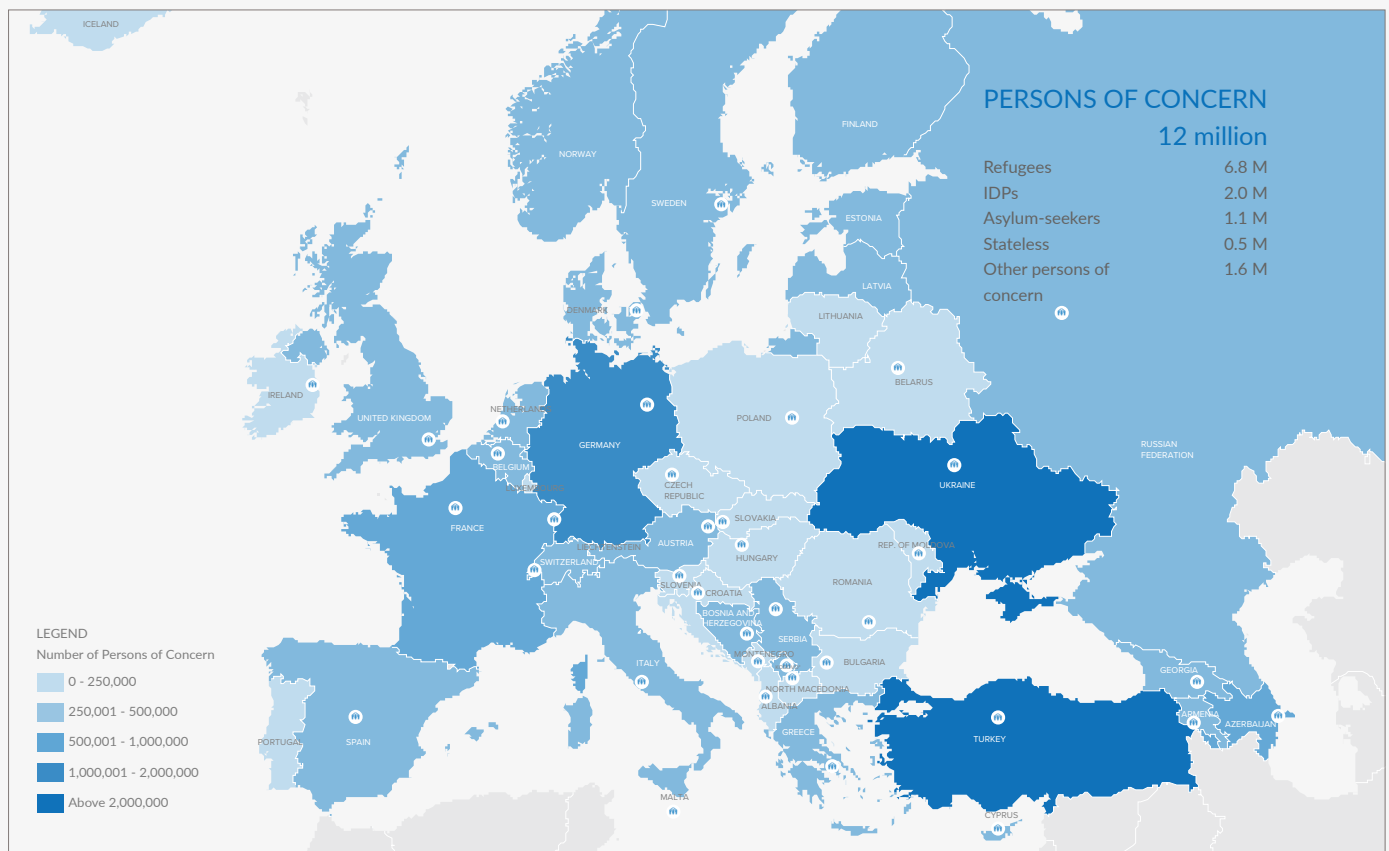


COVID-19 EMERGENCY RESPONSE

Regional COVID-19 infection rates remained on a steady upward trend in December, spiking toward the end of the month, with a new daily record of 1 million cases detected in the region on 31 December ([WHO](#)). Virtually all countries maintained or tightened [movement and travel restrictions](#).

COVID-19 travel restrictions remain 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, 32 offices are [partially teleworking](#) and four are on [full telework mode](#).



