

Regional Bureau for Europe

UPDATE # 20

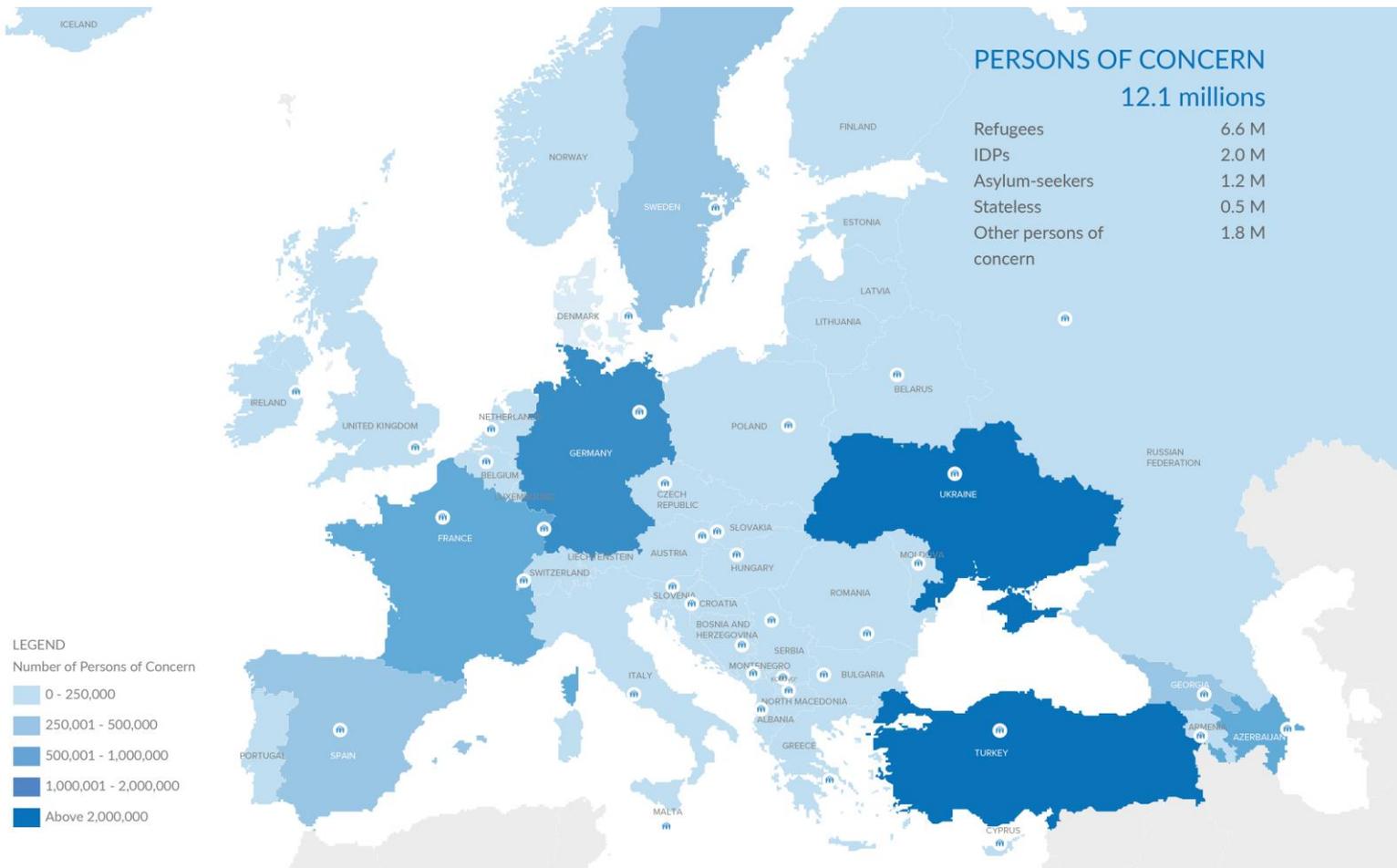
14 - 26 October 2020

With COVID-19 infection rates rising sharply across the region, many countries are progressively reinstating **movement restrictions** or **extending states of emergency**.

Despite the current strengthening of COVID-19 prevention measures taken by some states, **access to territory** is generally maintained.

New movement restrictions have begun to impact UNHCR staff work in country offices. All 37 offices are **partially teleworking** since 1 October.

