

Regional Bureau for Europe

UPDATE # 23

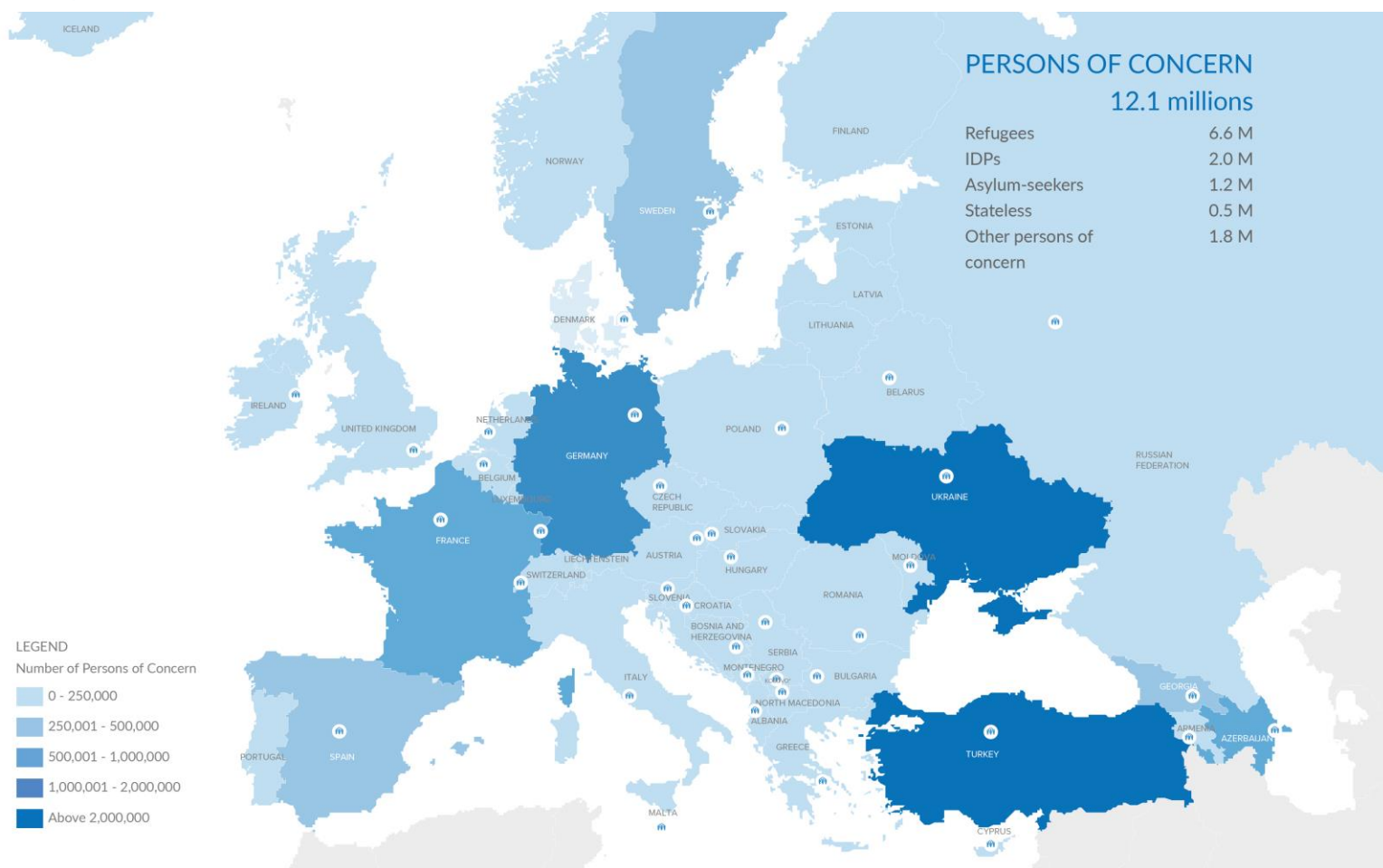
1 December 2020 – 11 January 2021

COVID-19 infection and death rates remained high across the region, and many countries introduced further **movement restrictions** and business closures ahead of the holiday period and extending into January.

