

# Regional Bureau for Europe

UPDATE # 10

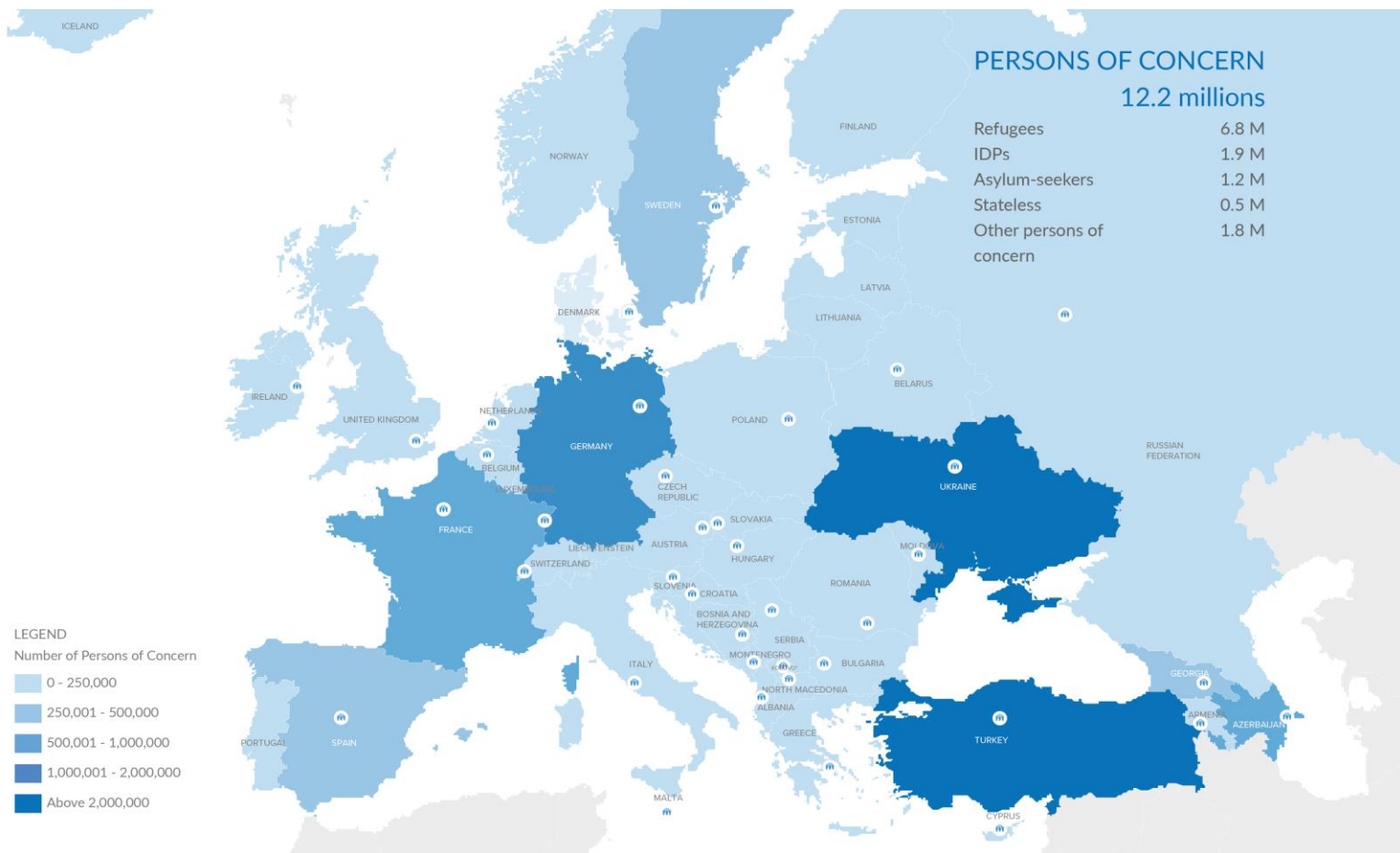
4 – 12 June 2020

Across the region, further **movement and border restrictions** were lifted, which shall facilitate **access to territory and international protection**.

