

# UNHCR Regional Bureau for the Middle East and North Africa (MENA)

## COVID-19 Response

Update #23 (1 – 30 September 2021)

### Key Figures



17.4 million

people of concern in the Middle East and North Africa (2021 planning figures)



17,602 cases

of COVID-19 were reported among people of concern (POCs) to UNHCR since March 2020, including fatalities



19 out of 19 countries

in the MENA region have confirmed the inclusion of refugees in their national COVID-19 vaccination programmes or plans



19 out of 19 countries

in the MENA region have started COVID-19 vaccinations for refugees

### Regional Developments



Following ongoing coordination between UNHCR and Jordan's Ministry of Health, Basma is one of six medically-qualified doctors from the refugee community recruited to work in a local hospital in Jordan as a UN Volunteer to support the national COVID-19 response. Photo by UNHCR/Lilly Carlisle

During September, most countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) continued to observe a downward trend in reported cases of COVID-19, though relatively high infection rates were reported in Egypt, the Syrian Arab Republic (Syria) and Yemen. Several countries who reported a stabilization in cases—including Israel, Kuwait, Mauritania, Morocco, Tunisia and UAE—began lifting national movement restrictions and curfews, with limitations on physical presence decreasing in schools and public areas.

Access to vaccination continued to increase, with people of concern in various age groups receiving vaccine doses across the region. Despite this, some PoCs reported difficulties in accessing COVID-19 vaccination centres or obtaining official proof-of-vaccination certificates and health passes to access public services and areas.

UNHCR operations in the MENA region continue to work with authorities to remove barriers preventing access to vaccination and health services among refugees, asylum-seekers, IDPs and host communities, while reinforcing the capacities and response of national health authorities.

### Main Lines of Response



Continuing, adapting, and delivering protection and assistance to the most vulnerable



Strengthening communication with communities



Prioritizing immediate interventions to prevent infections and supporting access to services and materials



Advocating for the inclusion of refugees, IDPs and other marginalized groups into national public health and other responses, and supporting national systems to deliver assistance



Empowering individuals and families to make the best decisions for themselves, through cash-based assistance

## Highlights from the Field

In **Algeria**, more than 4,000 Sahrawi refugees have been fully vaccinated in the Tindouf camps. However, as the overall vaccination rate remains low, UNHCR and partners continue to implement sensitization campaigns. UNHCR is also providing technical support to WHO during the roll out of the 'Go Data' Health Information Management System (HIMS) to support the digitalization of the Sahrawi health system, which will improve tracking of COVID-19 cases and facilitate investigation of outbreaks, data collection, contact tracing and the visualization of chains of transmission.

In **Egypt**, UNHCR continued to provide multi-purpose cash assistance (MPCA) as part of its COVID-19 response. So far in 2021, a total of 4,572 families (14,944 individuals) have been assisted with COVID-19 grants, with plans for an additional 3,375 families (10,039 individuals) to be assisted during the last quarter of 2021. UNHCR's health partners continue to support PoCs with online vaccination registration; to date, a total of 376 PoCs have been assisted with registration on the national online platform. Among them, 125 PoCs received vaccine doses (21 received their first dose and 104 were fully vaccinated).

In **Iraq**, UNHCR agreed with the Directorate of Health (DoH) in Duhok and Erbil governorates to establish COVID-19 vaccination units in refugee and IDP camps. WHO and UNICEF will support staff cost and training, while UNHCR will conduct vaccination awareness campaigns across refugee camps (door-to-door); the vaccination units are expected to be operational in October. Thanks to advocacy conducted by UNHCR and Legal Clinics Network in Diyala governorate, the DoH will prioritize UNHCR PoCs for vaccination in assigned centres, and Syrian asylum-seekers holding UNHCR certificates will have access to free PCR testing.

**Israel** saw the number of severe COVID-19 cases drop below 500 for the first time since mid-August, while the death rate stabilized at 20% of severe cases; the swift distribution of vaccine booster doses is believed to be behind this decline, with some 3.6 million individuals having now received a third dose.

In **Jordan** positive cases among camp-based refugees continued to be well below the national average, with 3.2% of camp-based refugees testing positive compared to 8.1% of the general Jordanian population. Meanwhile, the number of vaccinated refugees in camps continued to increase during September, reaching over 29,800 refugees in total (42% of the eligible population in Azraq and Zaatar), with more than 41,000 registered to receive the vaccine. Following ongoing

coordination between UNHCR and the Ministry of Health (MoH), six medically-qualified doctors from the refugee community were recruited to work in hospitals and clinics across Jordan as UN Volunteers to support the national COVID-19 response.

In **Lebanon**, UNHCR launched a 'vaccine awareness bus' and continued to deploy mobile vaccination teams in refugee settings across the country. Teams will continue administering the first vaccine dose until late October before administering the second dose for targeted groups in both urban and rural areas by mid-December. The Operation also dispatched medical equipment to 10 hospitals across the country including negative pressure machines, defibrillators, ultrasound scanners, high-flow oxygen machines, and digital X-ray machines. UNHCR is currently in discussion with the new government to continue collaboration on refugee health issues, including vaccination against COVID-19.

The national vaccine campaign in **Libya** continued as the number of active cases decreased in September following a peak in late-July. Since 25 July, refugees and asylum-seekers continue to be included in the national vaccination plan, with dedicated vaccine centres for non-Libyans set up across parts of the country. UNHCR shared video messages on its social media platforms to inform refugees and asylum-seekers of vaccines procedures while also providing information for accessing vaccination centres.

Following a stabilization in cases, the Government of **Mauritania** lifted movement restrictions including curfews. So far, some 800,000 individuals have received at least one vaccine dose including 500,000 who are fully vaccinated, ranking Mauritania among the highest vaccinated populations in Africa. In Mbera refugee camp, a total of 8,937 refugees were vaccinated as of 30 September, a 100% increase from the month prior. Additionally, no deaths from COVID-19 were reported in the camp throughout the month. To mitigate the financial impact of the pandemic, UNHCR distributed cash assistance to 1,000 refugee households and 3,500 vulnerable community members in Bassikounou and Amourj to support the purchase of food items, livestock feed, and agricultural items.

**Morocco** observed a downward trend in COVID-19 cases throughout September, with the weekly average falling from 9,509 in August to 1,081 in September. Vaccination meanwhile continued, with over 52.1% of the overall population being fully vaccinated (some 19.2 million individuals). While refugees and asylum-seekers continue to be included in the national vaccination campaign, national institutions, civil society

organizations and UNHCR are closely coordinating to ensure effective inclusion in practice. So far, over 591 refugees have been vaccinated.

Health authorities in **Syria** reported a sharp increase in daily COVID-19 cases since mid-August, believed to be a fourth wave. In response, local authorities in **north-east Syria** imposed a curfew from 25 September. The Syrian Ministry of Health confirmed intensive care units (ICUs) had reached full capacity, with ICUs in **north-west Syria** also reported to be at full capacity. UNHCR continued to provide PoCs with access to refugee status determination (RSD) procedures through a modified interview approach, whereby cases are processed remotely with caseworkers and PoCs both onsite and communicating via secure video. This approach works to guarantee all procedural and integrity safeguards including identity verification, confidentiality, data protection, secure communication and due process.

In **Tunisia**, 197 refugees and asylum-seekers were vaccinated during September — up from just 9 individuals the month prior — with the total number standing at 315 since the beginning of the national campaign. UNHCR organized information sessions on vaccines in the governorates of Gabes, Medenine and Sfax while outreach workers helped PoCs register on the national EVAX platform, with 152 individuals registering in the southern governorates during the month.

As **Yemen** witnessed a significant increase in infections, UNHCR continued distributing PPE and hygiene kits while delivering health services to refugees, asylum-seekers, and host community members countrywide through its five supported clinics. During September, UNHCR and partners reached more than 7,083 refugees and 3,738 Yemenis through COVID-19 awareness-raising activities, while continuing advocacy and coordination with local authorities and partners to ensure inclusion of refugees in the national vaccine rollout.



*In Tunisia, refugees and asylum-seekers are sensitized against risks of COVID-19. Photo: © UNHCR/wHallouli Mohamed Ameer*

## Global and MENA Financial Information

In 2021, UNHCR is seeking \$924 million, of which over 50% is mainstreamed in the annual budget and some \$455 million is sought through the [COVID-19 Supplementary Appeal](#), for activities in 2021 related to the exceptional socio-economic and protection impacts of COVID-19. As of 12 October, UNHCR's total financial requirements for the COVID-19 Emergency are **48% funded**, with **\$447 million received** (inclusive of indicative allocations of softly earmarked and unearmarked funds), of which **\$95.3 million** is for the MENA region.

## Resources:

- [UNHCR's 2021 COVID-19 Supplementary Appeal](#)
- For MENA regional and country reports on COVID-19 response, please visit – [UNHCR Global Focus](#); [UNHCR Operational Portal \(Syria Regional Refugee Response\)](#); and [Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan website](#)
- Support UNHCR's COVID-19 preparedness and response plans: <https://giving.unhcr.org/en/coronavirus/>

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