Regional Bureau for Europe

UPDATE #32

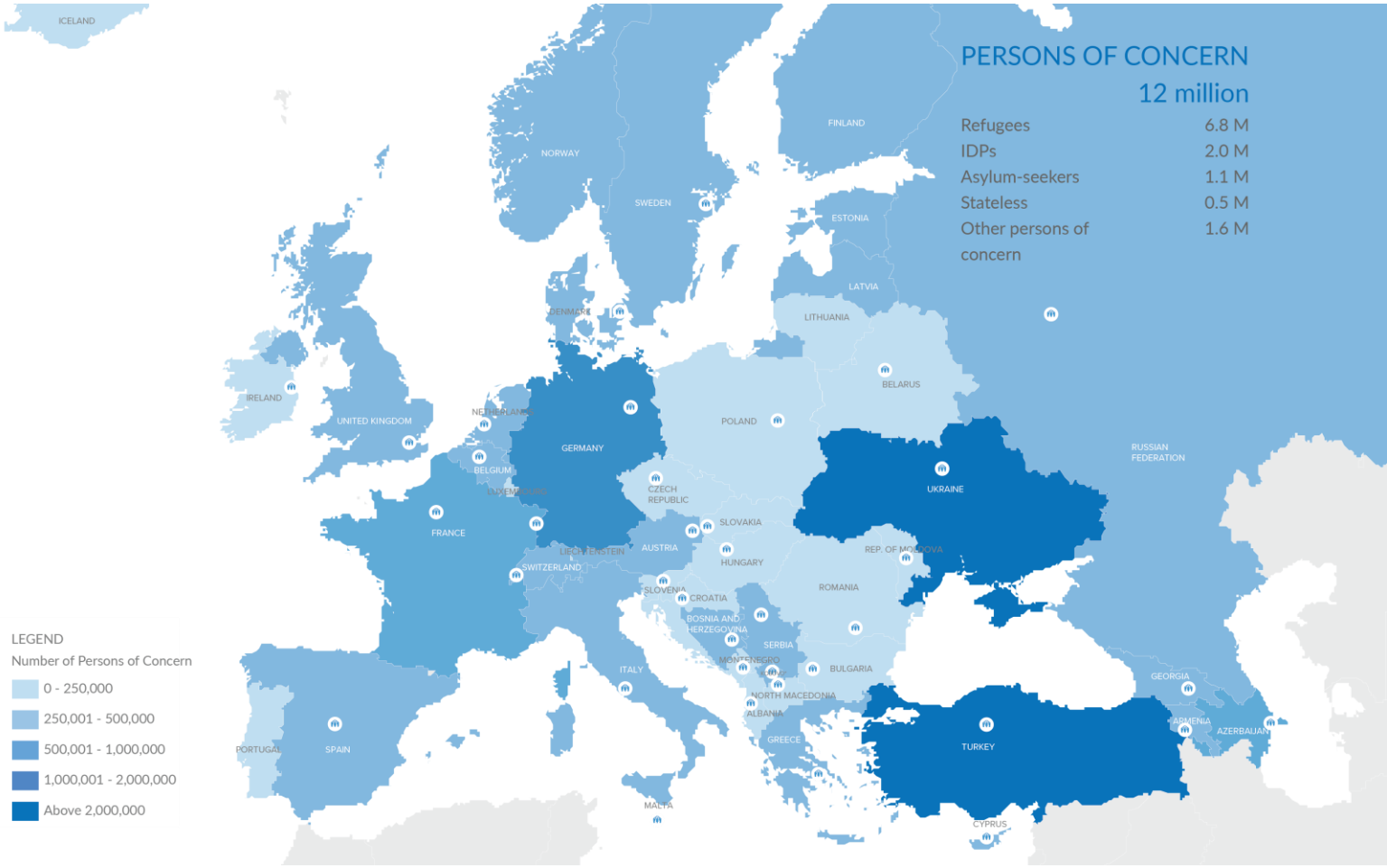
1 – 30 September 2021

Regional COVID-19 infection rates declined through mid-September before rising again slightly at the end of the month. Some countries eased **movement and travel restrictions**, while most maintained or tightened them.

COVID-19 travel restrictions are broadly protection-sensitive and in general include exceptions enabling **access to territory** by persons seeking international protection.

Movement restrictions continue to impact UNHCR staff in country offices. To date, 33 offices are **partially teleworking**, one is **fully teleworking**, and two had shifted **out of telework mode**.