Despite tightened COVID-19 prevention measures taken by some States, **access to territory for persons of concern** is generally maintained.

Movement restrictions continue to impact UNHCR staff in country offices. To date, 34 offices are **partially teleworking** while three are on **full telework mode**.

Populations of Concern



SOURCE: UNHCR 2020 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, 36 countries have reported cases among persons of concern at some point, and some of the concerned individuals have in the meantime recovered. However, any figures or estimates should be taken with caution due to varying approaches to testing, data segregation and reporting.
- With COVID-19 contagion and death rates remaining high region-wide, numerous countries tightened internal movement restrictions, extended curfews and applied more stringent social gathering measures for the holiday period. Closing of non-essential commerce and reintroduction of quarantine periods for international travellers are among the additional prevention measures that authorities have introduced. After the detection of a more contagious virus strain in the UK, numerous countries have halted or restricted travel to/from the UK.
- Voluntary COVID-19 vaccination started across much of the region during December. Nationwide vaccinations were launched in **Russia** in early December, for workers at high risk and people above 60 years old, including documented foreigners with public health insurance. The EU started rolling out its vaccination plan in the last week of December, in line with the EU's [vaccines strategy, according to which](#) priority consideration should be given to health care workers, people over 60 years old or at particular risk, vulnerable socioeconomic groups and workers who cannot physically distance. Other groups unable to physically distance, including in refugee shelters, should likewise be considered among priority populations, according to the [Commission](#). By the end of December 2020, many other countries in the region had also started voluntary vaccination campaigns, and the remaining plan to start around February 2021. Some countries in the region have also announced receiving vaccine doses through the global COVAX alliance, for example **Ukraine**. UNHCR is [calling](#) for the inclusion of people of concern in vaccination campaigns.
- As of 5 January, three UNHCR offices were on full telework mode, while 34 offices are in partial telework mode. In the reporting period, one office shifted from full to partial and one office from partial to full telework mode, adjusting to the fluid situation and changing rules. Field and on-site visits to reception centres are strictly regulated in some countries.

UNHCR Areas of Intervention



PROTECTION

- **Quarantine measures upon arrival:** Quarantine measures are in place in all countries registering significant numbers of sea arrivals. However, these protocols can limit in some cases UNHCR and partners' access to persons of concern, notably to provide information on procedures and for identification of people with special protection needs. In December, 1,591 individuals arrived by sea in **Italy**. All arrivals observe a 10-day quarantine. As of 31 December, 1,040 persons were observing quarantine, including 433 persons offshore on one of the five quarantine ferries. Throughout December, new arrivals to Lampedusa were swiftly transferred to one of the quarantine locations or to pre-removal facilities so that, by the end of the month, the Lampedusa hotspot, with a capacity for 260 people, was hosting 41 people and was no longer overcrowded. To support authorities with the identification of persons with specific needs, the first phase of a pilot project developed by UNHCR, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and UNICEF was concluded in early December. A tool to systematically identify vulnerable new arrivals allows now for swift referrals to appropriate services for follow-up. UNHCR also stepped up its cooperation with the Italian Red Cross Society, which currently manages the five quarantine ferries, including on training Red Cross staff to ensure that new arrivals are apprised of information on international protection and asylum procedures in Italy.
- In **Spain**, 4,565 persons arrived in December, mostly by sea. Consistent with recent trends, 77% of these persons arrived in the Canary Islands (3,530). Eleven arrivals tested positive for COVID-19 out of the approximately 600 people who arrived through the Alboran sea. In line with COVID-19 protocols in Andalusia, those who tested positive were isolated and some 200 people who were on the same boats were transferred to quarantine reception centres. Due to quarantine measures at ports, UNHCR's partner was unable to access some 332 people (47% of December's arrivals in the Andalusian coast) and UNHCR is following up to ensure they receive the information in the first line reception centres.
- **Reception conditions:** Overcrowded and inadequately equipped reception areas continue to pose a challenge to residents' implementing of social distancing and other preventive measures. In **Serbia**, for example, the country's official

