

# Jordan

October 2020

## Innovation in Refugee Response and Protection during COVID-19

In the wake of the Syrian crisis and the massive influx of refugees in Jordan, the UNHCR Jordan operation has attracted worldwide attention thanks to its unique approach to invest in new technology and partners with the Private Sector to support its refugee programmes. In recent years, the return of those smart investments has allowed UNHCR not only to reduce its expenditures and make its programmes more sustainable but has also enhanced UNHCR's role as a catalyst to bring new, development actors to support refugees in the long-term.

In 2020, in response to the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government of Jordan put in place a series of swift measures to safeguard the public health system, including lockdowns and other mobility restrictions throughout the country. To overcome some of the challenges, UNHCR quickly adapted and has since further invested on innovative solutions several areas, with the goal of protecting the health of refugees while keep delivering protection services and assistance. The following innovative solutions have provided some relief to refugees who have been severely impacted by the COVID-19 emergency and have enabled them to cover their basic needs with dignity.



### Protection response and remote refugee hotlines

While the bulk of UNHCR's response has continued through remote modalities throughout the COVID-19 crisis, UNHCR Jordan maintained a core group of staff who have stayed and delivered essential in-person services in [Azraq](#) and [Zaatari](#) camps, even during the months of total lockdown in Jordan. With health measures in place and continued monitoring of the situation, UNHCR staff in the two refugee camps stepped up the response and continued to offer assistance to persons of concern most affected by the emergency.

As part of its protection response to COVID-19, UNHCR Jordan, in coordination with the members of the Protection Working group, has enhanced and updated its remote refugee protection hotline services. Additionally, through the [Amaali mobile application](#), UNHCR is able to mainstream the referral pathways for sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) cases, while the UNHCR Integrated Voice Recognition Helpline has managed over 200,000 monthly calls since March. [Read more here.](#)



### Remote registration and certificate renewal modalities

As of 16 March 2020, in compliance with GoJ regulations, UNHCR closed its Registration Centres in Amman, Mafraq and Irbid. Prior to this, some 5,000 refugees approached the Registration centres on a daily basis to register or renew their Asylum Seeker Certificate (ASC). In order to overcome this challenge, UNHCR Jordan sought to find solutions to continue services through remote modalities.

UNHCR Jordan is now conducting registration interviews over the phone, with the aim to protect the health of



A UNHCR staff member helps a refugee who has approached UNHCR Registration Centre in Amman to renew their ASC.

refugees and UNHCR staff. This streamlined process seeks to ensure data on refugees in Jordan is kept up to date in a fraud-proof and secure manner. When receiving a call from UNHCR either to schedule their remote interview or to conduct the interview, refugees receive an SMS one-time password to verify the identity of the caller. Refugees are also notified by SMS regarding their appointment to collect their renewed ASC from the UNHCR Registration Centres, which have recently partially reopened with strict guidance to respect social distancing and other public health measures. [Read more here.](#)

## Video and telephone interviews for resettlement processing

UNHCR Jordan also made adjustments to resettlement procedures to ensure that processing and submission of resettlement cases carry on and that opportunities for durable solutions for refugees from Jordan are not lost. New remote resettlement procedures have been implemented in two phases. The initial phase from March to June 2020 focused on counselling and financial assistance for refugees whose resettlement travel was cancelled due to the pandemic, as well as pre-screening and identification by telephone of refugees in need of resettlement. During the second phase from July to September 2020 procedures for full resettlement casework have been established, involving a combination of telephone and video interviews. Small numbers of complex cases are invited to UNHCR's premises where they are provided a confidential interview environment for video interviews, identity is verified, and physical distancing is maintained between refugees and staff who conduct the interviews from their offices or homes. Staff have been trained on remote interviewing techniques, resettlement files have been digitized, interviews are audio recorded and additional integrity safeguards to maintain quality, including case audits, are being implemented.

## Remote modalities in the COVID-19 health response

During the months of increased mobility restrictions and lockdown measures in response to the spread of COVID-19, access to pharmacies was impeded for most vulnerable refugees in Jordan, 31% of whom have chronic medical conditions and need of daily medication. To address this challenge, UNHCR secured permits, through the Government of Jordan, to allow its partner Caritas to [deliver medication](#) for non-communicable diseases (NCDs) directly to refugee homes, to ensure those with health needs were not adversely impacted.



The COVID-19 crisis also had severe impacts on refugee mental health. In the first 3 months of the crisis, the number of refugees seeking mental health support through consultations increased by 50%. UNHCR and health partners adapted to the increasing needs providing additional [mental health and psychosocial support](#) (MHPSS) to refugees in need through remote hotlines and tele-MHPSS during the period of lockdown, and by gradually resuming in person services as of June 2020.

## Upgrading of shelters and building of isolation facilities in refugee camps

In response to the increasing needs as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, and in line with MoH provisions, UNHCR Jordan and partners have worked to upgrade the shelter capacity in the two refugee camps of Azraq and Zaatari, as well as to build isolation facilities in both camps for suspected cases of COVID-19 or for those who have come in contact with suspected cases. The [isolation facilities](#) are connected to electricity, while refugees who are in quarantine are provided with WASH facilities as well as hygiene kits.