Populations of Concern



Source: UNHCR, Global Trends Report 2020

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, at least 40 countries and one territory have reported COVID-19 cases among persons of concern at some point, and many have in the meantime recovered. Any figures or estimates should be taken with caution due to varying approaches to testing, data segregation and reporting.
- According to the World Health Organization (WHO), regional COVID-19 infection rates declined slightly through mid-September before rising again at the end of the month. While several countries continued cautiously relaxing restrictions, others maintained the measures in place or introduced new requirements in response to upward trends in infections, such as presenting COVID-19 certificates attesting vaccination or negative test results for social gatherings.
- Some 60 per cent of countries in the region have vaccinated 50 per cent or more of the general population, as reported by WHO. Portugal, Malta and Spain had the highest share of the population fully vaccinated: 87 per cent, 81 per cent, and 79.6 per cent respectively. This month, UNHCR offices reported that at least four countries had started inoculations with a third dose of the COVID-19 vaccine or plan to authorize them soon, prioritizing population groups at higher risk.
- At the end of September, one UNHCR office remained in full telework mode, 33 were in partial telework mode, and two had shifted out of telework mode altogether. Visits to reception centres are strictly regulated, and outbreaks in collective accommodation or detention centres continue to temporarily limit the ability of UNHCR and partners to access persons of concern in some countries.

UNHCR Areas of Intervention

PROTECTION

- **Quarantine measures upon arrival:** Testing and quarantine measures are in place in all countries registering significant numbers of sea arrivals. Of the almost 6,800 persons who arrived in **Italy** by sea in September (10,300 in August), at least 186 tested positive for COVID-19. With the exception of unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) and some persons with special needs, all arrivals usually observe quarantine on offshore ferries. A refurbished reception block was reopened in Lampedusa in mid-September, increasing the hotspot's capacity from 250 to 320 places. Over 2,420 persons were quarantined or being transferred to quarantine facilities as of 26 September.
- Some 8,000 persons arrived in **Spain** in September (compared to 4,000 in August), mostly by sea. Of the September arrivals, some 4,000 persons reached the Canary Islands and over 2,000 the Andalusian coast. Among the overall arrivals in Spain, only 4 people tested positive for COVID-19 upon arrival and were isolated.
- **Reception conditions:** Lack of sufficient reception spaces, overcrowding and inadequate facilities in a number of locations in Europe continue to pose challenges for residents to follow physical distancing, hygiene and other preventive measures, compounding risks of contagion. Outbreaks in centres remain a concern, and typically result in restrictions of movements for residents, with cases detected this month in **Austria**, **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, **Bulgaria**, **Croatia**, **Ireland**, **Latvia**, **Lithuania** and **Serbia**. Meanwhile, in **Cyprus**, 7 positive cases and some 30 close contacts identified at the Pournara reception centre were transferred to government-leased hotels for quarantine. In order to alleviate conditions in main reception centres and create safer environments for persons of concern and centre staff, some countries opted to make use of collective shelters as initial reception facilities, for example **Austria**. Elsewhere, the lack of facilities leaves persons of concern exposed to protection and health risks and makes it difficult for civil society organizations to provide health services, as is the case along the **Italy-France** border area for example.

- **Internally Displaced Persons:** In September, the COVID-19 situation deteriorated significantly in **Ukraine**'s Luhansk oblast GCA (government-controlled area), where the local hospital in Stanytsia Luhanska is no longer able to accept new COVID-19 patients after having filled all of its 45 available beds. There is no possibility to transfer patients to other localities since all hospitals in Luhansk oblast are full. In line with this trend, after no COVID-19 cases had been detected in August, 15 people crossing from NGCA tested positive in September at the Stanytsia Luhanska entry-exit checkpoint.

HEALTH

- **Inclusion in vaccination plans:** Persons of concern are generally included in national vaccination plans on par with the general population. As a result, persons of concern have generally been receiving the vaccination along with priority groups by age, profession or accommodation in collective shelters.
- Vaccinations progressed in reception centres in **Bulgaria**, where 474 refugees and asylum-seekers have been vaccinated as of end September. In a positive step, **Austria** announced deploying a "vaccination bus" to offer inoculation directly at its largest reception facility.
- Progress on vaccination of persons of concern was also reported in **Armenia**, **Azerbaijan** and **Montenegro**, among other countries, including those in private accommodations; in **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, UNHCR and its partner assisted six persons of concern in private accommodation with transport and interpretation to receive vaccination. In **Greece**, a new draft law, if approved, will authorize more administrative entities to issue temporary documentation for persons of concern to access COVID-19 vaccination. In **Italy**, vaccinations of new arrivals in Lampedusa started this month, and authorities announced plans to offer vaccination to the more than 5,000 Afghans evacuated to Italy from June to August.
- **Advocacy** for inclusion of all persons of concern in vaccination plans and roll-out continues where needed, for example in **Albania**, where asylum-seekers who have not yet received the required documentation remain outside the national vaccination scheme, as well as in **Hungary**, where asylum-seekers, stateless persons and third country nationals who may have protection needs but not the necessary documentation are still not included. In **Slovakia**, UNHCR's advocacy efforts resulted in the inclusion of asylum-seekers in the mainstream national vaccination system, while new legislation was passed in **Switzerland** prescribing forcible COVID-19 testing ahead of Dublin III transfers included a number of safeguards as recommended by UNHCR.
- After **Serbian** authorities have completed vaccination of all persons who had expressed interest, UNHCR is advocating for further surveys gauging interest to prepare for next vaccination rounds. In **Russia**, where asylum-seekers and stateless persons without documentation remain outside the national vaccination plan, UNHCR and partners continue assisting those who wish to be vaccinated through a separate programme offered by the Russian Red Cross.