shelter capacity of 5,665 is insufficient to appropriately and safely accommodate the over 8,000 refugees and migrants currently in the country. In **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, the non-winterized IOM-run Lipa emergency tent camp was closed on 23 December, with an estimated 1,300 single men still on site, unable to follow health measures. A fire broke out upon that closure, destroying infrastructure but not resulting in any casualties. Authorities relocated hundreds of people to other centres, and as of 6 January, some 600-700 people were believed to remain on site. The situation improved when the EU Commission granted EUR 3.5 million in aid to address the situation and military tents were set up on 11 January, a step [welcomed](#) by UNHCR.

- **Ireland [reported](#)** its fifth outbreak in an accommodation centre for asylum-seekers. Residents who tested positive for COVID-19 were accommodated in self-isolation rooms or moved to off-site isolation facilities. In reception centres in Melilla, **Spain**, at least 44 residents, including asylum-seekers, tested positive for COVID-19 in December and were moved to isolation areas. In response, local authorities restricted freedom of movement for centre residents and closed the centres to new arrivals. **Italy** also continued to report individual outbreaks in facilities. In a positive development, the Ministry of Interior and the National Institute for Health, Migration and Poverty signed an agreement on 22 December to monitor COVID-19 cases in reception facilities and adopt prevention and mitigation measures as of January 2021.
- Implementation of COVID-19 prevention measures has also led to long centre closures and deteriorating living conditions, increasing risks of tensions among residents. In **Cyprus**, residents of the Pournara camp have generally been prevented from leaving since 12 November, while new admissions continued, resulting in higher numbers of residents cohabitating in a facility inadequate for the estimated 1,500 residents. Despite no new COVID-19 cases in December, the Kofinou centre also remained closed, leaving some 27 school-age children without adequate access to education and residents unable to purchase hygiene items, adequate clothing or food items with their monthly cash grant. To address these needs, UNHCR coordinated the provision of material assistance to residents, liaised with local schools and provided equipment for online schooling.
- **Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs):** In **Ukraine**, movements through Entry Exit Checkpoints (EECPs) remained restricted in December, with only two EECPs functioning: in Stanytsia Luhanska (daily) and Novotroitske (twice a week). From 1 to 27 December, 1,171 people crossed at the Novotroitske EECP. Some 40,543 crossings were recorded at the Stanytsia Luhanska EECP, the highest number since movement restrictions were introduced in March. The increase is linked to the more regular functioning of the EECP after the requirement of special permissions to cross the “contact line” was lifted in November.



HEALTH

- **Inclusion in vaccination plans:** Refugees are generally included in national preparedness and response measures on a par with residents and should therefore also be included in national vaccine schemes. In **Croatia**, beneficiaries of the Regional Housing Programme (returnees) in an older persons’ home were, along with other groups at high risk, among the first vaccine recipients. The **German** vaccination regulation specifically includes persons accommodated and working in reception centres and communal accommodation facilities for asylum-seekers and refugees. In **Malta**, the Health Minister [confirmed](#) the vaccine will be available to all residents, including migrants and foreigners who reside in the country, free of charge and on a voluntary basis. Elsewhere, as national vaccination plans are developed, UNHCR continues engaging with authorities to ensure inclusion of persons of concern based on the same criteria applied to citizens. In the **Czech Republic**, after discussions with UNHCR in mid-December, the Ministry of Interior submitted recommendations to the Ministry of Health to include all categories of persons of concern to UNHCR in the vaccination scheme. In **Bulgaria**, UNHCR and UNICEF jointly addressed the Ministry of Health to advocate for inclusion.
- In **Greece**, as of 3 January, 1,347 persons of concern had tested positive for COVID-19 since the beginning of the pandemic. Of these, 595 were on the mainland and 752 on the islands. In the meantime, some of these people have recovered.
- Between 16 March 2020 and 3 January 2021, UNHCR has provided accommodation and protection services to 2,180 asylum-seekers at high risk of COVID-19 complications, by moving them out of the islands’ RICs and the Mavrovouni emergency site in Lesbos.

