

Regional Bureau for Europe

UPDATE # 18

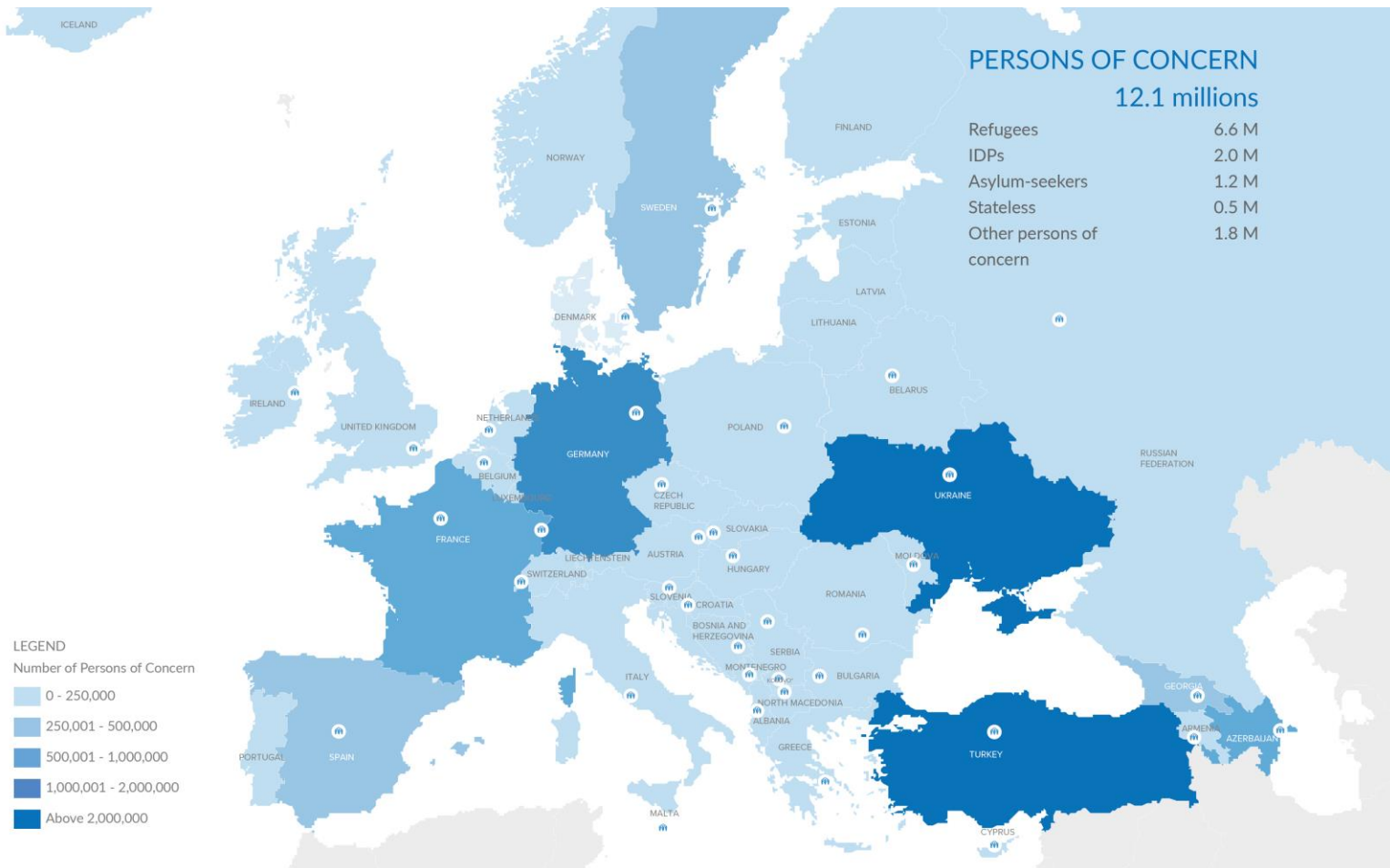
17 - 30 September 2020

As COVID-19 infection rates continued to increase across the region, many countries have reacted by reinstating some **movement limitations** as well as **targeted travel restrictions**.

UNHCR staff across Europe has gradually moved back to working in office premises. 36 offices are now **partially teleworking**, while one remains in **full teleworking mode** as of 30 September.

