

# Regional Bureau for Europe

## UPDATE # 21

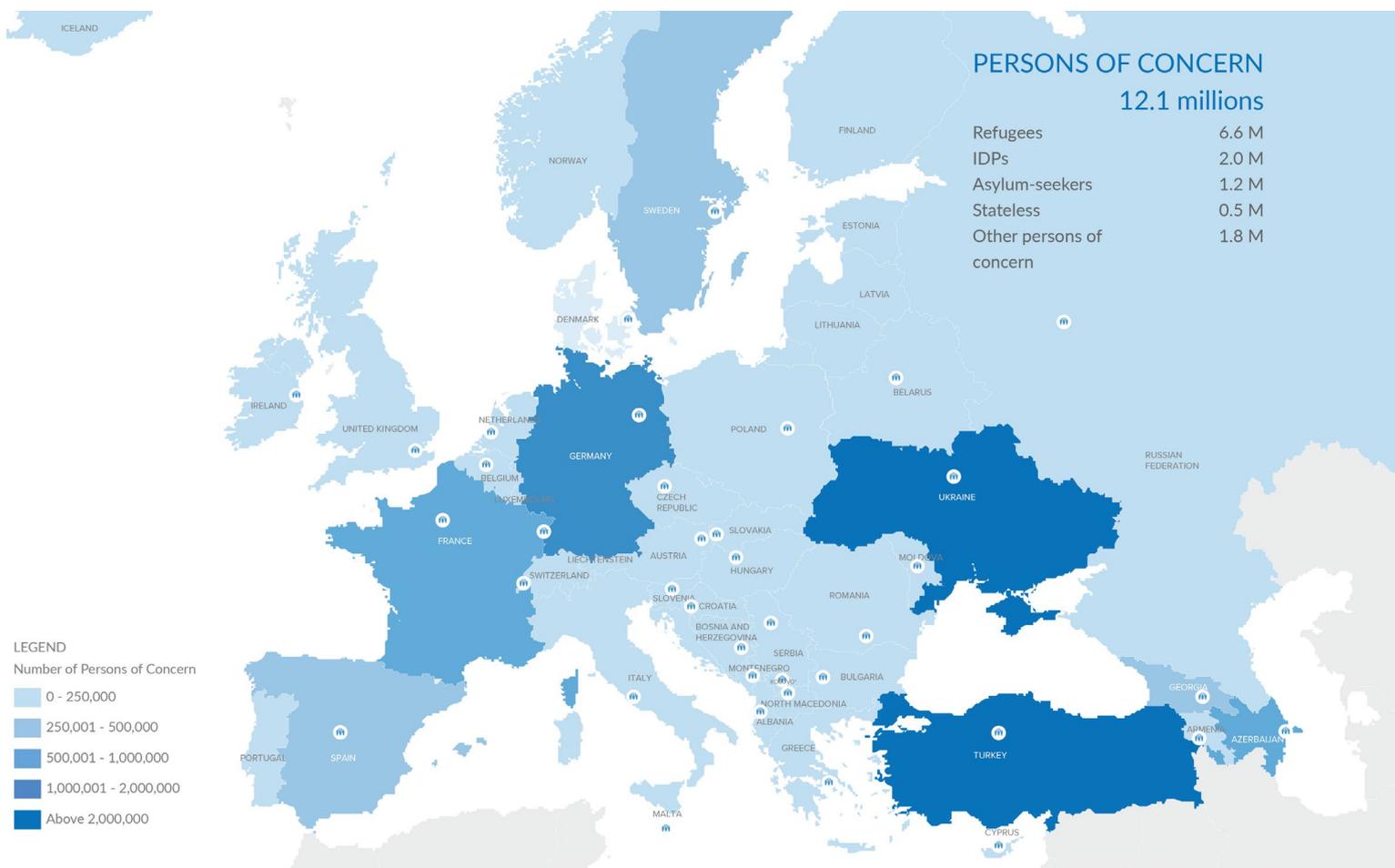
27 October – 10 November 2020

COVID-19 infection rates continue to rise sharply across the region, and many countries are progressively reinstating **movement restrictions** or **extending states of emergency**.