UNHCR staff is gradually moving back to office premises, with the vast majority of offices having shifted **from full-time to partial telework**. As of 12 June, only one out of 37 offices UNHCR offices is fully teleworking.

**UNHCR and partners' physical access to persons of concern** is improving with the progressive lifting of movement restrictions, in compliance with COVID-19 preventive measures.

## Populations of Concern



SOURCE: UNHCR STATISTICAL REPORT AS OF END OF JUNE 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, 21 countries have reported cases among persons of concern, and some of them have already recovered. However, any figure or estimate at this point needs to be taken with caution due to differing approaches to testing, data segregation and reporting.
- On 5 June, European Union **Home Affairs Ministers** agreed that any remaining border restrictions shall be non-discriminatory, proportionate and based on objective health-related criteria. With regards to entry of third country nationals, Ministers agreed upon a unified approach looking at gradual lifting of the restrictions on non-essential travel due to COVID-19, which is expected to take place after 1 July.
- As a result of lifted restrictions, some UNHCR country offices are planning to gradually resume some of the suspended activities, for example protection monitoring at borders. As of this week, only one UNHCR office is still fully teleworking, while 23 offices have shifted from full to partial telework. 13 have been on partial telework throughout the pandemic.

## UNHCR Response

- UNHCR's response to the COVID-19 situation is focusing on:
  - Continuing to **provide protection assistance** including legal aid, 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, as necessary, confirmed or suspected COVID-19 cases;
  - 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;
  - In some operations, supporting authorities in identifying alternative **accommodation** or bringing current housing for asylum-seekers up to acceptable protection and hygienic standards;
  - **Ensuring the inclusion** of persons of concern, host communities and service providers in the provision and distribution of adequate hygienic items;
  - **Continuous advocacy** to ensure the inclusion of persons of concern in national COVID-19 preparedness and response plans;
  - **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.

## UNHCR Areas of Intervention



### PROTECTION

- On 6 June, **Malta** allowed for the disembarkation of some 425 people who had been held offshore on tourist vessels for weeks, some since the end of April. The disembarkation followed 24 hours of bad weather and sea conditions that led to an untenable situation on board. The team provided information upon arrival and assisted in identifying vulnerable people, the majority of whom were unaccompanied or separated children, the youngest being around 14 years old. People were taken to two detention facilities and placed in a fourteen-day quarantine as a COVID-19 prevention measure.

- On 12 June, **UNHCR called Greece to investigate reports of push-backs** at sea and land borders with Turkey, resulting in the return of migrants and asylum-seekers after they had reached Greek territory or territorial waters. Such allegations have increased since March and UNHCR has continuously addressed its concerns with the Greek Government.
- As reported in the past weeks, confirmation of push-backs of hundreds of individuals at various borders in Central and South Eastern Europe have reached UNHCR offices, translating a worrisome protection situation. A number of individuals reported denial of asylum, theft, mistreatment and physical abuse by border guards.
- As movement restrictions are gradually lifted, increasing onward movement is observed also from **France** to the **United Kingdom** through the Channel, after these crossings had previously dropped due to COVID-19. Offices in these locations are liaising with authorities to adequately address these movements.
- Similarly, the number of people on transit through South Eastern Europe continues to rise. Protection monitoring and survey missions at the borders confirm a higher number of intercepted people in some countries, for example in **Albania** and **Serbia**. The team in **North Macedonia** has conducted over 40 field visits to southern borders and remains engaged with local communities and institutions.
- To ensure physical space in reception centres, some countries continue working on expanding reception capacities. In **Albania**, all residents of two facilities at the border were transferred to the National Reception Centre for Asylum-Seekers in Tirana, with the support of UNHCR and CARITAS. This transfer was the first since the pandemic started and had been requested by border police to increase accommodation capacity at the border in view of adequately anticipating higher numbers of arrivals. In the **Netherlands**, one centre has been designated as quarantine location for COVID-19 affected persons of concern from all over the country.
- Reception conditions remain dire where centres are overcrowded or under-equipped. Many persons of concern in the region are still living in facilities with problematic hygienic circumstances. In these settings, UNHCR continues to advocate and offer support for improved conditions that enable residents to comply with health measures, for access for humanitarian actors to these facilities and for effective access to asylum procedures is ongoing.
- In some countries, the situation of access to detention facilities has positively evolved, for example in **Poland**. Although preventive measures and restrictions are still in place, national health services are testing the most vulnerable detainees and staff in certain facilities for COVID-19. Similarly, restrictions on visits to the Temporary Accommodation Centre in **Moldova** were also lifted this week.
- **Germany** has decided to start remote interviews for resettlement procedures in Lebanon and is coordinating with UNHCR the assessment of the procedure feasibility. This would be the first time Germany would use such measures since 2014, which is seen as a very encouraging development.
- Across the region, advocacy continues where amendments are envisioned for procedures to comply with new health measures. In **France**, the Office has discussed in early June with relevant authorities and legal aid associations the changes at the National Court of Asylum on single judge adjudications and the standardised use of video-hearings, recommending a mechanism to monitor the impact of procedural amendments.