UNHCR and partners' physical access to persons of concern has improved compared to the onset of the pandemic, 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, 34 countries have reported cases among persons of concern at some point, and some of the concerned individuals have already recovered. However, any figures or estimates need to be taken with caution due to varying approaches to testing, data segregation and reporting.
- On 24 September, UNHCR called for [urgent action in Greece](#) to improve conditions and ensure humane solutions for asylum-seekers in the new Kara Tepe emergency site and in reception centres on the other Aegean Islands. UNHCR continues advocating for comprehensive solutions, calling for continuous European support and responsibility-sharing.
- On 30 September, UNHCR issued a joint [press release](#) with IOM and UNICEF hailing the milestone reached as over 1,000 asylum-seekers have been relocated from Greece so far this year through the EU relocation programme.
- As a result of the COVID-19 infection spike, movement restrictions and international travel advisories are being reinstated to prevent traveling from certain States or regions. As during the onset of the pandemic, these measures are implemented according to different criteria and in a largely non-coordinated manner. Local and selective lockdowns, like for example in Madrid, require offices to adapt working arrangements.
- As of 30 September, 36 offices in the Europe region were partially teleworking, while one office was to shift from full telework to partial telework mode on 1 October. Meanwhile, field and on-site visits to reception centres have gradually resumed thanks to protection measures put in place in most of the countries.

UNHCR Response

- UNHCR's response to the COVID-19 situation is focused 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 confirmed or suspected COVID-19 cases, as necessary;
 - 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 hygiene standards;
 - [Ensuring the inclusion](#) of persons of concern, host communities and service providers in the provision and distribution of adequate hygiene 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.

Situation on Lesbos, Greece

As of 30 September, some 8,587 people were hosted in the emergency site near Kara Tepe, according to the authorities. The population living on the site has decreased in recent days as some refugees and asylum-seekers have been transferred to the mainland, while others have been moved to alternative accommodations on Lesbos.

Upon request from the Greek Government who is leading the response, UNHCR has provided technical support by assisting in setting up the new tented facility and providing technical advice on site planning. At the same time, UNHCR has consistently advocated for a comprehensive and humane solution for the asylum-seekers affected by the fires and temporarily hosted in the emergency site.

As of 24 September, 1,100 family tents (900 provided by UNHCR) as well as four UNHCR Rubb Halls and eight IOM Rubb Halls had been set up. UNHCR advocated for a shelter allocation that takes into consideration the needs of women, children and vulnerable groups.

Despite efforts by UNHCR and other actors to set up adequate water, sanitation and hygiene facilities (WASH), the installations remained below standards in the emergency site, with only 376 functional toilets available (short of 53 to meet minimum standards) and no showers as of 25 September. Addressing WASH needs remain a key priority.

There is also an urgent need to adapt and strengthen the existing shelters. With winter approaching, and given its location near the seashore, the site is exposed to challenging weather conditions and safety hazards. To improve the living conditions of families hosted in tents, UNHCR has delivered tent insulation kits, and has begun installing custom flooring with plywood sheets and pallets. In addition, 825 m³ of gravel has been delivered as of 30 September to protect tents and common areas from rain and flooding. Large-scale efforts will still be required to ensure proper drainage throughout the site.

Electricity is not yet available in all parts of the site. Where it is, the network is often overloaded. To address safety concerns as well as lighting and power needs, UNHCR began distributing 6,000 portable solar lamps on 23 September, prioritising women-only areas and sections of the site without power. These lamps also allow for charging of mobile phones and other small devices.

In coordination with authorities, UNHCR re-opened its "protection desk," which previously operated at the Moria centre, and which allows for identification of individual concerns and specific needs, and support with referrals and transfers to suitable accommodation. UNHCR and its partner METAdrasi are working with authorities to support dissemination of information on procedures, both through text messages and verbally via community representatives during the distribution of material assistance and outreach in the site. Authorities have indicated that residents of the emergency site will be able to access asylum and other procedures at a date yet to be confirmed.

UNHCR teams and partners continue their efforts to identify and assist vulnerable asylum-seekers to prioritize them for safer accommodation. Single women and female-headed families have been allocated a dedicated tented area, but more measures are necessary to mitigate security risks.

As of 29 September, 713 recognised refugees had been transferred from Lesbos to the mainland, where they can access integration programs or, where applicable, relocation programs. Another 500 asylum-seekers from Lesbos are planned to be transferred to UNHCR ESTIA apartments on the mainland in the following weeks, in a joint effort between authorities, UNHCR, IOM and EASO.