Despite the current strengthening of COVID-19 prevention measures taken by some states, **access to territory** is generally maintained.

New movement restrictions have begun to impact UNHCR staff work in country offices. To date, 34 offices are **partially teleworking** while 3 have returned to **full telework mode**.

## 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 should be taken with caution due to varying approaches to testing, data segregation and reporting.
- As COVID-19 cases continue to increase region-wide, numerous countries have imposed partial lockdowns and curfews. Other preventive measures are also being strengthened, including additional mask requirements, expansion of remote education and closing of non-essential commerce, while health providers and hospitals have raised alarm as capacities are reaching their limit.
- During the reporting period, three UNHCR offices reverted back to full telework mode while 34 offices are in partial telework mode. Field and on-site visits to reception centres are strictly regulated in some countries, due to the increasing spread of the virus. As a result, access to UNHCR premises by persons of concern is subject to adjustments, in line with respective national health regulations. In **Ukraine**, for example, only urgent protection-related requests can be addressed at the office, after mandatory temperature screening. For all other cases, remote counselling is conducted via telephone or online.

## UNHCR Areas of Intervention



### PROTECTION

- **Quarantine measures for new arrivals:** In the past fortnight, nearly 3,500 individuals arrived by sea in **Italy**. Lampedusa remained the primary disembarkation site, where some 1,240 persons were accommodated at the island's hotspot with a capacity of 200 people as of 9 November. COVID-19 testing of new arrivals continues, as well as quarantine onshore or offshore. As of 9 November, some 3,411 individuals were in quarantine, the majority offshore.
- Increasing numbers of COVID-19 cases on offshore quarantine ferries are resulting in smaller groups of persons disembarking daily, as those testing positive or coming in contact with positive cases are required to prolong their quarantine onboard. This remains of concern to UNHCR, as access to refugees and migrants disembarking quarantine ferries remains limited.
- In a positive development, the Italian Government disembarked all unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) from offshore ferries to onshore quarantine, except those who tested positive for COVID-19 and are expected to disembark soon if asymptomatic. Newly arrived UASC are now transferred directly to onshore reception facilities. UNHCR developed a document outlining minimum standards and recommendations on UASC quarantine to be shared as technical guidance with NGOs and possibly institutional stakeholders.
- In **Spain**, 5,662 persons arrived by sea in the past two weeks, including some 2,000 over the 7-8 November weekend alone. This is the highest number in such a short period of time since 2006, when 39,000 persons disembarked in the islands. Further, a noteworthy increase in arrivals to the Balearic Islands was recorded between 30 October and 2 November, when some 400 persons arrived. Some 18 arrivals tested positive for COVID-19 and were transferred to the indicated quarantine locations.
- **Mixed movements** across **South Eastern and Central Europe** have been continuously observed since the opening of borders in summer and have not receded despite the resurgence of the pandemic in autumn. Pushbacks continue to be reported as well as omission of referrals to asylum systems, on which UNHCR is following up.
- Meanwhile, countries report increasing numbers of people hosted in reception centres. In **Croatia**, the operation reports a 20% increase in the number of asylum-seekers hosted in two reception centres since mid-October. In **Serbia**, authorities have transferred some 460 people from squatter settlements and overcrowded centres in the north to centres in the south and east of the country.
- The closure of emergency facilities at the land border between **Italy** and **Slovenia** due to COVID-19 and curtailed access to public services, coupled with deteriorating weather conditions in the coming months, are likely to further aggravate

the circumstances of persons of concern entering Italy through South Eastern Europe. UNHCR continues to be present on mission in Italy's border province to strengthen coordination among local institutions and civil society, collect testimonies from persons of concern and document readmission practices at the border.