- An estimated 7,300 people are hosted in the Mavrovouni site as of 3 January. To prevent and mitigate the spread of the pandemic, asylum-seekers have undergone rapid COVID-19 testing by national health authorities before entering the site. Based on health protocols, all persons testing positive have been directed to the isolation area, alongside family members. According to the authorities, there have been no confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the site since 25 December (as of 4 January).
- Works continued to upgrade the quarantine site for new arrivals in Western Lesvos Municipality, including groundwork and installation of temporary shelter, hygiene facilities and solar streetlights. An isolation area at the Evros Reception and Identification Centre (RIC) was completed, as was an additional isolation area in the Samos RIC. Meanwhile, works continued in two locations in Chios.



COMMUNICATION WITH COMMUNITIES

- The information needs of persons of concern have grown exponentially across the Europe region as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic. To ensure persons of concern remain apprised of the latest information on relevant procedures, services and COVID-19-related restrictions, offices disseminate information through established channels, as well as new ones. Sixteen countries in the region have UNHCR HELP pages in place with up-to-date information on the host State response to COVID-19, and many, like UNHCR [Greece](#), maintain the website in various languages. In [Italy](#), the information portal JUMA Refugees Map Services and its COVID-19 information pages received more than 133,000 visits in 2020. In [Turkey](#), for example, more than 11,200 persons of concern are by now receiving instant information about COVID-19 and other issues through a WhatsApp communication tree.
- Offices in the region are also scaling up their communication efforts related to national vaccination campaigns, to ensure that persons of concern are aware of such campaigns and to dispel any harmful misinformation or rumours.



CASH-BASED AND IN-KIND ASSISTANCE

- **Cash-based interventions** remain important where livelihoods of refugee and asylum-seeking families have been compromised due to the pandemic and lockdown. In [Ukraine](#), as COVID-19 measures continued disproportionately affecting the informal labour sector, UNHCR provided a second round of COVID-19 cash assistance to 540 refugee and asylum-seeking families on 17 December to cover winter needs, such as warm clothing, rent and heating.
- In [Greece](#), to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 and movement restrictions, UNHCR provided winter cash support to all households residing in the mainland and islands in all types of accommodation. The winter cash top-up amounts to EUR 45 per individual and was loaded to UNHCR cash cards on 29 December. Some 72,837 beneficiaries in 39,926 households received the cash top-up countrywide.
- In [Turkey](#), UNHCR and the authorities continue working on the one-off COVID-19 emergency cash assistance, with some 106,000 households approved for payment, 80,000 of which received the cash by the end of December.
- **In-kind:** UNHCR continues delivering COVID-19-related in-kind support, where needed, to persons of concern, host communities or authorities working with them. In [Ukraine](#), for example, UNHCR and its NGO partner distributed PPE and disinfectants to 108 medical institutions and social service centres in Donetsk NGCA (non-government-controlled areas) to enable them to safely provide services to conflict-affected persons in the coming months.
- In December, UNHCR and OCHA facilitated four humanitarian convoys to NGCA carrying PPE, hygiene items, WASH and COVID-19-related materials, as well as 500 CRI kits for conflict-affected families with specific needs and 225 metric tons of construction equipment, timber, roofing sheets, bedding and kitchen sets for UNHCR-led projects.
- In [Greece](#), UNHCR delivered more than 65,000 PPEs, 6,000 hygiene items and 5,000 CRIs in December, including gloves, masks and disinfectants to authorities and actors on the ground supporting persons of concern on the islands and mainland Greece. UNHCR also supported access to WASH on the islands with 65 portable WASH units, including

chemical toilets, showers and hand washing stations. In addition, since mid-March, UNHCR has provided 92,000 CRIs, 231,000 hygiene items and 555,300 PPEs (gloves, masks, antiseptic wipes and disinfectants) to the Hellenic Coast Guard to help mitigate COVID-19 spread at their local stations where new arrivals occur.

