

UNHCR Regional Bureau for the Middle East and North Africa

COVID-19 Emergency Response Update #16

1 - 28 February 2021

Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, Western Sahara, Yemen, and Turkey

Key Figures



20

out of 20 UNHCR countries / operations are reporting COVID-19 cases in the region



17.4 million

2021 planning figure for people of concern in the Middle East and North Africa



6,839

cases of COVID-19 reported among persons of concern¹ including fatalities since March 2020

Regional Developments

As countries across the MENA region roll out their national vaccination campaigns, governments continue to implement varying levels of restrictions to limit the spread of COVID-19, including curfews and partial lockdowns.

In support to Governments and partners, and to enable sound policy and decision-making during the pandemic and its aftermath, UNHCR has established an evidence-based tool, namely the [COVID-19 Live Platform on Temporary Measures and Impact on Protection](#). In line with the vision of the Global Compact on Refugees, the platform also aims to support the identification of areas where technical and financial support might be needed, to ensure that the pandemic does not disproportionately impact refugees and others forcibly displaced.



Ali, an internally displaced Yemeni, listens to an information session on how to protect himself and his family from COVID-19, at a UNHCR-supported community centre in Sana'a. Ali fled to the capital from Hudaydah in 2018. Photo by UNHCR / Shadi Abusneida

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**, as of 2 March 2021, 113,430 COVID-19 cases were recorded, including nearly 3,000 fatalities, according to the World Health Organization. In February, the Government rolled out its COVID-19 vaccination programme. The Algerian Ministry of Health launched an online platform for persons to register for inoculations, regardless of their nationality or legal status. Meanwhile, UNHCR continued advocacy efforts to ensure the inclusion of persons of concern in the national vaccination plan, both in urban and camp settings.

In **Egypt**, as of 3 March 2021, 183,591 COVID-19 cases were recorded, including 10,778 fatalities, according to the Ministry of Health and Population (MoHP). The MoHP recently launched a website for persons to register for vaccination. For now, registration is limited to three priority groups: health workers, people with chronic diseases (of all age groups) and elderly people. Refugees and asylum-seekers are able to register on the platform using identity documents issued by UNHCR. Meanwhile, UNHCR significantly increased its processing capacity at registration facilities during February in Alexandria, Zamalek and 6th of October City.

Israel continued to move towards a full opening of businesses and a partial opening of schools, in a gradual exit from the country's nationwide lockdown that began in December 2020. In February, the Ministry of Health opened a vaccination center for asylum seekers and migrant workers without medical insurance in the south of Tel Aviv, with over 14,250 persons receiving the first dose as of the beginning of March. Other vaccination centers dedicated for this population group have also opened in Eilat, Netanya, Haifa and Rehovot.

In **Iraq**, COVID-19 cases continued to rise at a higher rate compared to the previous month, with an average of 3,000 daily cases during the month of February, compared to an average of 785 during January 2021. Due to the surge in the number of cases, the government ordered a nationwide weekend curfew as well as the closure of schools and places of worship, among others. UNHCR continues to collaborate with education partners to support education opportunities for refugees despite limitations on access in many areas and ongoing school closures due to COVID-19. Within the National Education Sector, UNHCR is engaged in the Iraq Remote

Learning Taskforce and is supporting the development of a Joint Teacher Training in Remote Learning Package for Iraq with other education actors.

In **Jordan**, COVID-19 cases increased significantly in February, with a weekly increase of 37 per cent and 53 per cent in the last two weeks of the month. Strict measures to curb the spread of the virus were reimposed, including the Friday lockdown and extended curfew hours. In refugee camps, as of the end of February, a total of 316 refugees have been vaccinated, while refugees in urban settings are also receiving vaccines, in accordance with the government programme prioritisation. An in-camp vaccination centre in Zaatari refugee camp opened on 15 February and has been receiving Syrian refugee camp residents, who receive vaccination appointments after registering through the government platform.

UNHCR Jordan continues to implement most of its programmatic activities through remote modalities, including remote registration, refugee status determination and renewal of documentation, remote protection counselling and interviews, and remote resettlement processing. Meanwhile, information continues to be shared with refugee communities through a number of channels, including social media, WhatsApp groups, and Community Service Centres.

On 7 February, **Libya's** Scientific Advisory Committee to Combat the Coronavirus Pandemic announced that 55,000 Pfizer and 920,000 AstraZeneca vaccines have been secured, while efforts to procure additional vaccines are ongoing. Medical staff, people over the age of 60, and people suffering from chronic diseases will be prioritized for vaccination. Meanwhile, in response to the socio-economic challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, UNHCR and the World Food Programme continued their joint food distribution programme, targeting more than 2,400 refugee and asylum-seeker food-insecure families (over 7,500 individuals) in Tripoli, Zwara, Zawiya and Misrata.

In late February, **Mauritania's** Ministry of Health shared the national vaccination plan with UN Agencies and other relevant partners, including embassies and development actors. In the plan, refugees are included on par with nationals. At Mbera refugee camp, the vaccine will be administered at health facilities.

In **Morocco**, the state of national emergency has been extended until 10 April, extending the national night curfew and inter-city movement restrictions. The Government began its vaccination campaign on 28 January. As of the end of February, the country procured some 8.5 million doses, with 3.9 million people having received the first dose and 580,000 the second dose. Meanwhile, the government confirmed the inclusion of migrants and refugees in the vaccination campaign.

After imposing a total lockdown in January 2021, in February, **Lebanon** started easing the lockdown in a phased approach, gradually allowing sectors to reopen. UNHCR activities continued to operate at a capacity in line with the lockdown measures. The monitoring of cases at detention facilities continued remotely due to movement restrictions. Urgent medical and legal needs and the provision of core relief items continued.

As Lebanon received the first batches of the COVID-19 vaccine, UNHCR reached out to communities to ensure that eligible refugees come forward to enrol and receive the vaccine. Meanwhile, under the framework of UNHCR hospital expansion interventions in response to COVID-19, civil and ventilation works have been completed for both phase one and two of the expansion plans. Further support in terms of medical equipment, medical supplies, medications, and personal protective equipment (PPE) was extended to selected public

hospitals. So far, across all phases, a total of 319 regular hospital beds and 89 ICU beds have been installed and are operational

In **Syria**, the COVAX facility has been approved, and the government has confirmed that refugees and camp-based IDP populations will be included among the priority categories when the vaccination campaign is rolled out. Meanwhile, to ensure the continuity of assistance to refugees and asylum-seekers, UNHCR resumed its registration activities with reduced staff presence on 28 February, while continuing to follow precautionary measures as well as restrictions on occupancy.

In **Yemen**, UNHCR continues to coordinate closely with the authorities to ensure that vulnerable displaced populations, including refugees and asylum-seekers, are included in national preparedness and response plans, and that they can access adequate healthcare services. Yemen's National COVID-19 Vaccination Plan has been recently finalized and it is expected that the country will receive over two million vaccine doses in the coming months through the COVAX global vaccine sharing scheme. UNHCR is advocating to ensure that refugees and asylum-seekers are covered through the COVAX scheme.

Global and MENA Financial Information

In 2021, UNHCR is seeking USD 924 million of which over 50 per cent is mainstreamed in the annual budget and some USD 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 16 March, the Supplementary Appeal is **6 per cent funded**, with **USD 28 million received**, of which **USD 3 million is for the MENA region**.

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.

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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