Source: UNHCR 2021 [mid-year trends](#) and [annex table](#). 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 rose steadily for the third consecutive month in December, spiking toward the end of the month, with a daily record of 1 million cases detected in the region on 31 December. Authorities in almost all countries main-

tained or tightened measures to mitigate contagion risks by requiring use of masks and vaccination/recovery certificates, recommending telework and booster vaccinations, and introducing additional restrictions on travel and social gathering amid concerns over the spread of the Omicron variant. With the health care system under stress, authorities in the **Netherlands** introduced a general lockdown on 18 December, while at least four countries expanded vaccination mandates for certain categories of workers and vulnerable population groups.

The **European Union (EU) Council** adopted [conclusions](#) on 16 December, stressing the importance of increasing vacci-



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.

nations, coordination on EU digital COVID-19 certificates, and swift adoption of the revised EU recommendations on safe free movement and non-essential travel into the EU.

Some 64 per cent of countries in the region have vaccinated 50 per cent or more of their general population. By year end, **Denmark, Portugal and Malta** had the highest share of fully vaccinated population: 83 per cent, 82 per cent and 82 per cent, respectively (according to WHO as of 28 December).

At the end of December, four UNHCR offices were in full telework mode and 32 were in partial telework mode. 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.

es to hear about their experiences and ensure that procedural standards in appeals hearings are not reduced as a result of increased use of videoconferencing tools due to the current epidemiological situation.

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 reception centres remain a concern, and typically result in restrictions of movements for some centre residents, with additional cases detected this month in centres in **Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Ireland, Malta and Montenegro**.

In **Cyprus**, a record 138 positive cases were detected this month at the Pournara First Reception Centre. Some 585 close contacts were transferred to the Limnes multipurpose centre, of whom 81 later tested positive and were isolated along with 89 persons who had tested positive at Pournara. Conditions in the Limnes centre are precarious, with insufficient beds, heating and medical services. Following UNHCR's advocacy, the authorities ordered additional mattresses, blankets, electrical kettles and hygiene kits. UNHCR will deliver a further 8,500 blankets and over 500 camp beds. UNHCR intervened to identify the most vulnerable persons and ensure their transfer to appropriate facilities, including seriously ill persons to hospital. As of 31 December, 164 positive cases and 487 close contacts remain at the Limnes centre.

In the **Belarus** border area near Poland, some 700 refugees and migrants were accommodated in a warehouse at the end of December in substandard living conditions. There was no indication that COVID-19 preventive measures were in place and there is no information about the vaccination status of the people there.

Internally Displaced Persons: On 29 December, the Government of **Ukraine** simplified the process for crossing the contact line in eastern Ukraine and the administrative boundary with Crimea through Entry-Exit Checkpoints. Travellers will no longer be required to install the mobile phone application to monitor isolation or undergo self-isolation/observation. Since the start of the pandemic, UNHCR and other humanitarian actors had advocated for abolishing this requirement for conflict-affected persons, as persons who do not have smartphones, mostly older persons, cannot install the application and thus were limited in visiting government-controlled areas where they collect pensions and other social benefits.



Quarantine measures upon arrival: Testing and quarantine measures are in place in all countries registering significant numbers of sea arrivals.

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. Some 4,100 persons arrived in **Italy** by sea in December (9,500 in November), and some 5,000 persons were either quarantined or being transferred to quarantine facilities as of 26 December. With the exception of unaccompanied and separated children and some persons with specific needs, all arrivals in Lampedusa, Sicily and Calabria usually observe quarantine on offshore ferries. In late December, the shortage of quarantine capacity reportedly resulted in delays by the Ministry of Interior in allocating a port of safety to NGO vessels after rescue at sea operations.

Some 3,200 persons arrived in **Spain** in December (4,000 in November), mostly by sea. Of the December arrivals, 4 people tested positive for COVID-19 and were isolated, as per protocol.

UNHCR in **Greece** advocated with the authorities to ensure consistency in the quarantine period for new arrivals in the islands in line with European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control protocols, appropriate quarantine facilities for persons with specific needs, and UNHCR's access to provide information on asylum to arrivals while respecting health protocols.

Asylum procedures: In **Austria**, UNHCR's recommendations for video interviews in the asylum procedure, issued in June 2020, have gained renewed importance. UNHCR met this month with Federal Administrative Court judg-



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.

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, Croatia, Romania** and **Serbia**. In **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, vaccinations commenced this month at the Lipa centre, which opened in mid-November. Vaccination of persons of concern in private accommodations, centres and informal settlements reportedly continued in **Armenia, Italy, Montenegro** and **Ukraine**. In the **Russian Federation**, partners continue facilitating vaccination through the programme offered by the Russian Red Cross. UNHCR's survey on COVID-19 vaccination among refugees and asylum-seekers in **Azerbaijan** continued, revealing that of the 1,063 surveyed as of end December, 76 per cent had been inoculated through the national vaccination scheme.

