

Regional Bureau for Europe

UPDATE # 5

2 May – 7 May 2020

Movement restrictions continue to apply to some degree in most countries, but some countries have started relaxing such restrictions measures and announced further gradual lifting.

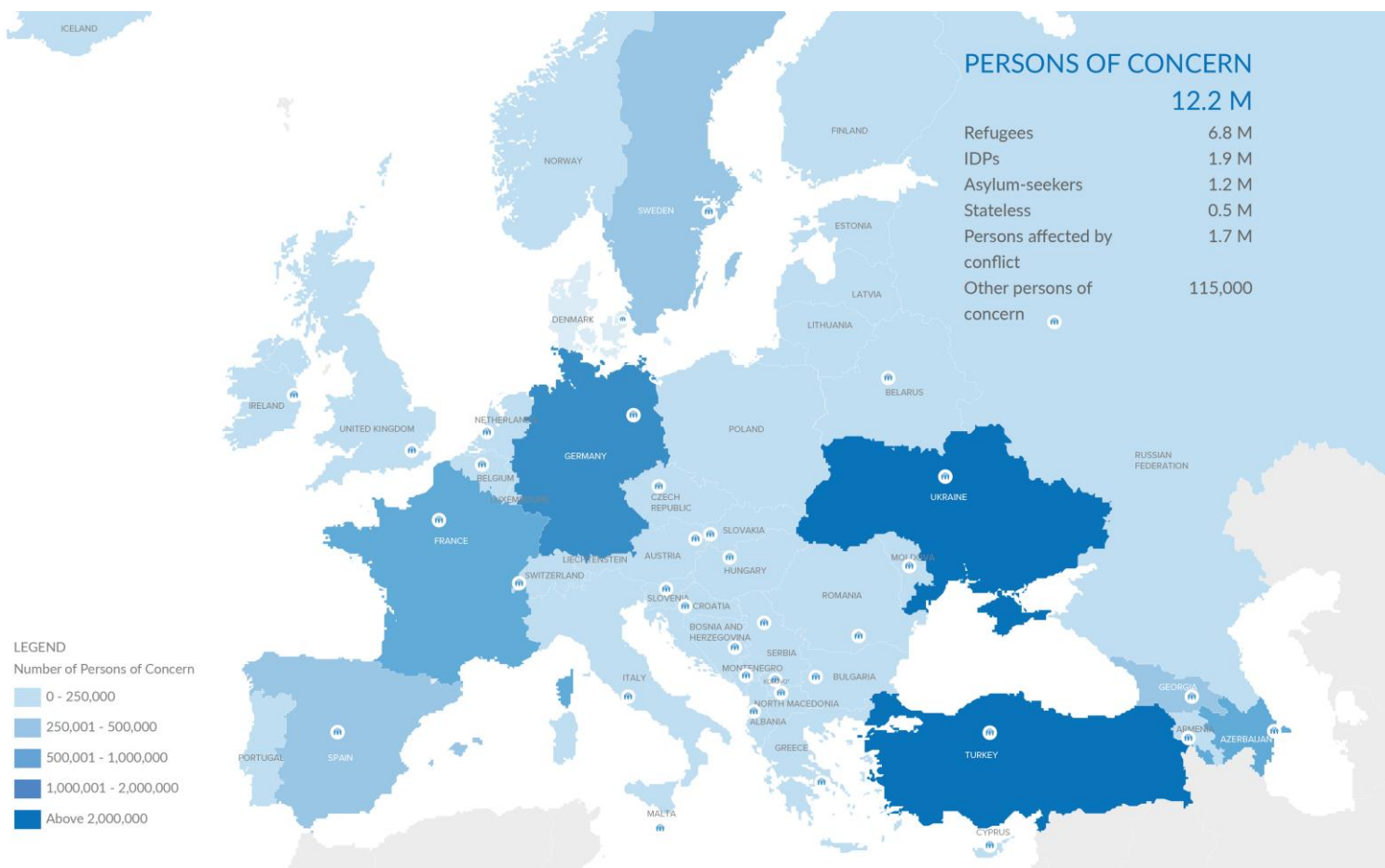
Access to territory is limited through border closures or entry bans for foreigners, with only a few exceptions.

Many countries in the region have managed to maintain access to **international protection** despite restrictions to access to territory.

UNHCR and partners' physical access to persons of concern has decreased. Communication with communities has been scaled up through virtual channels.

Populations of Concern

SOURCE: UNHCR STATISTICAL REPORT AS OF END OF JUNE 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. So far, 17 countries have reported cases among persons of concern, and some of them have already recovered. However, any figure or estimate at this point needs to be taken with caution due to differing approaches to testing, data segregation and reporting.
- Several countries have started to partially lift some of the restrictions of movement since 27 April. Most have chosen a fortnightly rhythm to review progress and proceed to the next easing of restrictions. Border-related restrictions, including European Union internal and external, remain largely in force and were further extended in some cases. As a result of lifted restrictions, some country offices can resume at least partially some of the suspended activities, for example protection monitoring at borders.