COMMUNICATION WITH COMMUNITIES

- Communication with communities of concern continued on vaccination campaigns across the region, making use of different channels, in line with the needs and preferences of communities of concern.
- In **Malta**, UNHCR produced notices in several languages on the easing of COVID-19 restrictions for in-person events, as well as a poster on *How Vaccines Work*, based on material from WHO. UNHCR's partners organized awareness-raising sessions on COVID-19 restrictions and vaccination in reception centres in **Bulgaria** and **Serbia**, as well as in two centres in **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, where, in addition, a survey on vaccination was conducted among 853 residents, revealing that 125

people had already been vaccinated with at least one dose, while an additional 356 expressed interest in getting vaccinated. In **Hungary**, UNHCR and its partner co-organized a community fair, where persons of concern could meet and seek advice and support from NGOs, service providers and other actors.



CASH-BASED AND IN-KIND ASSISTANCE

- In **Ukraine**, UNHCR distributed COVID-19 cash assistance to 636 refugee and asylum-seeking households, 10 vulnerable IDP households, as well as 950 hygiene kits and PPE to vulnerable persons of concern in Luhansk NGCA. UNHCR in **Greece** delivered 17,451 core relief items and PPE this month to authorities supporting persons of concern on the islands and mainland, as well as material assistance to persons affected by the wildfires. Meanwhile, in **Azerbaijan**, UNHCR distributed 9 individual food parcels this month (2,199 food parcels to date) and in **North Macedonia**, 4 asylum-seekers received one-time cash assistance as part of the COVID-19 project under the EU Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace.

UNHCR Response in Europe

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;
- **Advocating continuously** to ensure the inclusion of persons of concern in national COVID-19 preparedness and response plans, including vaccination campaigns;
- **Providing 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.

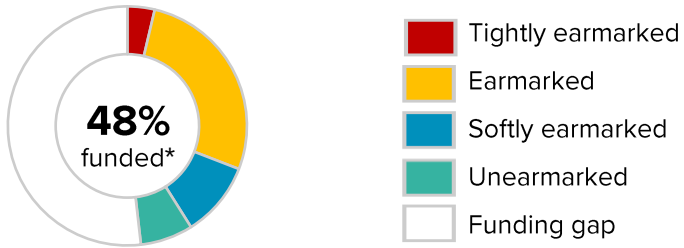
Working in partnership

- UNHCR supports governments' efforts to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic through coordination mechanisms and by working with WHO and other partners. In addition, UNHCR co-chairs with UNDP and IOM 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.

Financial Information

- For 2021, USD 469 million of UNHCR's COVID-19-related needs has been mainstreamed into its Global Appeal and USD 455 million are supplementary needs bringing the total COVID-19-related requirements in 2021 to USD 924 million. The supplementary COVID-19 response focuses on exceptional socioeconomic and protection impacts related to COVID-19 as millions of refugees, internally displaced and stateless people fall into conditions of extreme hardship.
- The UNHCR Regional Bureau for Europe is grateful to donors who have provided generous and timely support for the Coronavirus Emergency Situation response globally, and in 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 in 2021: USD 924 M



Total contributed or pledged to UNHCR COVID-19 appeal as of 4 October: USD 445,255,513 (48%)

including: United States of America | Germany | African Development Bank Group | European Union | Canada | Unilever (UK) | Austria | China | Education cannot Wait | Japan | France | USA for UNHCR | UN Covid-19 MPTF | UNO-Fluechtlingshilfe | Country-Based Pooled Funds | Australia for UNHCR | UN Conflict-Related Sexual Violence MPTF | Swedish Postcode Lottery | Japan Association for UNHCR | Private donors China | Sunshine forever Limited | Private donors Republic of Korea | Luxembourg | UNHCR Insamlingsstiftelse | Private Donors Canada | Private Donors USA | UN Programme On HIV/AIDS | Spain | Other private donors

Unearmarked contributions to UNHCR's 2021 global programme

Norway $80M | Sweden $66.9M | Private donors Spain $55.7M | Netherlands $36.1M | Denmark $34.6M | Private donors Republic of Korea $28.5M | United Kingdom $28.4M | Germany $26M | Private donors Japan $23.6M | Japan $23.4M | France $20.2M | Switzerland $16.4M | Private donors Italy $14M | Private donors Sweden $13M | Ireland $12.5M | Belgium $11.9M | Italy $10.7M

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. Where a donor has contributed USD 10 million or more, the total amount of the contribution is shown.

Useful Links

UNHCR's revised Coronavirus Emergency Appeal | UNHCR operations overview in Europe | COVID-19: UNHCR's response | Previous issues of Europe Region COVID-19 updates

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CONTACTS

Nicolas Brass, Senior External Engagement Coordinator, UNHCR Regional Bureau for Europe, brass@unhcr.org

Noelia Díaz, Reporting Officer, UNHCR Regional Bureau for Europe, diazno@unhcr.org