asylum-seekers/migrants were also reported, resulting in aggravated protection issues – including violence and gender based violence in substandard reception settings for persons of concern. UNHCR monitors closely the situation and continues advocating for equal treatment for asylum-seekers and migrants, compared to the rest of the population.
- The number of people transiting through **South Eastern Europe** continued to rise over the last two weeks, reaching pre-COVID-19 numbers in some countries. UNHCR remains highly concerned by numerous reports of push-backs, while asylum claims among new arrivals are not registered. Further to this, several groups pushed back from some countries reported police brutality and violence, with some individuals being molested, which is worrying to UNHCR.
- In **Cyprus**, a large part of the Kokkinotrimithia camp is still being used for quarantine purposes. Persons who arrive on the same day, albeit separately, are housed together. Individuals who are tested positive are sent to a rehabilitation centre in Tersefanou, while persons tested COVID-19 negative are hosted in the camp and are re-tested after 5 days. UNHCR provided 48 Refugee Housing Units (RHU) to the authorities in view of being exclusively used to establish adequate quarantine areas in Kokkinotrimithia. Monitoring of the situation in and out of the camp continues, and it is expected that vulnerability assessments within the camp will also resume shortly.
- In **Italy**, a significant increase of new arrivals (mainly by sea) continued to be reported, all of them having to follow the COVID-19 prevention protocol in place upon disembarkation. However, current arrangements remain inadequate in some locations, especially in Lampedusa hotspot for example, which remains largely overcrowded with a total number of 1,000 persons accommodated in the island's hotspot (against a capacity of 200). In light of the situation, UNHCR increased its staff presence to continue monitoring disembarkations and providing support as required. UNHCR does not currently access the hotspot, due to health and public order considerations, as well as the frequency of

activities to be carried out upon disembarkation at the port. As of 1 August, the Red-Cross-run Campo Roya facility in Ventimiglia, near the French border, was closed and persons accommodated there were transferred to other reception facilities. Campo Roya had been inaccessible for new arrivals since April in connection with the COVID-19 emergency. Many persons of concern (POCs) in Ventimiglia continue to live in informal settlements.

- In **Spain**, new irregular arrivals in Melilla are held in quarantine in a separated area of Plaza de Toros. Arrivals are tested for COVID-19 and held in quarantine for 14 days even if the test results are negative. UNHCR remains concerned about the reception conditions in this area, as this population is currently not allowed to leave the premises under any circumstances, not even to attend their asylum appointments. Discussions are ongoing with local authorities to find an alternative solution to this matter (possibly rescheduling interviews) There is no information on foreseen transfers to the mainland, authorized by the national authorities.
- Since the end of the state of alarm 55 persons have been transferred to the mainland from the CETI in Ceuta, which is of high concern to UNHCR as the centre, with a capacity for 780 residents, continues to be overcrowded with currently 1,375 residents, including at least 266 asylum seekers. Among them, around 20 LGTBI individuals are present and some women who have been identified as SGBV survivors. It is also reported that 425 unaccompanied minors also reside in Ceuta (out of the CETI), requiring special attention.
- The interim facilities of Plaza de Toros host over 400 persons, who live in precarious conditions, especially in regard to hygiene. Additionally, there are no social workers or any specialized staff to manage food distributions or respond to any other needs of this population
- In **Montenegro**, on 27 July, the government, with the support from the European Union and IOM, provisionally opened a second asylum container facility adjacent to the border with Albania, to be used for registration of asylum intentions and quarantine; UNHCR will have presence at the facility. COVID-19 resurgence has put on hold the registration of asylum intentions.
- Asylum procedures have been resumed in most States. However, in many instances, resumption of interviews and accumulated backlog present a challenge, and case processing picks up at a slower pace than usual. This is the case in **Spain**, where new applicants are facing up to six months of waiting periods for registration, since postponed registrations are being prioritised, and where Madrid local authorities report that around 500 persons per day approached them to request an interview to apply for asylum. In **Italy**, the Ministry of Interior (MoI) reported attempts to arrange remote Refugee Status Determination (RSD) interviews for applicants who autonomously reached Lampedusa and are currently observing quarantine. In **Cyprus**, similar challenges in accessing asylum procedures were reported, however since EASO resumed registration activities on 13 July, local authorities indicated that the delay in processing asylum claims should be resolved soon. In the meantime, UNHCR continues to monitor the situation, and provide assistance to the most vulnerable individuals, especially those who are unable to have direct access to the procedures.
- As a positive development, in **Portugal**, with the gradual re-opening of borders, preparations for the resettlement of refugees have resumed, with a first group of 19 persons expected to arrive from Turkey on 19 August, and another group of 25 individuals the following day. In the meantime, Portuguese authorities have been actively seeking for new reception possibilities across the country, with some success.
- UNHCR also welcomes the recent decision from the Parliament on the revision of the Nationality Act, on 23 July. Under the new regime, children born in Portugal to foreign parents holding a residence permit, or who have resided in the country for at least one year, are granted access to Portuguese nationality by birth right, provided that they declare their willingness to do so. This rule is relevant for children born in Portugal from refugees residing in the country. The revised act takes a significant step forward in the fight against statelessness.
- In **Turkey**, a first resettlement departure since COVID-19 took place last week, with a total of eight refugees being relocated from Turkey for Denmark. This resettlement involved a medical case requiring treatment not available in Turkey.
- On 24 July, 83 asylum-seekers, families with children with medical needs, were relocated from **Greece** to Germany, due to their specific needs and vulnerabilities. This was followed by the transfer of another group of 90 asylum-seekers – children with medical conditions along with their families – also relocated from Greece to Germany on 31 July, bringing the total to 173 asylum-seekers in this category departing to Germany from Greece so far. In addition, 26 unaccompanied children departed to Finland on 3 August in the context of the EU relocation scheme for unaccompanied