To prevent and mitigate the spread of COVID-19, asylum-seekers underwent rapid COVID-19 testing by national health authorities before entering the emergency facility. Based on health protocols, any person testing positive was directed to one of the two designated isolation areas together with their family members. Those who re-tested negative were in the meantime able to leave the isolation area, as were the others upon completion of quarantine. As of 30 September, according to the authorities, 130 people remained in quarantine in the emergency site, of which 50 were COVID-19 positive.

For more information, please consult the latest [Greece Update](#).

UNHCR Areas of Intervention



PROTECTION

- With many countries experiencing COVID-19 spikes, varying degrees of movement restrictions, mandatory testing and quarantine measures upon arrival were imposed.
- **Quarantine measures for new arrivals:** Most new arrivals in **Italy** were disembarked in Lampedusa and followed the COVID-19 prevention protocol in place, including a 14-day quarantine either onshore or offshore one of the five ferries with an overall capacity for 2,400 people. As of 28 September, at least 2,247 people were in quarantine, of which 2,052 were offshore and 195 onshore. Identification and referral of persons with specific needs in quarantine has recently become challenging, as people board buses while still on the ferries, to be transferred to reception facilities in different regions, including where UNHCR has no permanent presence. As a result of decongestion efforts, after having been overcrowded earlier this month, the Lampedusa hotspot hosted only 56 people as of 20 September. Ongoing works are expected to increase the facility's capacity to 400 by the end of September.
- In **Spain**, between 14 and 27 September, 3,095 persons arrived by sea, representing a 63% increase from previous reporting period and a 106% increase compared to the same period last year. New arrivals continue to be routinely tested and placed in quarantine. The upward trend of arrivals to the Canary Islands continues. The first reception centres are reaching full capacity and new arrivals find themselves accommodated in tents in the port of Gran Canaria or transferred to other islands.
- **Onward movements** continue through Central and South Eastern Europe, and further pushbacks were reported to UNHCR offices. Acts of violence during expulsion were also reported, with twenty-five persons being severely injured during their expulsion from **Romania** to **Serbia**. UNHCR and partners are conducting monitoring missions at various borders. Advocacy efforts for access to territory and asylum continues as well, for example in **Albania**. Meanwhile, in **Serbia**, UNHCR is concerned after 775 asylum-seekers and migrants were observed sleeping rough outside centres in Belgrade or at the borders, without access to appropriate COVID-19 mitigation measures. In **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, following intense pressure from the local authorities and population, the temporary reception centre "Bira", in Bihac, was effectively closed on 30 September. Earlier in the day, the centre residents were transferred to other centres, including ones that were already overcrowded.
- **Access to procedures:** Where asylum-seekers face difficulties to register asylum claims and long wait times to access RSD procedures, families are reportedly increasingly resorting to dangerous irregular onward movement with the assistance of smugglers. Discussions to resume resettlement procedures have advanced with a number of resettlement countries. In **Spain**, **resettlement arrivals** have resumed, with 138 Syrian refugees arriving on 24 September, 23 of which through the community-based sponsorship pilot programme in Valencia, in what was the first arrival since the beginning of the pandemic. Pre-departure procedures included COVID-19 tests, and the arrivals were **welcomed by authorities**, UNHCR and partners. Other countries have postponed newly scheduled resettlement missions due to quarantine requirements for civil servants upon return.
- **Reception conditions:** Overcrowded reception centres and detention facilities are posing additional health risks to residents. In this context, UNHCR's long-standing advocacy for improved living conditions and to end detention of asylum-seekers remains crucial. The Pournara/Kokkinotrimithia camp in **Cyprus** remains a closed facility with 265 residents as of 28 September, including 97 children, of which 28 are unaccompanied. Many asylum-seekers residing in the camp last month were able to leave upon presenting a residential address. As per protocol, any resident testing positive for COVID-19 is transferred to a rehabilitation centre. UNHCR has re-established a presence in the camp since September, but with limited access to applicants.
- In **Spain**, the Melilla centre remains overcrowded and is still operating under substandard conditions; similarly, the improvised accommodation at the Plaza de Toros has inadequate sanitation facilities for the estimated 500-700 people hosted in its premises, aggravating tensions among residents. No positive cases have been reported among persons of concern in the enclave of Ceuta to date. Meanwhile, first reception facilities in Madrid continue to face outbreaks and, in some cases, extreme quarantine measures that last for many weeks and create tensions between residents, NGO and security staff. Mitigating measures included transfers to other facilities. UNHCR is monitoring these developments to identify gaps and explore accommodation alternatives.

