

# Regional Bureau for Europe

## UPDATE #28

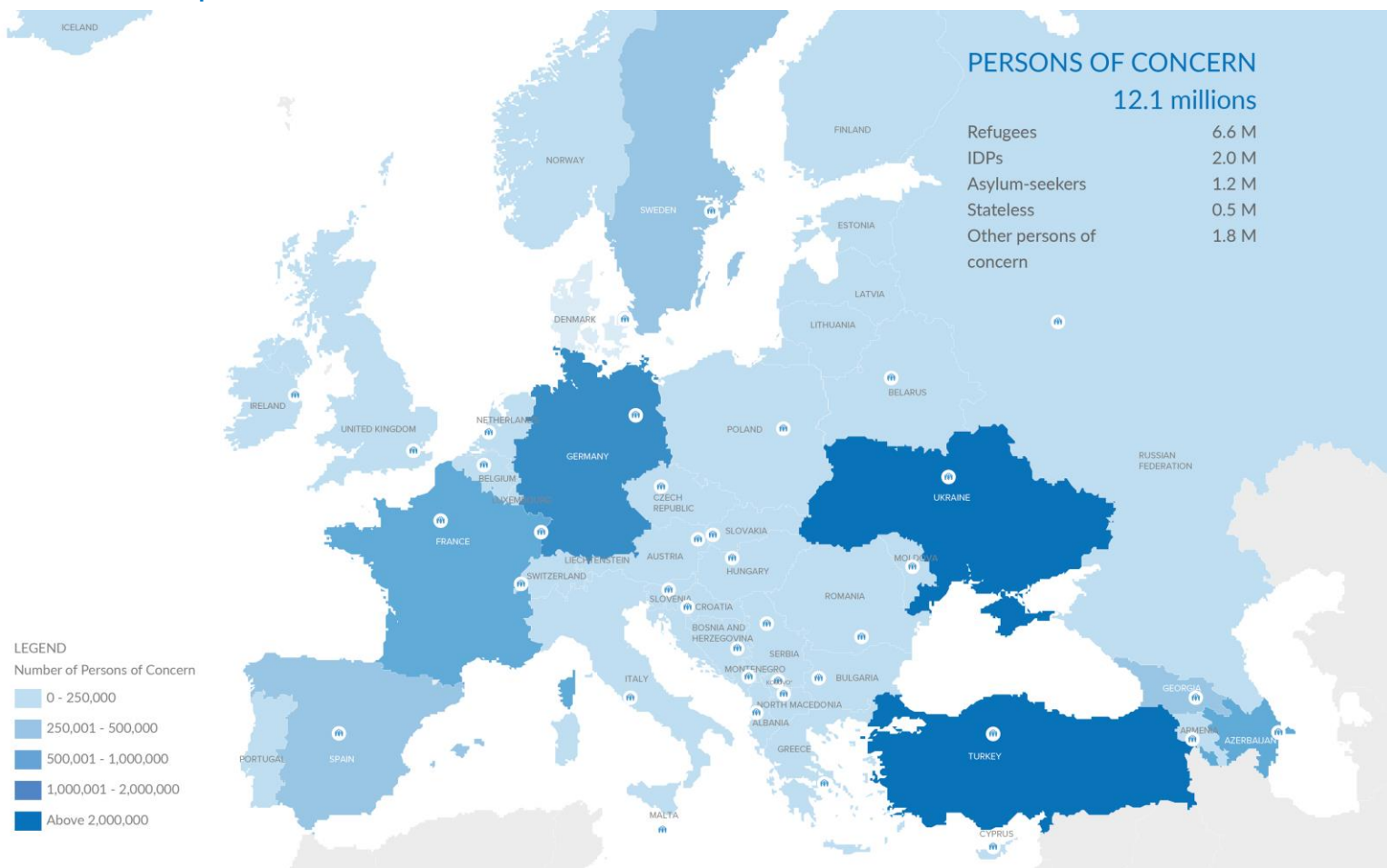
1 – 31 May 2021

Regional COVID-19 infection rates continued decreasing throughout the month. **Movement and travel restrictions** remained largely in place, with a few cautious relaxations.

Despite tightened COVID-19 prevention measures limiting international travel due to the spread of new variants, **access to territory for persons of concern** was generally maintained.