## Communication with Communities: UNHCR Jordan Help Site and other information sharing platforms

In the context of its COVID-19 preparedness and response plan, UNHCR Jordan has expanded its Communication with Communities (CwC) strategy to include a number of platforms through which UNHCR shares information with its persons of concern (POCs) in Jordan. The [UNHCR Jordan Help Site](#), launched in April 2020, is a website addressing POCs in Jordan and displaying detailed information on services provided by UNHCR and partners, in addition to links to other platforms, phone numbers, and media galleries. The information is available in Arabic and English to ensure accessibility to all POCs in Jordan. The Help Site receives more than 10,000 users on a monthly basis, with more than 30,000 pageviews. The site has a Frequently Asked Questions section, as well as a 'How To' template, connecting Google search engines with the site to redirect users, based on pre-identified keywords. To date, 12 FAQs and 4 How To's are marked up, with an expected expansion in the coming weeks to include more services. In September 2020, the UNHCR Jordan Help Site was ranked among the top 3 country-specific Help sites, following Turkey and Greece, in terms of visits by users.

UNHCR Jordan also initiated an Info-Sharing Group, which aims to increase awareness of all actions taken in terms of communication among all units and offices of UNHCR Jordan. This group is a key platform used to ensure that all front-line colleagues are on the same page when it comes to CwC and are aware of any recent announcements, while it also facilitates dissemination of CwC material among counterparts, refugee groups and partners. In parallel, UNHCR, in partnership with the Bridges of Communities group, has established a WhatsApp tree, where information related to services available and recent announcements is shared with the refugee community. The WhatsApp tree, which consists of some 85 groups comprising of over 11,000 refugees, also functions as a two-way communication tool, for issues such as referrals of vulnerable cases. [Read more here.](#)

## #AskUNHCR live Q&A sessions



Refugees in Jordan are well connected through social media communities and online platforms. In order to address increasing questions about a number of different issues and to provide information, UNHCR Jordan launched a series of Facebook live Q&A events addressing refugee questions. The #AskUNHCR series takes place on bi-weekly basis, in 30-minute sessions where UNHCR staff present basic information on a specific topic and answer questions received live by refugees. Topics range from [education](#), to [registration](#)

and cash assistance. Some 300,000 refugees have tuned in and provided comments.

## Enhancing e-learning platforms

Since the outset of the COVID-19 crisis, UNHCR Jordan has worked closely with the Ministry of Education and educational providers across the Kingdom in developing the technology and modalities to facilitate continued e-learning. Building on the organization's experience at its 10 Connected Learning Hubs, the Kolibri platform, which provides Arabic based courses from Maths and English to Science and Coding, has been integrated within Noorspace, an online platform operated by the Ministry of Education and Queen Rania Center for Information Technology (QRC), to create online virtual classrooms. The integration of Kolibri enables the diversification of learning materials and courses available to students in Jordan.

In addition to integrating the Kolibri platform within national education systems, over 17,000 refugee and Jordanian students have accessed the Kolibri virtual classes directly as part of UNHCR supported education programs. Previously used within UNHCR's community centers, as centers closed due to the coronavirus crisis, the online/offline nature of the Kolibri platform has meant that refugee and Jordanian students alike, have continued to be able to access the platform and its courses remotely from home. In refugee camps, in the early stages of the emergency, electricity provision was extended to 16 hours a day allowing students to enhance their home studies. [Read more here.](#)

## Emergency cash assistance and cash on wheels

In early April 2020, the Basic Needs Working Group estimated that, as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic, an additional 48,000 refugee families in Jordan became vulnerable. As of September 2020, UNHCR has managed to support some 43,000 of them through an emergency cash assistance programme, in addition to the regular cash assistance that reaches 33,000 families every month. Additionally, to support vulnerable refugees who have been in isolated locations during the COVID-19 emergency, UNHCR Jordan coordinated with Cairo Amman bank to frontload two months of the regular monthly cash assistance and then use their mobile ATM to facilitate cash assistance withdrawal for populations of concern facing mobility restrictions. This modality has been used over the years to reach persons of concern in remote locations and continued to be implemented as part of UNHCR Jordan's COVID-19 preparedness and response planning.



*Refugees withdraw their monthly cash assistance from an ATM on wheels in Aydoun, Irbid.*

## Mobile Payment Systems for Refugees

UNHCR Jordan has been able to harness innovative technologies available in the country to meet the different needs of refugees. One such example is the use of "mobile wallets" to increase financial inclusion. UNHCR has been working with a Jordanian national mobile payment system, originally developed in response to low rates of financial inclusion among Jordanians. The five licensed mobile payments services providers (MPSPs) are interoperable with mobile wallets, bank accounts, and prepaid cards. The mobile payments are designed to work through applications developed by the five MPSPs, work on analogue phones and don't require internet connection. Since the onset of the COVID-19 crisis, UNHCR Jordan has been working to expand the [use of mobile wallets](#) by refugees to improve their access to financial services, at a time when mobility restrictions and other limitations in place as part of the Government's response to the crisis presented additional challenges. Some 800 refugees are now registered and receive monthly cash assistance transfers to their mobile wallets. Read more about the Common Cash Facility platform [here.](#)

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## LINKS

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[www.data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees](http://www.data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees)