

## UNHCR Regional Bureau for the Middle East and North Africa

# COVID-19 Response

## 2021 Year-End Report

(January - December 2021)

### Key Figures



17.4 million\*

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



29,000 cases

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



19 out of 19 countries

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

## Regional Developments

In 2021, UNHCR and partners continued to provide support and deliver protection and assistance to refugees, asylum-seekers, and internally displaced people (IDPs) across the MENA region. This included supporting access to health and education services, and providing shelter and cash assistance, which remained essential to people of concern; some 826,000 unique individuals were reached with emergency cash assistance for the COVID-19 response to the value of \$43 million.

Notably, UNHCR advocacy contributed to the inclusion of refugees in national COVID-19 responses across the region, including for testing and treatment, and in all countries for COVID-19 vaccination.

Throughout the year, UNHCR continued to support local COVID-19 health responses and sensitization activities through Risk Communication and Community Engagement, while vaccination campaigns were further reinforced by national health authorities, as booster shots were introduced by some to mitigate the spread of the virus.

In 2022, UNHCR's COVID-19 response will continue to focus on advocating for the inclusion of people of concern to UNHCR in national public health systems and other national responses. Given that significant numbers of people of concern remain vulnerable and in hardship, exacerbated by the pandemic, UNHCR will continue to mitigate the negative socioeconomic and protection impacts of COVID-19, particularly through cash programming and community outreach. COVID-19 programming, including in the areas of protection, health, basic needs, WASH, shelter, and camp coordination and camp management (CCCM), are mainstreamed into annual planning and presented in the [Global Appeal](#) and an overview is available [here](#).



A refugee undergoing check-up before getting vaccination for COVID-19 in Sahrawi refugee camp, Algeria. Photo by © UNHCR/Eunice Ohanusi

## 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 assistance

## Notable 2021 achievements in MENA



**826,000**

unique individuals (IDPs, refugees and other people of concern to UNHCR) reached with emergency cash assistance to the value of \$43 million to mitigate economic impact of the pandemic



**112,000**

people were provided with mental health and psychosocial support services (MHPSS)



**18,000**

people of concern affected by COVID-19 benefited from Government increased or expanded social protection



**60,000**

women and girls received sexual and reproductive health services,



**5.9 million**

individuals accessed protection services, including registration, legal assistance, case management and community-based protection; GBV services were maintained or expanded



**108,000**

children and youth were supported with distance or home-based learning



**92%**

of areas inhabited by IDPs, refugees, migrants and host communities in 13 countries across MENA were reached by information campaigns about the COVID-19 pandemic



**1.2 million**

people of concern received essential health care services



Amazine and Abderramah are asylum-seekers from Chad and they live in Zarzis, southern Tunisia. They are receiving a home visit from the COVID-19 outreach team of UNHCR partner the Tunisian Refugee Council (CTR), with the aim to sensitize them on the risks linked to COVID-19 and on the importance of getting vaccinated. The team is also helping them enroll in the vaccination campaign

Photo: © UNHCR/Hallouli Mohamed Ameur

## Highlights from the Field

In **Algeria**, refugees were gradually included in the national health systems for secondary and tertiary health care services following continued advocacy efforts. UNHCR also continued to assist national public health facilities, supported medical staff working in COVID-19 departments with incentives, and provided trainings for medical staff. UNHCR also supported vulnerable POCs with emergency COVID-19 cash assistance.