children. This brings the total of children relocated from Greece to other European States so far to 140 (of whom 25 to Portugal, 50 to Finland, 12 Luxemburg and 53 to Germany).

- **Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs):** In **Ukraine**, between 20 and 29 July, a total of 7,667 persons crossed the crossing point EECF of Stanytsia Luhanska from NGCA to GCA and 5,897 persons from GCA to NGCA. The operation and its partners provided electro-car services to 3,541 individuals. However, some challenges are reported regarding technical problems during the installation of the “Diy vdoma” (Act at home) mobile app needed to enter GCA, as well as unequal observance of the COVID-19 preventive measures (such as wearing face masks).
- On 29 July, UNHCR jointly with other UN and NGO partners facilitated a second “hand-pushed” humanitarian convoy across the EECF Stanytsia Luhanska, a pedestrian crossing point, to deliver COVID-19 related relief items. UNHCR’s part of the convoy consisted in some 105 bicycles were transported. These bikes will be distributed to local territorial centers and first aid points, local actors that are front line responders against COVID-19 in NGCA Luhansk.

**HEALTH**

- In **Greece**, one additional person of concern has tested positive to COVID-19 since the last report, raising the number to 217 reported cases as of 3 August. Out of these, 208 are on mainland and nine are on the islands.
- On the islands since 27 July, a new COVID-19 medical protocol is in place for new arrivals who will need to remain in quarantine for seven days should they test negative upon arrival, or for 14 days should they test positive. In the latter case they will need to re-test after the 14-day quarantine. Quarantine spaces are available on Lesbos, in Megala Therma/Apanemo in the North and in Kara Tepe on the South. The Megala Therma site is not fully ready for use as it lacks partitioning, but it has been agreed with the authorities that in the meantime, UNHCR will support the set-up of the site.
- As of 3 August, UNHCR has provided accommodation and protection services to 1,598 asylum-seekers vulnerable to COVID-19 complications. These individuals have been transferred out of island Reception and Identifications Centres (RICs) into ESTIA apartments on the mainland and the islands and hotels on the islands. The population in the RICs dropped to 25,700 however, compared to the capacity for 5,400, the sites remain overcrowded with unhygienic conditions prevailing.
- On 30 July, MSF’s COVID-19 in-patient clinic near Moria RIC closed. However, as a result of an official request from the authorities, the operation and MSF have agreed to provide their support to transfer the existing COVID-19 infrastructure on the island to a plot of land where a field hospital donated by the Dutch Government will be established. In addition, UNHCR is also setting up a quarantine area for new arrivals on Leros and has already delivered 21 Refugee Housing Units to be used for that purpose. New arrivals on Rhodes continue to be held in the designated quarantine area behind old Sfageia.
- UNHCR in response to COVID-19 emergency, is also in the process of replenishing its stock of core relief item (including plastic sheets, plastic rolls, jerry cans, tents, sleeping mats, rub halls, as well solar lanterns) in view of being distributed to persons of concern. Further to this, 220,000 disposable masks will also be made available for both refugees and UNHCR and partner organization staff who work in reception facilities, as a preventive measure to COVID-19 spread.
- In **Montenegro**, during the reporting period, UNHCR donated to the Asylum Centre in Spuz a shipment of medicines, sensory dispensers for hand disinfection, sanitizers, antibacterial doormats, contactless thermometers and hygiene products for disinfection of premises. These activities are part of a EU-funded project that aims at addressing COVID-19 challenges in South-Eastern Europe.
- In **Ukraine**, the office in Sievierodonetsk received PPEs (5,760 masks, 5,760 gloves, 42 glasses and 1,440 gowns) that will eventually be distributed to “first aid centers” located near the ‘contact line’ in eastern Ukraine, with a first distribution planned in early August.