Advocacy for inclusion of all persons of concern in national COVID-19 response plans continues, where these are not equally applied to all population groups, for example in **Austria**, where subsidiary protection holders have only limited access to social welfare support and as a consequence cannot benefit from many COVID-19-support measures. In a positive development, following UNHCR's advocacy in **Croatia**, the Ministry of Health confirmed on 9 December that stateless persons and those at risk of statelessness will be included in the national vaccination roll-out. UNHCR and partners are disseminating this information to stateless persons and will monitor implementation of the decision.

COMMUNICATION WITH COMMUNITIES

Communication with communities of concern on vaccination campaigns and the latest COVID-19 prevention measures continued across the region, making use of different channels, in line with the needs and preferences of persons of concern. This month, UNHCR and partners delivered information and awareness sessions in collective accommodation facilities on COVID-19 preventive measures and vaccination, for example in **Armenia, Bulgaria** and **Romania**. In a New Year's appeal, UNHCR's Representative in **Azerbaijan** addressed a [video message](#) on social media to persons of concern, urging them to get vaccinated and continue following public health measures to mitigate risks of COVID-19 contagion. In **Montenegro**, UNHCR distributed information on the importance and availability of COVID-19 vaccination via mobile phone messaging applications and printed materials to refugees and asylum-seekers, including in collective accommodations, as well as by SMS in cooperation with the country's three major telecommunications companies to 667 refugees and persons at risk of statelessness.

CASH-BASED AND IN-KIND ASSISTANCE

Where needed, UNHCR continues delivering COVID-19-related cash and in-kind support to persons of concern or authorities working with them. In **Turkey**, UNHCR's second round of COVID-19 cash assistance was finalized on 13 December, targeting 85,000 vulnerable refugee and asylum-seeking

households, with a top-up in view of the recent volatile economic situation in the country, which caused a sudden spike in the price of essential items. By 12 December, 71,630 households had collected their cash cards from the service provider. This month, UNHCR in **Ukraine** distributed COVID-19 cash assistance to 12 vulnerable internally displaced persons and reimbursed the costs of COVID-19 medical treatment of 1 asylum-seeker and of COVID-19 vaccination services of 20 asylum-seekers. In **Georgia**, UNHCR provided COVID-19 cash assistance to 223 families, including asylum-seekers, refugees, humanitarian status holders and stateless persons, while in **North Macedonia**, 14 asylum-seekers received one-time cash assistance as part of the COVID-19 project under the EU Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace.

In **Greece**, UNHCR delivered 623,508 core relief items and PPE this month to authorities supporting persons of concern on the islands and mainland, as well as 622,548 PPE, personal hygiene and dry food items to Emergency Support to Integration and Accommodation II (ESTIA II) programme partners to help refugees and asylum-seekers meet their basic needs. In **Azerbaijan**, UNHCR distributed 20 individual food parcels this month (2,239 food parcels to date) and, in **Georgia**, UNHCR through its partner delivered food packages and hygiene items 200 vulnerable persons in remote locations in Abkhazia.

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.

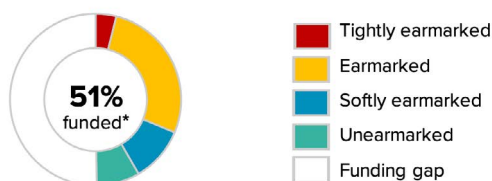
The UNHCR Regional Bureau for Europe is grateful to donors who have provided generous and timely support for the Coronavirus Emergency Situation response globally, and in Europe in particular, including for non-COVID-19-related interventions, which are critical to ensure business continuity.

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.

Requested for UNHCR's COVID-19 response globally in 2021: **USD 924 M**



Total contributed or pledged to UNHCR COVID-19 appeal as of 29 December 2021: **USD 473,434,817**

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

Unearmarked contributions to UNHCR's 2021 global programme

Norway \$80M | Private donors Spain \$75.9M | Sweden \$75.4M | United Kingdom \$40.4M | Private donors Republic of Korea \$38.8M | Netherlands \$36.1M | Denmark \$34.6M | Private donors Japan \$30.9M | Germany \$26M | Japan \$23.4M | France \$20.2M | Private donors Italy \$17.6M | Private donors Sweden \$16.9M | Switzerland \$16.4M | Ireland \$12.5M | Belgium \$11.9M | Italy \$10.7M | Private donors USA \$10.6M

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.

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Useful Links

[UNHCR's revised Coronavirus Emergency Appeal](#)
[UNHCR Global COVID-19 Response](#)
[Previous issues of Europe Region COVID-19 updates](#)

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