

Regional Bureau for Europe

UPDATE #29

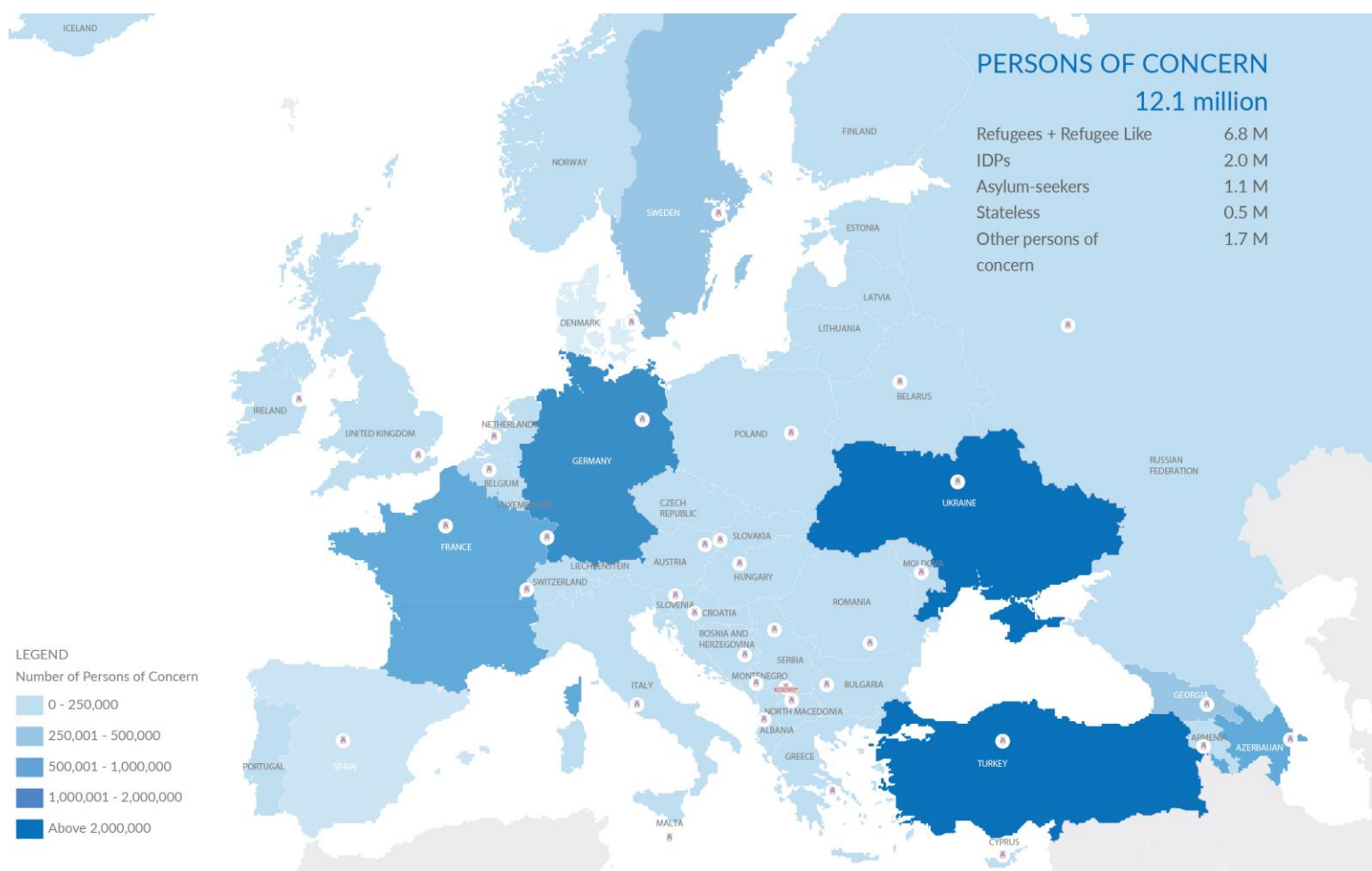
1 – 30 June 2021

Regional COVID-19 infection rates continued declining until mid-June, before rising again at the end of the month. **Movement and travel restrictions** were in general cautiously relaxed.

Despite 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, 34 offices are **partially teleworking** while two continue on **full telework mode**.

Populations of Concern



SOURCE: UNHCR 2020 ANNUAL GLOBAL REPORT

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 the WHO, after declining steadily for two months, regional infection and death rates reached a low point in mid-June, before rising again at the end of the month, mainly due to the spread of the more infectious Delta variant. Measures such as curfews and restrictions on travel and social gatherings continued to be in general cautiously relaxed, except where the Delta variant spread raised concerns. COVID-19 vaccination rates picked up across the region, reaching more populations of concern alongside the general population.
- At the end of June, one UNHCR office continued in full telework mode, and 34 offices in partial telework mode. One office shifted out of telework mode altogether. Visits to reception centres are strictly regulated, and outbreaks in collective accommodation or detention centres continue to temporarily limit 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 June, 5,840 individuals arrived in Italy by sea (some 200 more than in May), of whom at least 133 reportedly tested positive for COVID-19. Quarantine measures were reinforced after the first 10 Delta variant infections were detected. With the exception of unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) and some persons with special needs, all arrivals observe quarantine on offshore ferries. UNHCR follows up on the disembarkations from NGO vessels and their transfer to the quarantine ferries. As of 30 June, 1,338 persons were quarantining on one of the four operational ferries, and 350 UASC were quarantining in ad hoc facilities that are not child-appropriate and are generally under-equipped. UNHCR is following up on the challenges that remain in ensuring the timely transfer of UASC to dedicated facilities throughout the territory.
- Some 2,480 persons arrived in **Spain** in June, mostly by sea, on a par with May. Among these, some 30 tested positive for COVID-19 and were isolated along with their close contacts in the Canary Islands, Melilla's main reception centre and Andalusia. In Ceuta, the Spanish Red Cross is surveying health and sanitary conditions of people who arrived on 17-18 May and have not been living in shelters. Out of 850 persons interviewed, no COVID-19 cases had been identified as of 28 June.
- **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 Melilla, **Spain**, where an outbreak at the Child Protection Centre resulted in 18 infected persons. An outbreak was also detected in a camp in the Canary Islands. Meanwhile, in Ceuta, five active cases resulted in 73 persons in quarantine, including 70 UASC, as of end June. Four positive cases were confirmed in **Bulgaria** in a State reception centre and in the immigration detention centre.
- A significant decrease in COVID-19 cases was recorded among persons of concern in reception centres in **Austria**, with no active cases reported as of end June, and in **Serbia**, where for the first time since spring, no resident of government centres contracted the virus in the month of June. In **Cyprus**, since 10 June, there have been no active cases in the Pournara First Reception Centre. Cases also remained on the decline in reception centres in **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, where, despite reporting

three new cases in early June, there were no active cases by the close of the reporting period for the second consecutive month. However, despite further relaxing COVID-19 preventive measures for the general population, movement restrictions remain in place in the country's reception centres, where the authorities see heightened risk of COVID-19 transmission due to insufficient access to sanitary facilities and limited quarantine capacity.

- **Livelihoods and integration:** In June, UNHCR **Bulgaria** reported an increased number of calls to its hotline from persons of concern with questions on current COVID-19 prevention measures, livelihood loss, employment or financial support. To address the latter, the Bulgarian Red Cross supported five business start-up ideas out of 31 applications this month. Acknowledging the added difficulties posed by the pandemic, **Norway** has released [guidelines for municipalities](#) for adaptation of qualification work for refugees and immigrants, while the Institute for social work has released a [report](#) on the consequences of COVID-19 on vulnerable children. In **North Macedonia**, UNHCR with academia, government partners and EU support developed a [Digital Platform for learning the Macedonian Language](#) with the aim of introducing systemic solutions to enhance language learning and digitalization in the context of the pandemic.
- **Internally Displaced Persons:** In **Ukraine**, to facilitate movements of residents of the NGCA (non-government-controlled areas) to the GCA, the parliamentary Human Rights Committee approved in June a UNHCR-supported draft law abolishing fines for residents of NGCA and Crimea who cross into Ukraine through the Russian Federation.



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 been those in priority groups due to age, profession or accommodation in collective shelters. In several countries, people living in collective shelters are vaccinated as a group. Vaccinations started in **Austria's** federal reception centres, and in asylum housing in **Sweden**, alongside interventions specifically for asylum-seekers in private accommodations. In Ceuta, **Spain**, by end June, 85% of residents of the main reception centre had been inoculated. Authorities continued vaccinations in **Bulgaria**, where 75 of the 795 persons accommodated in State reception centres had been vaccinated as of 24 June. The second vaccination shot is being administered to persons of concern residing in centres in **Serbia**, where authorities have thus far reached 50 people for the second shot out of the 309 persons of concern reached with the first jab. In **Malta**, authorities reported that 98% of residents in closed centres had been vaccinated as of end June.
- In **Greece**, vaccinations of asylum-seekers on the islands started on 3 June on Lesbos, Samos and Chios, where 620 persons had been vaccinated as of 20 June. Vaccinations have yet to start on Leros and Kos, due to the low number of registered, eligible people. UNHCR has been supporting awareness-raising efforts in coordination with authorities, IOM and other actors with audio-visual material, communication with community representatives, working groups and inter-agency structures. Vaccination started in mainland refugee sites on 10 June.
- Offices have also reported about specific initiatives to facilitate vaccination of persons of concern who fall outside the scope of general vaccination plans due to their specific status or documentation. **Belgium's** Brussels-Capital region announced an initiative with an NGO consortium to vaccinate some 5,000 persons of concern without a residence permit. After reports that asylum-seekers in **Malta** without a residence permit were unable to register for vaccination, health authorities informed that, as of 1 July, all persons of concern in the country will be able to be vaccinated at a central hub next to the national hospital. A mobile vaccination unit is also planned.
- Where needed, UNHCR **advocacy** for inclusion of all persons of concern in vaccination plans and roll-out continues, in particular of those lacking the documentation required to register for vaccination, for example in **Albania**, where asylum-seekers who have yet to receive a residence permit are not