COMMUNICATION WITH COMMUNITIES

- In **Armenia**, UNHCR and a partner NGO run and monitor 24/7 hotlines for PoC (using interpretation services remotely) to maintain the continuity of counselling and referral services. The hotlines are also used to collect and analyse information on protection risks and needs of PoC.
- In **Belarus**, during the reporting period, UNHCR in partnership with three Belarusian mobile operators reached close to 8,000 PoC, through SMS, sharing information and contact numbers to be contacted in case any COVID-19 related assistance needed, as well as any other assistance or information in relation to international protection. The SMS informed recipients of the contact details of partner organizations providing legal and social assistance to people of concern in all regions of the country.
- In **Spain**, to better understand the impact of COVID-19 on UNHCR PoC, UNHCR conducted an online survey during the reporting period, that reached a total of 755 persons from 33 countries of origin. The results of the survey indicated that 30% of the respondents required health care during the State of Alarm, 48% had difficulties in accessing basic assistance and 41% of the children saw their education compromised, mainly due to the lack of electronic devices and internet connection. It is worth noting that 96% considered having had adequate information on COVID-19. Among the main challenges identified, participants highlighted difficulties in paying the rent, keeping their jobs or the administrative uncertainty. One of the main objectives of the survey was to support informed decisions by authorities in case a similar situation takes place in the future.
- In **Turkey**, UNHCR counselling line answered a total number of 3,884 calls from 65 provinces during the reporting period. The main inquiry related to resettlement (40%) followed by financial assistance (30%).



CASH-BASED AND IN-KIND ASSISTANCE

- In **Azerbaijan**, UNHCR is planning to organise the second round of emergency cash assistance for refugees and asylum seekers due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The cash assistance is expected to target over 300 families already identified and selected on an individual assessment basis, in line with pre-defined eligibility criteria in line with the Bureau's recommendations. The distribution is planned to be processed through post office transfers in early August, once the rules for this exercise have been approved.
- In **Bulgaria**, since the beginning of the COVID-19 emergency, a total of 300 households have been supported with food packages, financial assistance and medical support. The provision of the aid is based on the vulnerability assessment made. However, it is to be noted that NGO partners report 5-10 new cases per week, which marks a considerable decrease compared to the first weeks of the pandemic.
- In **Moldova**, during the reporting period, UNHCR approved one-off cash assistance for refugees and asylum-seekers who lost their primary source of income due to the economic consequences of the pandemic. So far, 195 asylum-seekers and refugees received financial support from the operation during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- In **Turkey**, as of 30 July, following the distribution of cash cards for the COVID-19 emergency cash assistance programme that started on 29 May, a total of 15,255 households (72,182 individuals) were identified as eligible and will receive a financial assistance shortly. The second cohort of beneficiaries will target some 12,000 households, bringing the total number of recipients of this assistance to 20,000 households.
- Upon DGMM's feedback and approval, UNHCR finalised the post-distribution monitoring through phone calls with the first round of beneficiaries of the COVID-19 emergency cash programme. In total, 412 households were interviewed. Key findings of the survey are still pending.
- In **Ukraine**, UNHCR decided to provide financial assistance for 100 IDP families who have been the most severely affected by the COVID-19 related restrictions.

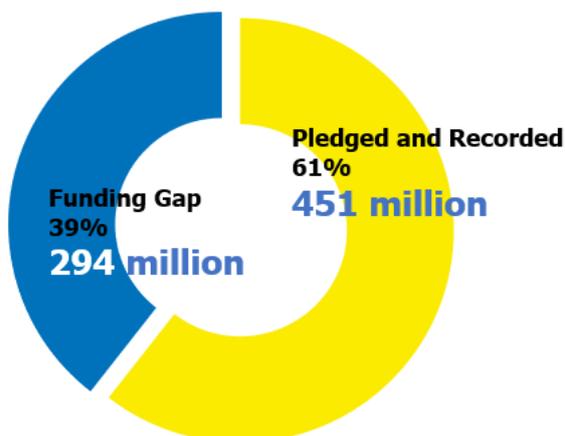
Working in partnership

- 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**, 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 451 M (61%)

Including: United States of America \$186.3M | Germany \$62.7M | European Union \$44.6M | United Kingdom \$31.5M | Japan \$23.9M | African Development Bank \$18.3M | Denmark \$14.6M | United Nations Foundation \$10.0M | Private donors \$8.7M | CERF \$6.9M | Canada \$6.4M | 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 | Unilever \$2.1M | Education Cannot Wait \$1.8M | UNO-Flüchtlingshilfe (Germany) \$1.7M | 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 | Private donors Spain 33.1M | United Kingdom 31.7M | Germany 25.9M | Private donors Republic of Korea 17.3M | Switzerland 16.4M | France 14 M | Private Donors Japan 11.7 M

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