In **Iraq**, UNHCR successfully advocated with health authorities and constructed a COVID-19 vaccination unit in Domiz 1 refugee camp in Duhok Governorate (the biggest refugee camp in Iraq, hosting over 30,000 individuals), as well as allocated Primary Health Care Centres (PHCC) in other camps to be used as COVID-19 vaccination units. UNHCR also provided Personal Protective Equipment to camp staff to protect them and reduce the spread of the COVID-19, and conducted an awareness campaign on COVID-19 vaccines. In camps alone, some 11,000 Syrian refugees received the first dose of COVID-19 vaccine and a further 5,100 Syrian refugees in camps received the second dose. Together, these individuals represent approximately 17% of Syrian refugees living in camps (approximately 22% of the Iraqi national population had been vaccinated by the end of 2021). Capacity-building activities were provided to around 50 PHCC staff on COVID-19 related topics (e.g. detection and treatment, COVID-19 during pregnancy, vaccination). The expected impact is to improve the capacity of the medical staff in refugee camp, PHCCs to detect COVID-19 cases early and avoid further cases in the camps, to treat and follow-up on mild/moderate COVID-19 cases in camps, thus decreasing the load on the national health system. Informed medical staff, who can in turn provide information on COVID-19 vaccines to refugees during medical consultations, is expected to improve vaccine intake and reduce vaccine hesitancy among refugees.



*Syrian refugee girl wash her hands after an awareness-raising activity about the preventive measures of COVID19 in UNHCR-SWEDO community centre, the children in the camp started to practice what they learnt during the session, starting by washing their hands for 20 seconds! Photo: © UNHCR/Shaza Shekfeh*

Further, more than 37,000 of the most vulnerable IDP and returnee families benefitted from COVID-19 cash assistance to support their basic needs during the pandemic. Syrian refugees continued to have free access to COVID-19 public services including PCR tests, treatment, and hospital admission.

**Israel** pursued inclusive policies for all COVID-19-related health services, including treatment, testing and its national COVID-19 vaccination programme. The Government also announced in 2021 that asylum-seekers would be included in the national health insurance scheme, with a rollout plan to be developed in 2022.

In **Jordan**, UNHCR supported Government prevention and vaccination efforts, including via the establishment of vaccination points at its premises. COVID-19 vaccine administration continues to be provided to camp-based and urban refugee population in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and the national centre for security and crisis management. As part of its COVID-19 emergency response, UNHCR delivered COVID-19 cash assistance to approximately 41,000 families adversely affected by the pandemic.



Um Ahmed, talks to Linda a Jordanian Community Volunteer, ahead of taking the COVID-19 vaccine to allay concerns that she has. In coordination with the Ministry of Health, UNHCR operates a mobile vaccine centre two days a week at Nuzha Community Centre in East Amman. Photo: © UNHCR/Lilly Carlisle

In **Lebanon**, UNHCR was engaged in the national COVID-19 response to support the prevention, containment, and treatment of COVID-19 cases, through community mobilization, supporting vaccine campaigns, awareness-raising and hygiene product distribution, and ensuring access to testing and treatment. UNHCR maintained its response focusing on strengthening Government capacity to respond to the pandemic and treat patients regardless of nationality. Efforts were also taken to increase COVID-19 vaccination among refugees through communication campaigns, mobile vaccination teams, and a behavioural science study to better understand the reasons for vaccine hesitation. UNHCR also managed to cover 100% of hospitalization costs for refugees in need of treatment for COVID-19.

In **Libya**, UNHCR distributed 40,000 hygiene kits to IDPs, IDP returnees, refugees, asylum-seekers and host community members, along with 39,000 soap bars, as part of the COVID-19 response.

Medical equipment and supplies were donated to several public health facilities to improve their delivery capacity. In addition, three medical ventilators were donated to the Sirt and Al-jufra municipalities in western Libya to enhance the COVID-19 response capacity.

In **Morocco**, UNHCR provided COVID-19 cash assistance exceptionally to 4,500 families.

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## Global and MENA Financial Information

In 2021, UNHCR sought \$924 million, of which over 50% is mainstreamed in the annual budget and some \$455 million through the [COVID-19 Supplementary Appeal](#), for activities in 2021 related to the exceptional socio-economic and protection impacts of COVID-19. **As of 31 December**, 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.

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## Resources:

- [UNHCR's 2021 COVID-19 Supplementary Appeal](#)
- [UNHCR MENA COVID-19 Response Fact Sheet](#) (January 2022)
- 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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