- **Relocation:** In a positive development, 290 unaccompanied children had been relocated from **Greece** to **Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Luxembourg, and Portugal**, as of 30 September. This year, a total of 1,066 asylum-seekers have been relocated from Greece to Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Luxembourg and Portugal.
- **Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs):** In **Ukraine**, during the reporting period, 39,327 persons crossed the 'contact line' from the Non-Government Controlled Area (NGCA) to the Government-Controlled Area (GCA) at the **Stanytsia Luhanska** Entry Exit Checkpoint (EECP), 42% more than in the previous fortnight. 7,744 people with special needs benefited from the transportation services provided by the two electric cars that are operated by UNHCR and Proliska. **Novotroitske/Olenivka** checkpoint remains the only one functioning in Doneska oblast and continued operating twice per week for people on the pre-approved lists prepared by the de facto authorities. 333 persons were permitted to cross to the GCA and 916 persons to the NGCA during the reporting period. As of 28 September, 13 individuals were awaiting resolution of their cases to cross at the check point.
- However, on 25 September, the de facto authorities in Luhansk restricted the modalities for entering and leaving the Luhansk NGCA. Only those with residence registration in Luhansk NGCA will be allowed to enter and leave once per month.
- In a welcome development, and effective 16 September, the Government waived the 14-day self-isolation requirement for students and their parents/guardians entering the government-controlled areas (GCA) from the non-government-controlled areas (NGCA).
- In a concerning development, a UNHCR-facilitated convoy carrying COVID-19-related assistance and scheduled for 16 September had to be cancelled at the last minute after the de facto authorities in Donetsk refused permission for it to transit through NGCA Donetsk on its way to Luhansk. UNHCR is liaising with the so-called 'humanitarian committees' in Donetsk and Luhansk and with OCHA, negotiating new dates for the convoy.

**HEALTH**

- In **Greece**, 769 persons of concern had tested positive for COVID-19 as of 27 September. Out of these, 374 were on mainland and 395 on the islands.
- The operation is assisting the authorities in establishing medical spaces and services at border locations, including in the new emergency site in Kara Tepe, set up following the fires in Moria RIC. In Samos, the existing isolation area remains with limited capacity, which is a concern expressed by UNHCR and medical actors, including national health agency EODY. The reconstruction of the area continues with support from the operation that provided containers and is undertaking technical works. In Leros and Kos, works for the creation of the medical space have been completed, while in Chios UNHCR is following up with the authorities on its proposal to set up a medical area there as well.
- General movement restrictions on refugee-hosting sites across Greece remain in place but continue to be implemented differently in each site. On the mainland, nine accommodation sites remain under quarantine following the identification of COVID-19 cases amongst their residents. Quarantine measures in the RICs on Samos, Leros and in Evros were extended until the end of September. Testing protocols are also different in different locations, which is cause for concern.
- UNHCR has provided accommodation and protection services to a total of 1,959 asylum-seekers at high risk of COVID-19 complications, by moving them out of island RICs, between 16 March and 27 September. In addition, on 28-29 September, authorities transferred 930 recognized refugees from the islands to the mainland, who will eventually be included in the IOM bridge integration programme (HELIOS) or upcoming relocation schemes. Another 500 asylum-seekers from Lesvos are planned to be transferred to UNHCR ESTIA apartments on the mainland in the following weeks. While the operation has long been advocating to decongest island centres, the need for transfers has become more acute as a COVID-19 prevention measure.
- In **Ukraine**, on 22 September, the operation published its updated [Key Advocacy Messages on Internal Displacement](#) with several points related to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. UNHCR calls for further steps to maintain infrastructure but also ensure physical distancing at the EECPs.



