

# UNHCR Regional Bureau for the Middle East and North Africa

## COVID-19 Response Update #26 (1 – 31 December 2021)

### Key Figures

 17.4 million

people of concern  
in the Middle East  
and North Africa  
(2021 planning figures)

 20,095 cases

of COVID-19 reported among  
people of concern to UNHCR  
since March 2020, including  
fatalities

 19 out of 19  
countries

in the MENA region have  
confirmed the inclusion of  
refugees in their national  
COVID-19 vaccination  
programmes or plans

 19 out of 19  
countries

in the MENA region have  
started COVID-19 vaccinations  
for refugees

### Regional Developments


Several countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) reported a significant increase in daily cases of COVID-19 during December, with the Omicron variant believed to be driving a new wave of infections. Health authorities in **Tunisia** reported the highest number of new infections since September 2021, however no PoCs reported testing positive in December. **Algeria** saw its daily infection rate double during the month, from 192 on 1 December to 395 at the end of the month; in the Sahrawi refugee camps, cases also doubled from 28 to 48 throughout December. **Israel, Libya, Turkey,** and the **UAE** also observed a significant rise in cases.


UNHCR continued supporting local COVID-19 health responses and sensitization activities. Vaccination campaigns were further reinforced by national health authorities, as booster shots were introduced by some to mitigate the spread of the virus. The demand for vaccines among PoCs rose considerably during the month, notably in **Lebanon** where a 59% increase in registrations and 102% increase in vaccinations was observed compared to November. **Mauritania** meanwhile remains among the countries in Africa with the highest rate of vaccination, with Mbera refugee camp reporting a comparatively high vaccination rate of 37% of the camp's total 67,500 population. With national COVID-19 'Green Passes' continuing to be rolled out for those fully vaccinated to access to public venues, UNHCR worked to ensure PoCs were included and could access national platforms and register using their ID and documentation.





Refugees receiving the COVID-19 vaccine in Alexandria, Egypt. Photo by ©UNHCR/ Pedro Costa Gomes


### Main Lines of Response

 Continuing, adapting, and delivering protection and assistance to the most vulnerable

 Strengthening communication with communities

 Prioritizing immediate interventions to prevent infections and supporting access to services and materials

 Advocating for the inclusion of refugees, IDPs and other marginalized groups into national public health and other responses, and supporting national systems to deliver assistance

 Empowering individuals and families to make the best decisions for themselves, through cash assistance

## Highlights from the Field

UNHCR **Algeria** provided lifesaving health equipment in anticipation of a fourth wave, including five oxygen concentrators (plus 15 filters) to Sahrawi refugee health facilities in the Tindouf camps, as well as other critical health supplies. As vaccination efforts continued in the camps, UNHCR provided logistics and incentive payments for health workers responding to the emergency health needs of Sahrawi refugees.

During December, UNHCR **Egypt** provided 285 refugee and asylum-seeking families (854 individuals) with multipurpose cash grants to mitigate the negative socioeconomic impacts of the pandemic. This brings the total number of assisted families in 2021 to 7,950 (25,402 individuals).

To mitigate the impacts of COVID-19, including reliance on harmful coping mechanisms and costs associated with purchasing hygiene items, UNHCR **Iraq** delivered a one-time cash transfer to vulnerable refugees and IDPs; as of 31 December, some 12,900 refugee and 9,000 IDP families have received this assistance.

In **Jordan**, UNHCR, the Ministry of Higher Education and the Connected Learning Consortium organized a national workshop on “Instructional Design for E-Learning”, following a national roundtable to discuss key challenges faced by the education sector when it comes to connected learning during the pandemic. The roundtable provided a platform to discuss opportunities around embedding connected learning in higher education in Jordan, in light of schooling being widely interrupted throughout the pandemic. In a positive development, a team of Refugee UN Volunteer (RUNV) medical doctors in Jordan [won](#) the ‘UNHCR Volunteer Service Award’ for the MENA region for their contributions to the COVID-19 response.