  
**HEALTH**

- In **Armenia**, 150 non-medical masks were distributed to the residents of the reception and integration centres this week. Earlier, some 1,000 masks were donated by another partner, Homeland Development Initiative Foundation (HDIF), for distribution among persons of concern and service providers. Displaced Syrian women are producing masks within a partnership between UNHCR, MADE51 and HDIF.
- IKEA in **Croatia** made a generous donation to UNHCR to mitigate health and economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic for some 500 refugees. In the course of the coming weeks, IKEA products, including different household items and products for children, will be distributed to refugees across the country. The

IKEA and UNHCR global partnership aims at improving the livelihoods of people forced to flee their homes around the world.

- In **Greece**, as of 7 June, 212 persons of concern have tested positive to COVID-19. Four are located on Lesbos (in the Megala Therma quarantine area of the Apanemo site) and 208 in mainland sites. Following the identification of one additional case on mainland this week, a lockdown was imposed on the affected site until 19 June. On the islands, movement restrictions in the Reception and Identification Centres (RICs) were extended to 21 June.
- The transfer of older and immunocompromised asylum-seekers from island RICs to alternative accommodations continued, where compliance with COVID-19 preventive measures is easier. To date, 1,124 persons have been moved. Reception conditions on the islands remain dire for the 31,600 people living in overcrowded and unhygienic conditions in the RICs with a hosting capacity for 5,400 people.
- The Apanemo site on Lesbos is currently the only one ready to accommodate people placed in quarantine prior to their transfer to a RIC. For now, the site is at full capacity and lacks physical barriers to separate groups based on arrival dates. Some 70 residents have completed the quarantine and remain awaiting transfer to the RIC for registration.
- The operation supports WHO and MSF's advocacy to increase testing of persons of concern and is monitoring and assisting coordination in the field between the authorities and medical actors. The infrastructure and strategy for triage, quarantine, treatment, isolation is contingent upon a minimum of tests available. However, at present, only 3-5 tests per day are being provided to the medical actors operating in the Lesbos facilities. COVID-19 testing is a pre-requisite for new arrivals before they can be allowed to join the Apanemo quarantine site.
- In **Ukraine**, on 9 June, Ukrainian authorities announced a partial re-opening of the Entry-Exit Checkpoints (EECPs) across the 'contact line' in eastern Ukraine, starting on 10 June. Priority will be given to "humanitarian exception cases", but also includes recent graduates from the non-government-controlled areas (NGCA) who are travelling to the government-controlled side (GCA) to enrol in higher education institutions. Crossing into GCA will be subject to temperature screening and self-isolation for 14 days.
- On 4 June, humanitarian and medical material was delivered through a third humanitarian convoy between Donetsk GCA and the NGCA since the pandemic outbreak. This was the first convoy to Donetsk that included materials related to non COVID-19 response programmes since the closure of the "contact line" in March.