Populations of Concern



SOURCE: [UNHCR GLOBAL REPORT 2019](#)

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, 34 countries have reported cases among persons of concern at some point, and some of the concerned individuals have already recovered. However, any figures or estimates need to be taken with caution due to varying approaches to testing, data segregation and reporting.
- As COVID-19 cases continue to increase region-wide, reaching a dramatic situation in some countries with higher spikes than during the spring, governments are declaring various states of alarm, expanding movement and international travel restrictions with more quarantine measures, in order to prevent healthcare systems from being overwhelmed.
- Newly established movement restrictions and further COVID-19 prevention measures have already impacted the work of UNHCR staff in country offices, for example in **Central Europe**, where border monitoring visits have been placed on hold. In **Serbia**, to access persons of concern in governmental centres, non-state actors are required to present a negative COVID test or wear full Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), as of 19 October.
- Clashes between **Armenia** and **Azerbaijan** over the Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) region continued during the reporting period. UNHCR remains concerned about the situation of civilians, including women and children, directly impacted by the fighting, many of whom have been forced to flee their homes in search of safety. The conflict poses a direct threat to public health and safety on both sides, a situation exacerbated by rising COVID-19 infection rates. The humanitarian response is led and coordinated by the respective governments, and UNHCR has offered assistance in line with its mandate.
- COVID-19 cases continued reaching record numbers in both Armenia and Azerbaijan, where the number of infections quadrupled compared to the previous fortnight. While the healthcare system there is under heavy pressure, the regular testing and isolation of those infected has resumed.
- Since 1 October, all UNHCR offices in the Europe region are in partial telework mode. Field and on-site visits to reception centres are strictly regulated in some countries, due to the increasing spread of the virus.

UNHCR Areas of Intervention



PROTECTION

- **Quarantine measures for new arrivals: Italy** continued to receive new arrivals during the reporting period, although the number decreased by half as compared to the previous fortnight. Of these, 506 persons arrived in Lampedusa, where hosting capacities have increased as a result of swift transfers to offshore quarantine facilities. COVID-19 testing continues, and new arrivals continue to quarantine as per official health protocols. As of 26 October, some 1,964 individuals were in quarantine offshore and 297 onshore.
- In **Spain**, a total of 4,605 persons arrived by sea during the reporting period, the highest number so far in 2020. Most persons arrived in the Canary Islands and the Andalusian coast. In a change to health protocols upon arrival, antigen tests are now conducted instead of PCR tests, due to their accuracy and fast results. In case of positive results, antibody blood tests are also conducted to provide confirmation.
- Quarantine vessels remain of concern to UNHCR as some individuals tested positive after having tested negative upon boarding, which could be indicative of the unreliability of tests or of difficulty in ensuring COVID-19 preventive measures on board. Quarantine length also remains a concern, since some groups are held back for at least double the mandated time in sub-standard circumstances, prompting some groups to protest the repeated testing and prolonged quarantines. Equally concerning is the fact that people disembarking from offshore quarantine undergo identification procedures on the ferries, where UNHCR has no access and thus is unable to identify and refer persons with special needs. While authorities have communicated that children will no longer quarantine offshore, an unknown number of unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) remain quarantined offshore.
- **Reception conditions:** Overcrowding at centres continues to pose serious challenges for social distancing and other preventive measures. Further, identification of COVID-19 positive cases often results in preventing access to all centre

residents for UNHCR and its partners. In the Pournara camp in **Cyprus**, limited separation between the main camp isolation area, hosting some 316 individuals, and the rest of the site, hosting 85 persons, creates a risk of cross contamination. In **Belgium**, the occupancy rate in the UASC reception network has exceeded capacity, making it difficult to comply with health requirements. In **Serbia**, to relieve chronic overcrowding in the Sombor centre in the north, authorities have transferred almost 450 refugees and migrants to the renovated Pirot centre in the east. The Bujanovac centre in the south reopened on 13 October after months of inactivity to receive newcomers from the north. In **Spain**, a new quarantine reception centre for sea arrivals was set up in Andalusia, to better cope with the increasing number of arrivals. On the Canary Islands, reception conditions remain precarious. There is reportedly a group of 900 persons accommodated in sub-standard tents near the port of Gran Canaria. Authorities are searching for adequate premises to establish a first-line detention centre (CATE) for registration and identification by the port of Arguineguin, the main disembarkation point.