included, and in **Cyprus**, where access remains a challenge for those in an irregular situation without required identification. UNHCR and the Humanitarian Country Team in the Ukraine are advocating jointly for the inclusion of asylum-seekers, stateless persons and persons with an undetermined nationality, while refugees, IDPs and other conflict-affected persons have, in principle, access to State medical services on par with the general population. In a positive development, authorities in **Slovakia** confirmed, following advocacy from UNHCR, that asylum-seekers will have access to vaccination, alongside refugees and subsidiary protection holders who are covered by the vaccination plan.

- The office in **Italy** continues advocating at national and regional levels to help persons of concern overcome reported obstacles in access to information, digital barriers and administrative hurdles that may in practice leave behind vulnerable individuals or people living in marginalized contexts. At the same time, best practices by regional and local health authorities are observed, as they take steps to overcome digital barriers through outreach in reception facilities.
- In **Greece**, 1,858 asylum-seekers and refugees have reportedly tested positive for COVID-19 since the onset of the pandemic: 717 on the mainland (same as last month) and 1,141 on the islands (216 more than last month). The increase on the islands is, for the second month in a row, more significant than previously, likely due to the relaxation of mitigation measures for the general population. In the meantime, some of those having tested positive have recovered.



COMMUNICATION WITH COMMUNITIES

- Communication with communities of concern continued on COVID-19 vaccination campaigns across the region, making use of different channels, in line with the needs and preferences of communities of concern. Many country offices continue to report that some persons of concern have expressed hesitations regarding the vaccine. Therefore, additional efforts are made to clarify questions related to the effects and benefits of the vaccine. UNHCR in **Austria** kicked off a series of webinars on vaccination with refugees that are well-connected in their communities. In **Ukraine**, UNHCR and partners launched an action plan to address vaccine hesitancy among older persons and people with disabilities near the contact line. According to partner HelpAge, only 10% of older persons among its 3,500 beneficiaries are willing to be vaccinated, due to concerns over vaccines' quality and side effects. The plan aims to raise awareness of the importance of vaccination among conflict-affected populations through information dissemination by key partner NGOs and State agencies.
- Offices across the region support authorities with translation of official information material, for example in **Bulgaria**, where partner Bulgarian Red Cross has translated and printed brochures on COVID-19 vaccines, or in **Cyprus**, where UNHCR has translated and disseminated information on vaccines on its Help page and social media, while partners Refugee Council and Caritas amplified information on the Government's 25 June inoculation drive for asylum-seekers not covered in the General Health System. Elsewhere, offices have developed material, such as in **Malta**, where UNHCR has prepared and disseminated a leaflet on vaccination access for persons of concern.



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 **Georgia**, UNHCR and its partner provided 175 food parcels and hygiene items to 88 vulnerable IDP returnee households this month, while in **Azerbaijan**, UNHCR distributed food parcels to 36 persons of concern, bringing the total to 2,180 food parcels distributed to date as of end June. In **Greece**, UNHCR delivered 6,779 core relief items and PPEs this month to authorities supporting persons of concern on the islands and mainland. In June, UNHCR in **Ukraine** provided cash assistance to six vulnerable IDP households impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

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.

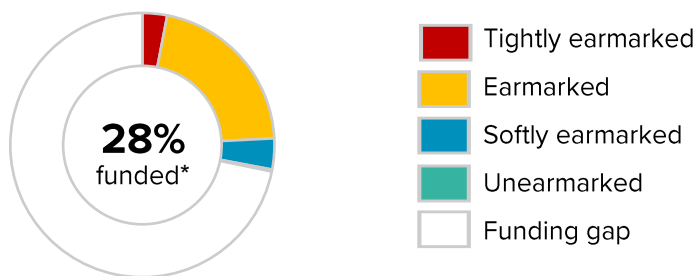
Working in partnership

- 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

- For 2021, USD 469 million of UNHCR's COVID-19-related needs has been mainstreamed into its Global Appeal and USD 455 million are supplementary needs bringing the total COVID-19-related requirements in 2021 to USD 924 million. 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 924 M**



Total contributed or pledged to UNHCR COVID-19 appeal as of 2 July: **USD 260,634,858 (28%)**

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

Unearmarked contributions to UNHCR's 2021 global programme

Norway \$80M | Sweden \$66.9M | Private donors Spain \$42.6M | Netherlands \$36.1M | Denmark \$34.6M | Germany \$26M | France \$20M | Private donors Republic of Korea \$17.9M | Switzerland \$16.4M | 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](#)

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