Refugee doctors, who have been working at Jordanian hospitals since June 2021, receive an award for their efforts in supporting the COVID-19 response. Photo: ©UNHCR / Lilly Carlisle

Following continued UNHCR community engagement on vaccinations in **Lebanon**, more than 235,000 PoCs were reached by 600 volunteers, partners, and UNHCR staff as of 26 December through physical and remote outreach, as well as at UNHCR’s reception centres, mobile vaccination units, and validation sites. Of those reached, 115,000 individuals (49%) were assisted with registration on the national IMPACT platform, close to 19,000 had already received the vaccine, and 21,000 had earlier been registered on the platform. To date, 24% of all refugees registered on IMPACT were as a direct result of community engagement efforts.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, UNHCR **Libya** has donated medical supplies – including 21 ambulances, 16 generators, 12 hospital tents, 46,900 hygiene kits, 21,800 face masks, and 19 prefabricated containers – to various public health facilities. As part of its refugee response, UNHCR continues to maintain a 24-hour emergency medical hotline as well as an ambulance service for emergency cases, in partnership with IRC and the Libyan Red Crescent (LRC).

During the last week of December, UNHCR **Mauritania** provided cash assistance to almost 2,000 refugees around Mbera refugee camp, as well as to more than 14,000 asylum-seeking and host community households and 171 micro-enterprises to reduce the socioeconomic impacts of the pandemic in the Hodh Chargui region. Additionally, a new UNHCR-supported PCR testing site in Nouadhibou was inaugurated.

UNHCR **Morocco** extended its cash assistance programme to respond to the protection needs of households not already included, assisting more than 2,200 individuals during December. Following a rise in reported mental health issues among PoCs due to the pandemic, UNHCR and partner AMPF organized a workshop on mental wellbeing with key stakeholders to harmonize approaches, identify best practices and develop key recommendations on engaging with national authorities.

The second phase of UNHCR **Turkey’s** COVID-19 cash assistance for 2021 assisted more than 71,600 households (315,300 individuals) by 12 December.

During December, UNHCR **Tunisia** organized several outreach and information sessions for PoCs on Tunisia’s national vaccination passport – which is now required to access public venues – in partnership with the Tunisian Council for Refugees. UNHCR also sensitized PoCs on COVID-19 transmission and the Omicron variant.

In **Yemen**, more than 5,700 refugees, asylum-seekers, and host community members approached UNHCR-supported clinics in Basateen neighbourhood (Aden) and Kharaz refugee camp (Lahj) throughout December, with febrile illnesses and upper respiratory tract infection reported to be the primary outpatient consultations. Additionally, more than 4,700 refugees, asylum-

seekers, and host community members approached UNHCR-supported clinics in Sana'a. UNHCR continues to provide health consultations and medication to PoCs at its supported clinics in Yemen, while providing awareness-raising sessions on communicable diseases, including COVID-19.



*Nechervan Sulaiman is a Syrian refugee living in Erbil, the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. He volunteered with the International Medical Corps (IMC) to help his community by raising awareness about COVID 19 prevention measures and the importance of vaccination.  
Photo: ©UNHCR/Shaza Shekfeh*

## Global and MENA Financial Information

In 2021, UNHCR sought \$924 million, of which over 50% is mainstreamed in the annual budget and some \$455 million through the [COVID-19 Supplementary Appeal](#), for activities in 2021 related to the exceptional socio-economic and protection impacts of COVID-19. **As of 29 December**, UNHCR's total financial requirements for the COVID-19 Emergency are **51% funded**, with **\$473.4 million received** (inclusive of indicative allocations of softly earmarked and unearmarked funds), of which **\$98.6 million** is for the MENA region.

## Resources:

- [UNHCR's 2021 COVID-19 Supplementary Appeal](#)
- For MENA regional and country reports on COVID-19 response, please visit – [UNHCR Global Focus](#); [UNHCR Operational Portal \(Syria Regional Refugee Response\)](#); and [Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan website](#)
- Support UNHCR's COVID-19 preparedness and response plans: <https://giving.unhcr.org/en/coronavirus/>

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