Movement restrictions continue to impact UNHCR staff in country offices. To date, 35 offices are **partially teleworking** while two continue 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, 40 countries and one territory have reported cases among persons of concern at some point. 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.
- According to WHO, daily infection rates in the European region decreased steadily throughout the month. Curfews and restrictions on social gatherings were in general cautiously lifted within the framework of relaxation plans extending into June. COVID-19 vaccination rates picked up across the region, reaching more populations of concern alongside the general population.
- In May, two UNHCR offices continued in full telework mode, and 35 offices in partial telework mode. Visits to reception centres are strictly regulated, and outbreaks in collective accommodation or detention centres have temporarily limited the ability of UNHCR and partners to access persons of concern in some countries.

## UNHCR Areas of Intervention



### PROTECTION

- **Quarantine measures upon arrival:** Testing and quarantine measures are in place in all countries registering significant numbers of sea arrivals. In May, 5,679 individuals arrived in **Italy** by sea (vs. 1,595 in April), of which at least 80 reportedly tested positive for COVID-19. Compared to April, a significantly smaller percentage of arrivals tested positive for COVID-19. UNHCR followed up on disembarkations of rescued people from NGO vessels and their transfer to one of the quarantine ferries. As of 31 May, 727 people were observing offshore quarantine and 409 unaccompanied or separated children were quarantining in facilities in Apulia. UNHCR continues to follow up on the challenges that remain in ensuring UASC's timely transfer to dedicated facilities throughout the territory.
- Some 2,418 persons arrived in **Spain** in May, mostly by sea, up from 1,725 persons in April. Of these, 37% reached the Canary Islands. Among arrivals in the Canary Islands, ten persons tested positive for COVID-19 and were isolated. Two new arrivals to Melilla's main reception centre and one arrival to Andalusia tested positive and were quarantined, along with their close contacts. Separately, some 10,000 persons arrived in Ceuta on 17-18 May. More than 8,000 persons had been forcibly or voluntarily returned to Morocco as of 1 June. Some 72 people among the arrivals tested positive for COVID-19. On 31 May, the authorities in Ceuta set up a quarantine centre in a warehouse to host them.
- **Reception conditions:** Lack of sufficient reception spaces, overcrowding and inadequate facilities in a number of locations continue to pose challenges for residents to follow physical distancing, hygiene and other preventive measures, compounding risks of contagion. Outbreaks in centres remain a concern and result in restrictions of movements for centre residents, as for example in Cádiz, **Spain**, where an outbreak at the emergency reception centre run by the Red Cross resulted in seven persons being infected. All of them had tested negative upon arrival. Another outbreak in a centre in **Ireland** brings to seven the number of open outbreaks in centres for asylum-seekers in the country. All 36 residents were moved to an off-site isolation facility in Dublin to break the contagion chain. Preventive measures remain in place for example in **Hungary**, where visits are still banned in detention facilities; however, UNHCR communicates with detainees via remote communication channels and services for people of concern remain operational.

- A significant decrease in COVID-19 cases was recorded among the migrant and asylum-seeking population accommodated in reception centres in **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, following a marked rise in April, with no active cases reported as of end May. However, despite relaxing COVID-19 preventive measures for the general population, including freedom of movement, restrictions remain in place in reception centres, where authorities see heightened risk of COVID-19 transmission due to collective living and insufficient access to sanitary facilities.
- **Access to medical and psychosocial services:** Residents of **Bulgarian** reception facilities reported difficulties accessing medical and psychological assistance due to limited capacity of medical institutions, cumbersome administrative procedures, and depleted funds of NGOs. UNHCR keeps organizing monthly COVID-19 coordination and response meetings with partners, identifying gaps, and potential ways to address them. To mitigate the psychosocial impact of repeated lockdowns and related restrictions on movement, UNHCR's partner in the **Czech Republic** has established a self-help group for asylum-seeking and refugee women, facilitated by a psychotherapist, with online sessions accessible to participants countrywide.
- **Access to procedures:** In the wake of closure of Dutch embassies due to the pandemic, asylum authorities and UNHCR in the **Netherlands** have signed an agreement for UNHCR to facilitate video interviews in family reunification procedures. A [press release](#) on the temporary initiative explains that the intention is to address the delays in processing family reunification cases, with the support of UNHCR. In **Germany**, to ensure better access to procedures, asylum authorities concluded the rollout of technical devices and support to ensure all employees are fully equipped to work from home. These employees are also in one of the priority groups scheduled to be vaccinated soon.
- **Livelihoods:** Persons of concern living outside reception facilities in **Bulgaria** report ongoing and rising unemployment and risk of homelessness. UNHCR and partners are connecting employers with persons of concern seeking employment to facilitate matching. On 14 May, the **Germany**-based Research Institute of the Federal Employment Agency (IAB) presented new data indicating that asylum-seekers and refugees have been more adversely affected than other groups by repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic on the German labour market. By the end of 2020, the unemployment rate among asylum-seekers generally increased by 2.7% as opposed to the 1% increase among Germans. The IAB expects long-term impacts, as many were unable to participate in language classes and qualification measures over the last year. The European Migration Network and the OECD recently published their [report on the impact of COVID-19 in the migration area in EU and OECD countries](#). EASO and Frontex also provided inputs. The document provides updates on changes in border procedures, provision of COVID-19-related health services to migrants, the shifting landscape of the labour market, international protection, international students and return issues, highlighting concrete concerns, lessons learnt and good practices.
- **Internally Displaced Persons:** In **Ukraine**, movements through Entry Exit Checkpoints (EECPs) remained restricted in May, with only two EECPs functioning: Stanytsia Luhanska (daily) and Novotroitske (twice a week). The Schastia and Zolote EECPs were open for crossings from the GCA (government-controlled area) but remained closed from the NGCA (non-government-controlled area). Free COVID-19 PCR testing remained available at Stanytsia Luhanska EECP in May.