- In a worrisome development, authorities in some countries have once again restricted the movement of asylum facility residents. For example, in **Slovakia**, residents are not allowed to exit the facilities, with some exceptions. At the same time, UNHCR's access to persons of concern is reduced due to the worsening overall COVID-19 situation.
- **Resumption of procedures:** A mission by Swiss authorities is conducting refugee interviews at EASO's Resettlement Support Facility in Istanbul, **Turkey**. This is the first in-person selection mission in the country since the outbreak of COVID-19. The operation briefed the Swiss mission on the COVID-19 situation, the impact on refugees, and other matters relating to temporary and international protection procedures in Turkey.
- In **Spain**, as a positive development, the police in Melilla have provided remote interpretation for asylum-seekers to conduct their asylum interviews by phone. UNHCR will monitor the quality of this service.
- **Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs):** In **Ukraine**, on 15 October, civilian movement across the contact line through the **Stanytsia Luhanska** Entry Exit Checkpoint (EECP) was suspended until 31 October due to increased COVID-19 cases in the Luhansk Non-Government Controlled Area (NGCA). The temporary closure created new challenges for persons in the GCA unable to return to the NGCA, many of whom had to rent accommodation given the lack of alternatives provided by authorities. Individual crossings were allowed on an exceptional basis. To date, the **Novotroitske/Olenivka** EECP continues operating twice per week.
- On 15 October, UNHCR facilitated the delivery of a twelve-truck humanitarian convoy to Luhansk NGCA with COVID-19-related items and materials for WASH projects provided by UNHCR, UNICEF, and NGOs "People in Need" and Médecins du Monde. On 22 October, UNHCR facilitated the delivery of a five-truck convoy to Donetsk NGCA with COVID-19 related assistance provided by UNICEF and IOM. In total, five trucks transferred 47 MT of materials and medical equipment, such as hygiene items and oxygen concentrators, to Donetsk NGCA.
- In a welcome development, on 26 October, Oshchadbank, the State bank in charge of paying pensions to registered IDPs, extended the validity of the banking cards issued to pensioners in NGCA until 1 January 2021. This is the third extension since March when COVID-19 restrictions severely impacted freedom of movement across the 'contact line,' preventing thousands of pensioners in NGCA from travelling to GCA to access their pensions. UNHCR and other humanitarian actors have prioritized the extension of the cards' validity as an advocacy point in recent months.

**HEALTH**

- In **Greece**, as of 25 October, a total of 1,101 persons of concern had tested positive for COVID-19 since the beginning of the pandemic. Of these, 514 were on the mainland and 587 on the islands. In the meantime, some of these people have recovered.
- Some progress has been made in the Government's preparedness for COVID-19, but it continues to lack uniformity in protocols and processes, including in screening/testing of new arrivals. UNHCR continues to offer technical expertise and raise these issues with the authorities. However, there remains a shortage of health authority medical staff at the Reception and Identification Centres (RICs). In **Chios**, the capacity of medical actors, including NGOs, is severely stretched and unable to cover the needs of increased COVID-19 cases (67 asylum-seekers/refugees are isolating upon recently testing positive). To enlarge the on-site isolation area, authorities set up two UNHCR tents and redesigned quarantine areas. Following the completion of the RIC's isolation area on **Samos**, UNHCR is working with the authorities

to set up an additional area inside the RIC, by delivering four containers and undertaking fencing and other works. At the request of the authorities, UNHCR is also setting up an isolation/screening space in the Fylakio RIC, in **Evros**.

- Some 7,700 asylum-seekers are currently hosted in the Mavrovouni emergency site near Kara Tepe in **Lesvos**, while several hundred vulnerable asylum-seekers have been transferred to safe accommodations on the island or the mainland. As of 24 October, 40 people remain in quarantine in the site, 33 of which are COVID-19 positive and isolated alongside family members/close contacts, according to the authorities. To prevent the spread of the virus, asylum-seekers have undergone rapid COVID-19 testing by national health authorities before entering the site. UNHCR has provided and installed one Rubb Hall for COVID-19 testing and is currently installing partitions to help ensure patient privacy. Some 48,500 protective masks provided by the Swiss Humanitarian Aid Unit have been handed out at the UNHCR Rubb Hall distribution point.
- During the reporting period, UNHCR provided 3,900 pieces of personal protective equipment (PPE) and 1,170 core-relief items (CRIs) to the Coast Guard in Alexandroupoli, northern Greece, and over 9,000 hygiene items to two NGOs that support refugees on Samos. Countrywide, UNHCR has provided a total of 99,000 CRIs that help mitigate COVID-19 spread.
- New health measures and movement restrictions announced by authorities across the region, exacerbate difficulties for persons of concern in accessing health systems. In **Hungary**, persons of concern face a number of challenges due to language barriers when social workers/cultural mediators cannot accompany them to the hospital, as well as difficulties in accessing general practitioners and understanding the Hungarian medical referral system.
- In **Romania**, according to a needs assessment carried out between 9-16 October, a total of 522 persons of concern in the six reception centres will benefit from hygiene packs and personal protective equipment. An increased need for masks was noted, given that they are now mandatory in both indoor and outdoor public spaces in many areas across the country.
- In **Ukraine**, amid reports of critical medicine shortages in local pharmacies in Luhansk NGCA, de facto authorities allocated additional funds to procure medicines for the treatment of COVID-19 and pneumonia. Meanwhile, on 16 October, the de facto authorities in Donetsk informed that supplies of medicines to treat respiratory diseases, influenza and COVID-19 are planned for delivery at the end of October. On 21 October, the Swiss Development Agency provided 20,000 express tests for COVID-19 primary diagnosing to the de facto Ministry of Health in Donetsk.