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;
- **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 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 **Turkey**, UNHCR is working with WHO, UNFPA and the RCO to develop a proposal for the UN COVID-19 Response and Recovery Multi-Partner Trust Fund. The project will focus on the provision of telemedicine and (rural) medical outreach to enhance access to medical services for vulnerable populations. UNHCR will support the project through risk communication and awareness-raising on the new available services.

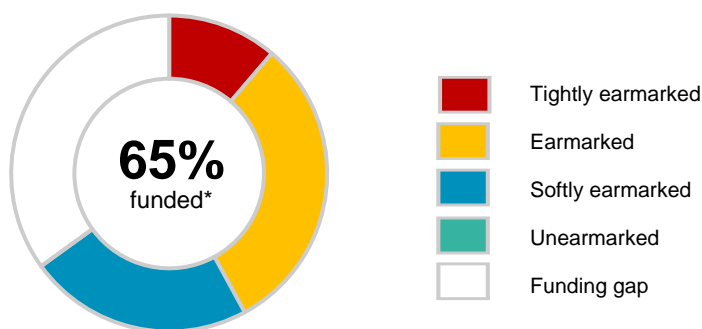
Financial Information

- The **COVID-19 Global Humanitarian Response Plan (GHRP)**, covering the period April-December 2020, included UNHCR's financial requirements amounting to USD 745 million to boost preparedness, prevention and response activities to address immediate public health needs of refugees and host communities worldwide. The amount presented in the appeal did not represent the full magnitude of UNHCR's engagement to support governments' efforts in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, including in Europe.
- UNHCR released in December 2020 its **supplementary appeal for 2021 COVID response** seeking an additional US\$455 million. While most of the pandemic-related activities amounting to USD 477 million have been already mainstreamed and included in UNHCR's 2021 Global Appeal totalling USD 8.6 billion, 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 until the end of 2020: USD 745.1 M



Total contributed or pledged to UNHCR COVID-19 appeal: USD 471 M (65%)

including: United States of America \$186.3M | Germany \$62.7M | European Union \$39.8M | United Kingdom \$26.4M | Japan \$25.1M | African Development Bank \$18.3M | Private donors \$18.0M | Denmark \$14.6M | United Nations Foundation \$10.0M | Unilever \$7.9M | CERF \$6.9M | Canada \$6.4M | France \$4.5M | Education Cannot Wait \$3.9M | Qatar Charity \$3.5M | Spain \$3.4M | Ireland \$3.3M | Austria \$3.1M | Saudi Arabia \$3.0M | Sweden \$3.0M | Sony Corporation \$2.9M | FUNDAÇÃO ITAÚ PARA EDUCAÇÃO E CULTURA \$2.8 M | Finland \$2.4M | USA for UNHCR \$2.3M

Unearmarked contributions to UNHCR's 2020 programme

Sweden \$88.2M | Private donors Spain \$73.5M | Norway \$41.4M | Private donors Republic of Korea \$37.5M | Netherlands \$36.1M | Denmark \$34.6M | United Kingdom \$31.7M | Private Donors Japan \$31.6M | Germany \$25.9M | Japan \$23.8M | Private Donors Italy \$17.6M | Switzerland \$16.4M | Private Donors Sweden \$14.2M | France \$14 M | Private Donors USA \$10.8 | Italy \$10.6 M

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