## HEALTH

- **Inclusion in vaccination plans:** Persons of concern are generally included in national vaccination plans on par with the general population. As a result, persons of concern receiving the vaccination have mostly been those in the priority groups called due to age, profession or accommodation in collective shelters. In several countries, people living in collective shelters are vaccinated as a group. Throughout May, **German** authorities continued vaccinating residents in collective accommodation facilities at a moderate rate, due in part to bureaucratic obstacles and some lack of trust in vaccines by centre residents. UNHCR continues identifying good practices to enhance the rollout. Vaccinations

in **Switzerland**'s federal asylum centres and cantonal accommodations also started in May, while persons of concern not residing in such facilities have access to vaccination on par with the general population. **Belgium**'s vaccination rollout has reached the group of asylum-seekers without vulnerabilities. Authorities lined up multilingual information and awareness-raising activities for reception centre residents and started vaccination.

- Offices have also reported initiatives to facilitate vaccination of persons of concern who fall outside the scope of general vaccination plans due to their specific status or documentation. In **Portugal**, the Government launched an online platform that undocumented people can use to register for COVID-19 vaccination without having to enter a national health system number. In **Cyprus**, over 500 asylum-seekers who are otherwise not included in the General Health System were vaccinated through a collaborative effort between three refugee assisting organizations and the Ministry of Health. Authorities in **Azerbaijan** assigned a dedicated medical centre in Baku to vaccinate foreigners, including asylum-seekers and refugees.
- In **Estonia**, authorities reported that 14,651 of some 70,000 **stateless persons** in the country had been vaccinated as of end May, alongside the general population.
- UNHCR **advocacy** continues to ensure inclusion of all persons of concern, where needed. In **Malta**, while vaccinations began in open centres, challenges remain for asylum-seekers living in the community who do not have a residence card required for vaccination registration. UNHCR and its partner met with health authorities, submitted recommendations and offered support to enhance vaccination rollout among communities of concern. In **Hungary**, asylum-seekers, applicants for statelessness status and third-country nationals who may have international protection needs but lack the necessary documentation remained outside the vaccination plan at the end of the reporting period. Similarly, UNHCR continues advocating in **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, where authorities had yet to confirm the inclusion of persons of concern in the national vaccination rollout by end May.
- In **Greece**, 1,642 asylum-seekers and refugees have reportedly tested positive for COVID-19 since the onset of the pandemic as of 23 May: 717 on the mainland (3 more than last month) and 925 on the islands (73 more than last month). In the meantime, some of those having tested positive have recovered. The increase on the islands is more significant than in previous months and concerns several islands, likely due to the relaxation of mitigation measures for the general population, the start of the tourist season and lack of vaccinations in the centres, which were scheduled for June. In the meantime, some of those having tested positive have recovered.