- Due to overcrowding in centres in some countries, such as **Serbia**, persons of concern and migrants have found themselves in very precarious situations, sleeping out in the open without means to observe basic COVID-19 prevention measures.
- **Reception conditions:** Overcrowding at centres remains a challenge for social distancing and other preventive measures. Further, identification of COVID-19 cases often leads to reduced access to all camp residents by UNHCR and partners. Due to the increase of new arrivals in Spain's **Canary Islands**, reception conditions remain sub-standard, with a group of some 2,000 persons currently hosted in unsuitable tents near the port of Arguineguin (Gran Canaria). In **Cyprus**, access to the Pournara main camp by UNHCR and its partners has been limited by the authorities after a COVID-19 case was identified. The Kofinou Reception Centre was closed on 30 October for quarantine after four persons tested positive for the virus, all of whom were sent to the Eden Rehabilitation Centre, in line with the quarantine protocol. Three detention centres in **Malta** remain overcrowded, with around 1,236 asylum-seekers detained at Safi, Lyster and Hal Far Refugee Centre, against an estimated combined capacity of 1,100.
- **Access to procedures:** Increasing COVID-19 infection rates among the general population have challenged the capacity and continuation of registration and asylum procedures and are likely to negatively impact wait times for decisions and increase the applications backlog. In **Cyprus**, for example, on 9 November, the Asylum Service suspended in-person asylum interviews for an initial period of one week, and authorities in **Bosnia and Herzegovina** cancelled the registration of asylum claims and RSD interviews scheduled for November. Similarly, in **Italy**, some Territorial Commissions have reduced the number of daily in-person RSD interviews while others are considering suspending them. In the **United Kingdom**, to limit the exposure of screening officers to new arrivals, screening interviews at the port of Dover have been condensed, resulting in delays in identification of persons who may have experienced violence, trafficking or trauma on the route.
- In **Hungary**, on 30 October, the European Commission announced the opening of an infringement procedure on grounds that the country's new asylum procedures introduced in response to the coronavirus pandemic violate EU law.
- **Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs):** In **Ukraine**, to date, only two EECs remain operational - in Stanytsia Luhanska and Novotroitske. Since the March movement restrictions, only two checkpoints functioned to allow people to cross the "contact line." UNHCR and partners have been advocating for eased civilian movement restrictions since the outbreak of the pandemic. This fortnight, fewer people than the average in past months crossed at the two open EECs following the JFO Command's decision to suspend the movement, with humanitarian exceptions.
- On 5 November, UNHCR facilitated the delivery of a convoy carrying 3,721 tons of humanitarian assistance by UNICEF, WHO, and the NGOs People in Need and Médecins du Monde to Luhansk Non-Government Controlled Area (NGCA), including over 500,000 disposable medical masks, 25,600 medical gloves, and Non-Food Items (NFIs) for medical institutions, such as oxygen generators, pulse oximeters and medical couches.



#### HEALTH

- In **Greece**, as of 25 October, 1,210 persons of concern had tested positive for COVID-19 since the beginning of the pandemic. Of these, 520 were on the mainland and 689 on the islands. In the meantime, some of these people have recovered.
- As the country entered a renewed lockdown on 7 November, movement in and out of refugee sites, including RICs was suspended. Specific measures are pending guidance by central authorities and hence not yet uniformly applied. UNHCR is monitoring the implementation of measures to refugee hosting sites. In the new emergency site on Lesbos, UNHCR has worked with site management staff to ensure the new restrictions are communicated to site residents via SMS, loudspeakers and in hardcopy with the food distribution.
- Since 16 March, UNHCR has provided accommodation and protection services to 2,125 asylum-seekers at high risk of COVID-19 complications, by moving them out of the islands RICs and the Lesbos emergency site.

- Quarantine spaces for new arrivals are available on Chios, Leros, and in three locations on Lesbos, including the new emergency site Mavrovouni. Technical works for the improvement of Megala Therma quarantine site for new arrivals are expected to start on 13 November and will include ground works, installation of temporary shelters, hygiene facilities and solar streetlights.
- An estimated 7,300 people are hosted in the Mavrovouni emergency site on Lesbos as of 10 November. Some 50 persons remain in quarantine, of which 22 are COVID-19 positive and isolated alongside family members. Improvement of living conditions on the site is key to reduce the risk of virus spread. UNHCR began additional technical works in the medical hub of the emergency site, which will include a dental clinic, a pharmacy and spaces for psychosocial care. On the main site, all UNHCR tents have in the meantime been enhanced with insulation material and wood flooring in preparation for winter. NGOs have also started insulating the tents provided by other aid actors. Hygiene and sanitary facilities were enhanced but remain overall inadequate.



### COMMUNICATION WITH COMMUNITIES

- With new movement restrictions and partial lockdowns, UNHCR offices across the region have disseminated information on new regulations through the established channels used by persons of concern, as in **Austria** through the HELP website and the closed community Facebook group.
- In **Croatia**, 320 persons of concern used the UNHCR hotline in October, twice as many compared to September. Some two thirds consented for UNHCR to share their intention to seek asylum and 31% eventually did. Notably, 60 of these callers reported having been pushed back, while none of the callers did in September.
- In the **Czech Republic**, UNHCR partner OPU reactivated its online volunteer support for refugee families to help with the online/distance education. Where possible, participatory assessments were carried out by multi-functional teams observing health measures, for example in an integration facility hosting refugees in Prague. To facilitate collection of AGD-related information from asylum-seekers at reception and detention facilities during the pandemic, UNHCR produced a multi-language online tool while also making the printed questionnaire form available in the facilities. The online tool served as model for a similar tool for international protection holders to use throughout the year.



### CASH-BASED ASSISTANCE AND LIVELIHOODS

- In **Ukraine**, an additional 34 families received cash as individual protection assistance. This measure was introduced in July, and to date, 98 families of IDPs with specific needs have received this type of assistance, to help them better cope with the socio-economic impact of COVID-19.
- In addition, UNHCR continues to deliver in-kind support where needed to persons of concern or authorities working with host communities. In **Moldova**, for example, upon request from authorities, the operation procured and delivered personal protective equipment for border police staff working at the border crossing points.
- In **Turkey**, UNHCR and the Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM) are preparing for the second phase of emergency COVID-19 cash support. UNHCR has reached 21,555 households with the first phase of COVID-19 emergency cash, and the total figure is expected to reach to 85,000 households by the end of 2020 with the support of the European Union.
- In **Ukraine**, as of 9 November, UNHCR completed the distribution of hygiene kits to social service centres in Luhansk NGCA as part of its Quick Impact Projects (QIPs) initiated during the pandemic. Assistance was provided to over 500 medical and social workers at six facilities along the “contact line.”

## 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.

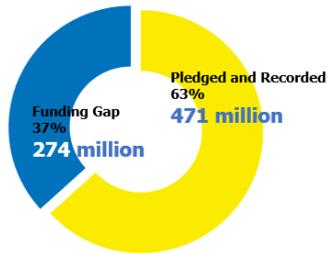
## Working in partnership

- 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 **Greece**, UNHCR continues supporting Government 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 boost preparedness, prevention and response activities to address immediate public health needs of refugees and host communities worldwide. 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.
- 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 the year:



#### Total contributed or pledged to UNHCR COVID-19 appeal

**USD 471 M (63%)**

Including: United States of America \$186.3M | Germany \$62.7M | European Union \$34.1M | United Kingdom \$25.7M | 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 | Education Cannot Wait \$3.9M | Qatar Charity \$3.5M | Spain \$3.4M | France \$3.4M | Ireland \$3.3M | Austria \$3.1M | Saudi Arabia \$3.0M | Sweden \$3.0M | Sony Corporation \$2.9M | Finland \$2.4M | USA for UNHCR \$2.3M |

#### Unearmarked contributions to UNHCR's 2020 programme

Sweden \$76.4M | Private donors Spain \$59.9M | Norway \$41.4M | Netherlands \$36.1M | Denmark \$34.6M | United Kingdom \$31.7M | Private donors Republic of Korea \$30.6M | Germany \$25.9M | Private Donors Japan \$25.1M | Japan \$23.8M | Switzerland \$16.4M | Private Donors Italy \$15.7M | France \$14 M | Private Donors Sweden \$11.7M | Italy \$10.6 M |

#### Useful Links

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

[UNHCR operations overview in Europe](#)

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

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