#### COMMUNICATION WITH COMMUNITIES

- In **Belarus**, the United Nations Communications Group, is currently developing a Risk Communication and Community Engagement Strategy for the health authorities to apply in their communication with the public.
- In **Ireland**, a recent initiative resulted in the creation of a new free helpline set up by the Government for asylum-seekers living in centres, run by the Jesuit Refugee Service to support residents during COVID-19.



#### LIVELIHOODS

- With the pandemic and related measures impacting the labour market, persons of concern are facing a number of specific difficulties. In the **Czech Republic**, a partner organization specialized on integration provides online support and mentoring schemes, and has issued an information brochure for persons of concern on the current labour market situation, their rights and opportunities, so as to limit the negative economic impact of the crisis and mitigate specific risks that make persons of concern vulnerable to abusive practices. UNHCR assisted with translation of the information material.



### CASH-BASED AND IN-KIND ASSISTANCE

- In **Armenia**, in addition to the one-time cash assistance provided to 507 households, NGOs and the Armenian Red Cross Society provided cash assistance to some 65 displaced Syrian families in dire need of support, based on vulnerability criteria. Further, food vouchers were distributed to about 200 families.
- In **Moldova**, 94 asylum-seekers and refugees have received one-off cash assistance, after they lost their primary source of income and were unable to meet their needs due to the pandemic.
- In **Russia**, provision of one-time cash assistance to the most vulnerable persons of concern in Moscow and 16 other regions has been ongoing since mid-April. In total, 964 persons applications were received by the Operation or through partner organizations. Post-distribution monitoring and analysis are being conducted. Many persons of concern also receive food assistance from charity and partner organizations. More than 100 smartphones, donated by the private sector, were also distributed to families in view of helping with distant learning of their children.
- In **Turkey**, following the distribution of one-off cash assistance cards for more than 7,000 families across the country last week, an additional 2,500 households have been enlisted to receive the assistance.

### 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**, the operation continues supporting the Government's efforts by enhancing coordination mechanisms in response to the COVID-19 situation, with a particular focus on the islands, regarding health, clean water and sanitation, as well as Communication with Communities.
- In **Romania**, the office participated in the UNICEF-led joint rapid needs assessment to ascertain the situation of most vulnerable children and their families during the pandemic, focusing on access to online education. Asylum-seeking and refugee children residing both in reception centres and urban settings were included. Findings will be finalised in late June.
- 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 globally boost preparedness, prevention and response activities to address immediate public health needs of refugees and host communities. The amount presented in the appeal does not represent the magnitude of UNHCR's engagement to support governments' efforts in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, including in Europe.

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

**Total contributed or pledged to UNHCR COVID-19 appeal****USD 248 M (33%)**

Including: United States of America \$64.0M | Germany \$38.6M | European Union \$33.5M | United Kingdom \$24.8M | Japan \$23.9M | Denmark \$14.6M | United Nations Foundation \$10.0M | CERF \$6.9M | Canada \$6.4M | Private donors \$4.7M | Ireland \$3.3M | Sweden \$3.0M | Sony Corporation \$2.9M | Finland \$2.4M | Education Cannot Wait \$1.8M | Qatar Charity \$1.5M | Norway \$1.4M | USA for UNHCR \$1.0M

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

Sweden 76.4M | Norway 41.4M | Netherlands 36.1M | Denmark 34.6M | Private donors Spain 33.1M | United Kingdom 31.7M | Germany 25.9M | Switzerland 16.4M | Private donors Republic of Korea 13.9M

**Useful Links**[UNHCR's revised Coronavirus Emergency Appeal](#)[UNHCR operations overview in Europe](#)[COVID-19: UNHCR's response](#)

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