## COMMUNICATION WITH COMMUNITIES

- Communication with communities of concern continued on COVID-19 vaccine campaigns across the region, making use of different channels, as preferred and most relied on by communities of concern. Many country offices reported this month that persons of concern have expressed hesitations regarding the vaccine. Therefore, additional efforts are made to clarify questions on the effects and benefits of the vaccine. In **Sweden**, to better reach vulnerable groups with information on vaccines, local authorities in Stockholm will open multi-language infohubs staffed by health professionals to answer medical questions and assist in booking vaccination appointments. Mobile vaccination teams will provide vaccinations for homeless and other vulnerable people. UNHCR partner **Bulgarian** Red Cross provided information sessions and translations to accompany the vaccination campaign for centre residents. In **Serbia**, from March to May, 30 outreach volunteers engaged by UNHCR and UNDP informed 6,598 people in Roma informal settlements about vaccinations, of whom 1,041 expressed interest and 593 registered with the help of volunteers.
- UNHCR **Romania** led a two-week online and offline vaccination information campaign in May, with government and NGO partners, which has been amplified by several line ministries. The campaign included social media infographics, an **information website** and print material for reception centres. In **Armenia**, UNHCR is preparing information material on vaccines in languages relevant to persons

of concern in detention centres, where the authorities have begun vaccinations. UNHCR **Cyprus** has updated the Help platform with information on vaccination and translated information products in multiple languages. In **Austria**, in addition to the local Help Page and the closed Facebook group, UNHCR is producing short testimonial videos on vaccination in different languages with refugees who are well-connected in their community. UNHCR hopes to contribute to dispelling doubts vis-à-vis vaccinations and answer questions among asylum-seekers.



### CASH-BASED AND IN-KIND ASSISTANCE

- UNHCR continues delivering COVID-19-related in-kind support, where needed, to persons of concern or authorities working with them. In **Azerbaijan**, UNHCR facilitated the distribution of food parcels to 10 persons of concern this month, bringing the total to 2,144 food parcels distributed to date as of end May. As part of the regional joint project with IOM for both the immediate and long-term response to COVID-19 under the EU Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace, UNHCR in **North Macedonia** distributed 22 one-time multipurpose cash grants (CBI) to 29 persons of concern between February and May. In May, UNHCR in **Greece** delivered 3,388 core relief items and PPEs to authorities supporting persons of concern on the islands and mainland to mitigate COVID-19 spread.

### 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, including vaccination campaigns;
- **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.

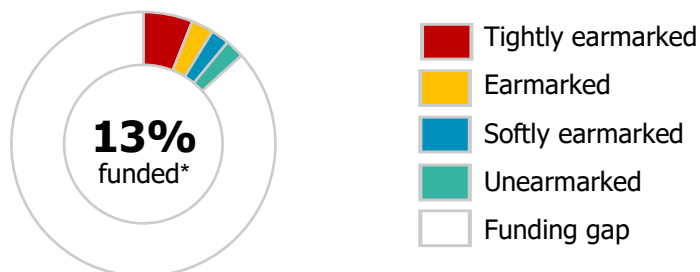
### Working in partnership

- UNHCR supports governments' efforts to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic through existing coordination mechanisms and by working with WHO and other partners. In addition, UNHCR co-chairs with UNDP and IOM 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.

## Financial Information

- UNHCR released in December 2020 its [supplementary appeal for 2021 COVID response](#) seeking an additional USD 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 in 2021: USD 445 M



### Total contributed or pledged to UNHCR COVID-19 appeal as of 25 May: USD 60,603,608 (13%)

including: African Development Bank | Canada | Unilever (UK) | European Union | Austria | China | Education cannot Wait | France | UN Covid-19 MPTF | Japan | Swedish Postcode Lottery | Sunshine forever Limited | UNHCR Insamlingsstiftelse | Japan Association for UNHCR | Private donors Chine | Private Donors USA | UN Programme On HIV/AIDS | Other private donors

### Unearmarked contributions to UNHCR's 2021 global programme

Norway \$80M | Sweden \$66.9M | Netherlands \$36.1M | Denmark \$34.6M | Private donors Spain \$28.3M | Germany \$26M | France \$20M | Switzerland \$16.4M | Private donors Republic of Korea \$14.3M | Ireland \$12.5M | Belgium \$11.9M

Contributed without restrictions on its use, unearmarked funding allows UNHCR critical flexibility in how best to reach refugees and other populations of concern who are in the greatest need and at the greatest risk. Where a donor has contributed USD 10 million or more, the total amount of the contribution is shown.

### 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](#).



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