



# 5 KEY CALLS

## TO THE EUROPEAN UNION ON THE COVID-19 RESPONSE

**In the face of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) crisis, we are all vulnerable. The virus has shown that it does not discriminate – but many refugees, those forcibly displaced, and the stateless are at heightened risk.**

Over 85 percent of the world's refugees are hosted in developing regions where health systems are already overwhelmed and under-capacitated. Many live in overcrowded camps, settlements, makeshift shelters or reception centres, where they lack adequate access to health services, clean water and sanitation. The socio-economic impact of this crisis will likely strip many forcibly displaced of their income. The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) together with our sister UN agencies and other partner organizations are working to respond to and mitigate the impact of COVID-19.

The European Union (EU) can also play a leading role in protecting refugees, forcibly displaced and the stateless both inside and outside its borders. Through financial and political support, the EU can help to manage a global crisis which is exacerbating vulnerabilities and inequalities. The EU Communication on the Global Response to COVID-19 serves as a basis to guide future EU responses.

This crisis demands a coherent, effective international approach that leaves no-one behind. We can only overcome this when each and every one of us is protected.

1

**ENSURE ACCESS TO ASSISTANCE FOR ALL:**

The impact of COVID-19 exacerbates inequalities and any EU response must include the world's most vulnerable people. The health of everybody is linked and everyone – including refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced people and the stateless – should be able to access health facilities and social and economic services, with access to relevant information, wherever they may be.



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2

**PROVIDE MORE FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE GLOBALLY:** COVID-19 has brought many aspects of life to a standstill – but wars and other crises have not stopped, and action to save lives, alleviate suffering and end displacement remains imperative. The EU, the largest donor globally, should continue to provide further and flexible financial support to countries hosting large numbers of refugees, as well to aid organizations on the ground delivering essential services to the forcibly displaced and their hosts. EU financial assistance for forcibly displaced and their hosts, managing the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 is equally important.

3

**PRESERVE ACCESS TO ASYLUM:** We can only tackle this virus when each and every one of us is protected. This also means continuing to uphold international standards and laws and good practice when it comes to protecting people fleeing war, persecution and conflict, to ensure that the essential aspects of asylum are preserved, including access to territory and dignified reception conditions. UNHCR has provided guidance on how this can be done in its [Practical recommendations and good practice on the response to COVID 19](#). Rescue at sea also remains a humanitarian imperative, and rescue and subsequent disembarkation in a place of safety can be managed in a manner which respects international human rights and refugee protection standards, including the principle of non-refoulement, while sensitive to legitimate public health considerations, through quarantine and health checks.

4

**ENSURE SOLUTIONS AND SOLIDARITY:** EU Member States should retain emergency resettlement from third countries as a life-saving tool wherever possible and seek innovative ways to maintain resettlement processing. In addition, solidarity between EU Member States, including through relocation, is needed to ensure the safety of the most vulnerable, especially children.

5

**EMPOWER REFUGEES TO ASSIST IN THE RESPONSE:** In the spirit of a whole of society approach, we must also remember that refugees, forcibly displaced people and the stateless have skills and resources to assist in the response. By recognizing their qualifications, refugees can be part of the solution.