CASH-BASED ASSISTANCE AND LIVELIHOODS

- In **Ukraine**, 64 families have to date received cash as individual protection assistance to help IDPs with specific needs to better cope with the socioeconomic impact of COVID-19, a measure introduced in July.
- Between 29 September and 12 October, the office in **Hungary** conducted an assessment of the socio-economic implications of the pandemic among 63 persons of concern. The majority of respondents stated they had difficulties satisfying basic needs, and 50% highlighted rent as the most difficult need to meet. 59 respondents were employed before the pandemic. For 28%, their work situation remained unchanged throughout the pandemic, 25% of the respondents had to go on temporary leave, while 20% lost their job. The majority of respondents attending school before the pandemic were able to continue their education, while five were unable to, mainly due to language barriers.



EDUCATION

- In **Ukraine**, as a result of the increasing COVID-19 rates in the GCA and NGCA, various measures have been taken to mitigate the spread of the virus, such as extending the autumn school holidays and online modalities for higher education.

- In **Turkey**, preliminary findings of an inter-agency needs assessment carried out in September with 1,039 individuals of different nationalities in 49 provinces indicate an increase in school drop-outs due to remote education. Additional findings include higher risks of child labour and forced marriage, significant negative changes to refugee's working status with many unable to meet their basic needs, higher levels of stress within communities, and higher domestic violence rates and tensions with local communities.

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;
- **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 closely with WHO and other partners. In addition, UNHCR co-chairs 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.
- In **Greece**, UNHCR continues supporting Government efforts by enhancing coordination mechanisms in response to the COVID-19 situation, with a focus on the islands, regarding health, clean water and sanitation, as well as Communication with Communities.
- In **Ukraine**, where the humanitarian programme cycle is implemented, the UN Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator and the Humanitarian Country Team lead the response, with WHO providing lead expertise on public health issues, in consultation with the authorities.

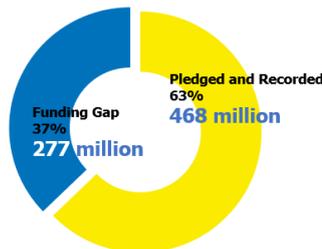
Financial Information

- The revised **COVID-19 Global Humanitarian Response Plan (GHRP)** was released on 7 May, covering the period April-December 2020. UNHCR seeks USD 745 million to boost preparedness, prevention and response activities to address

immediate public health needs of refugees and host communities worldwide. The amount presented in the appeal does not represent the full magnitude of UNHCR's engagement to support governments' efforts in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, including in Europe.

- 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 until the end of the year:



Total contributed or pledged to UNHCR COVID-19 appeal

USD 468 M (63%)

Including: United States of America \$186.3M | Germany \$62.7M | European Union \$32.4M | United Kingdom \$25.7M | Japan \$25.1M | African Development Bank \$18.3M | Private donors \$16.3M | Denmark \$14.6M | United Nations Foundation \$10.0M | CERF \$6.9M | Unilever \$7.2M | CERF \$6.9M | Canada \$6.4M | Education Cannot Wait \$3.9M | Qatar Charity \$3.5M | Spain \$3.4M | France \$3.4M | Ireland \$3.3M | Sweden \$3.0M | Sony Corporation \$2.9M | Austria \$2.5M | Finland \$2.4M | USA for UNHCR \$2.3M |

Unearmarked contributions to UNHCR's 2020 programme

Sweden \$76.4M | Private donors Spain \$59.9M | Norway \$41.4M | Netherlands \$36.1M | Denmark \$34.6M | United Kingdom \$31.7M | Private donors Republic of Korea \$30.6M | Germany \$25.9M | Japan \$23.8M | Private Donors Japan \$21M | Switzerland \$16.4M | Private Donors Italy \$14M | France \$14 M | Private Donors Sweden \$11.7M | Italy \$10.6 M |

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[UNHCR's revised Coronavirus Emergency Appeal](#)

[UNHCR operations overview in Europe](#)

[COVID-19: UNHCR's response](#)

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