CASH-BASED AND IN-KIND ASSISTANCE

- In **Montenegro**, UNHCR donated videoconferencing equipment to a Centre for Asylum Seekers to ensure continuity of community-based activities, and access to services for asylum-seekers, in particular for psycho-social support activities part of an EU-funded joint UNHCR-IOM project to identify and address COVID-19 challenges.
- In **Serbia**, 19,040 soap bars out of 20,000 donated by Unilever were delivered to asylum authorities. A remaining 240 will be distributed to homes for unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) and 720 to refugees in private accommodations. In addition, 67 beneficiaries were identified as eligible for a cash distribution to be conducted in October. Residents of the Kokkinotrimithia camp in **Cyprus** will also receive 1,000 kg of soap from the same donation.
- In **Turkey**, the second phase of emergency COVID-19 cash support is being planned together with the authorities. The operation is considering different methodologies to identify additional beneficiaries, such as using data from resettlement and referral channels. Nearly 21,000 families were reached through the first phase of COVID-19 emergency cash assistance, and with the support from ECHO, the total figure is expected to reach to 85,000 families until by end of 2020.
- In **Ukraine**, 24 families received cash as individual protection assistance, a measure introduced in July to support 100 IDP families in dealing with the impact of the pandemic on their lives.
- Refugees and asylum-seekers in the Temporary Accommodation Centres received 3,000 soaps from the Unilever donation and 50 bottles of cleaning liquids. Hygienic items were also distributed to Social Centres along the contact line to improve hygienic conditions during the pandemic.



COMMUNICATION WITH COMMUNITIES

- In **Serbia**, a **Facebook group** set up by UNHCR and partner Sigma continued its daily broadcast to asylum-seekers and refugees about the latest measures prescribed in relation to the COVID-19 situation in Serbia and all necessary information about asylum procedures.



EDUCATION

- In **Serbia**, in a welcome step, authorities announced that 400 refugee and migrant children started attending schools all over the country in September. Partner IDEAS distributed cash cards to 16 elementary and high school unaccompanied and separated children under the UNHCR-supported "Cash for Education" project, as well as schoolbooks and creative hobby sets, clothes and shoes for UASC in "integration homes". Overall, 13 elementary school children were provided with learning support in the Serbian language and other school subjects until the end of 2020. Individual material support for vocational training and tertiary education under COVID-19 modalities was also extended.

Working in partnership

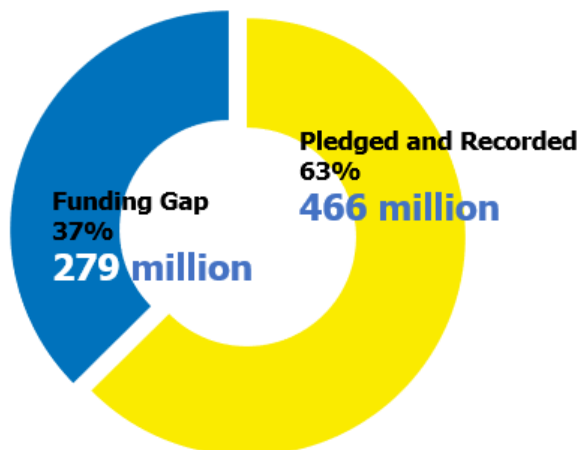
- UNHCR supports governments' efforts to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic through existing coordination mechanisms and by working closely with WHO and other partners. In addition, UNHCR co-chairs the Issue-Based Coalition on Large Movements of People, Displacement and Resilience, steering collective 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 full 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 466 M (63%)

Including: United States of America \$186.3M | Germany \$62.7M | European Union \$47.0M | United Kingdom \$26.5M | Japan \$25.1M | African Development Bank \$18.3M | Private donors \$16.1M | Denmark \$14.6M | United Nations Foundation \$10.0M | CERF \$6.9M | Canada \$6.4M | Unilever \$6.3M | Education Cannot Wait \$4.7M | 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 | USA for UNHCR \$2.0M |

Unearmarked contributions to UNHCR’s 2020 programme

Sweden 76.4M | Private donors Spain 52.9M | Norway 41.4M | Netherlands 36.1M | Denmark 34.6M | United Kingdom 31.7M | Private donors Republic of Korea 27.2M | Germany 25.9M | Private Donors Japan 17.9M | Switzerland 16.4M | France 14 M | Private Donors Italy 12.4M | Italy 10.6 M | Private Donors Sweden 10.5M

Useful Links

[UNHCR's revised Coronavirus Emergency Appeal](#)

[UNHCR operations overview in Europe](#)

[COVID-19: UNHCR's response](#)

To subscribe to the mailing list of UNHCR's Regional Bureau for Europe, please click [here](#).



CONTACTS

Nicolas Brass, Senior External Engagement Coordinator, UNHCR Regional Bureau for Europe

brass@unhcr.org

Delphine Crespin, Donor Relations Officer, UNHCR Regional Bureau for Europe

crespin@unhcr.org