UNHCR Response

- UNHCR's response to the COVID-19 situation is focusing on:
 - Supporting national authorities in setting up **preparedness and response plans**, including improving access to water and sanitation where possible, enhancing reception capacity post disembarkation by establishing quarantine and isolation areas in reception centres to better monitor and isolate, as necessary, confirmed or suspected COVID-19 cases;
 - 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;
 - In some operations, supporting authorities in identifying alternative **accommodation** or bringing current housing for asylum-seekers up to minimum protection and hygienic standards;
 - **Ensuring the inclusion** of persons of concern, host communities and service providers in the provision and distribution of adequate hygienic items;
 - **Continuous advocacy** to ensure the inclusion of persons of concern in national COVID-19 preparedness and response plans;
 - **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.

UNHCR Areas of Intervention



PROTECTION

- Some of the countries that had suspended **asylum procedures** are resuming the processing of asylum claims. However, backlogs will take some time to be cleared, given adjusted procedures must be compliant with health guidelines. This is of particular concern in relation to those asylum-seekers who are *de facto* in detention ahead of the formal claim submission. In countries like **Spain**, UNHCR is coordinating with asylum authorities on plans to resume asylum registration and interviews in a way that is efficient, preserves quality and is compliant with health measures. Especially where authorities were working on improving and consolidating the quality and efficiency of asylum systems pre-COVID,

backlog management measures are advocated for in order to mitigate the risk of losing past investments.

- In several countries, concerns arise where movement restrictions are relaxed for the general population but remain in place for people in **reception centres**. UNHCR has also been in dialogue with authorities for example, regarding the Spanish reception centre in Melilla, where over 1,600 people have been confined since 14 March, or in centres in Bosnia and Herzegovina. More severe concerns arise where authorities have reportedly continued forcibly moving registered and documented asylum-seekers from private accommodations to reception centres, in which health guidelines are more difficult to comply with. Advocacy and dialogue with concerned authorities, at times jointly with other stakeholders, continue.
- Countries continue amending regulations and legislations to allow for the extension of validity of documentation for asylum-seekers and other foreigners. **Poland** has, for example, introduced a set of welcome measures that include extending foreigners' documentation by up to 30 days after the state of health threat will be called off; introducing online applications for integration and social assistance programmes by refugees and other protection holders; extending food assistance for quarantined foreigners; allowing for work without renewed permits; and extending eligibility for asylum-seekers' access to free social and medical help. In **Ukraine**, the Government decided to extend the validity of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) certificates and refrain from revoking them until up to 30 days following the end of the quarantine measures. Normally, if an IDP is absent from the government-controlled part of the territory for 60 days or more, their IDP registration is revoked. This initiative is a positive step, introducing an automatic prolongation of all social benefits for IDPs.
- Some of the measures taken by governments to prevent the spread of COVID-19 have inadvertently compounded some of the pre-existing child protection and sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) concerns. Concerns also emanate from suspended asylum procedures; it has become more challenging to consistently appoint guardians for unaccompanied or separated children. At the same time, this unusual situation has also prompted States to take proactive measures to prevent child protection concerns. In **France**, the emergency legislation ensures that minors who turn 18 during the pandemic remain in the child protection system. In **Bulgaria**, the State Agency for Child Protection has set up a new online service where children, parents and other caregivers can ask questions and receive professional psychological support and advice. Advocacy for the inclusion of refugee and asylum-seeking children in distance-learning education programmes continues (in **Croatia** for example).
- SGBV survivors face additional difficulties with reporting incidents, accessing safe referral pathways and obtaining needed support, due to movement restrictions and a drop-in capacity of service providers, such as in Italy and Greece. To mitigate this challenge, in **Greece**, survivors are being empowered to form a network through social media to facilitate community referrals. Concerns regarding the de-prioritization of SGBV reports due to the COVID-19 emergency have been reported in some countries, for example by police or hospitals. On the contrary, in **Croatia**, heeding a warning by the Gender Equality Ombudsperson, the Government encouraged the reporting of any instances of potential domestic violence and launched the national "Behind Closed Doors" awareness campaign on domestic violence and child abuse in the COVID-19 situation, together with specialized institutions. In **Spain**, the Government Office for Gender Violence has extended the contingency plan against SGBV in the context of COVID-19.
- On 5 May, the Ombudsman's Office in Ukraine highlighted the dire living conditions of the Roma population, which is disproportionately affected by the virus and health-related movement restrictions due to their poverty and inability to provide themselves with the necessary means for protection, food and medicine. According to the Ombudsman, in order to prevent the spread of COVID-19 infections among the Roma population, joint efforts between local authorities and the Roma community will need to be strengthened in order to ensure observance of the anti-pandemic rules, provision of protection services, and enhanced access to health services, especially COVID-19 testing.


HEALTH

- In **Greece**, a UNHCR-supported medical reception area outside the Moria Reception and Identification Centre (RIC) was inaugurated on 3 May by the Minister of Migration and Asylum, local Members of Parliament and the Vice-President of the Parliament.
- UNHCR continues moving older and immunocompromised persons of concern out of island RICs to locations where they are exposed to lesser risks of contagion. Between 16 March and 6 May, **913** people were moved out of island RICs to UNHCR apartments and hotels. Reception conditions on the islands remain dire for the 33,200 people living in overcrowded and unhygienic conditions in the RICs with a hosting capacity of some 5,400 persons. UNHCR also supports State organized transfers to the mainland with logistics, interpretation and PPE distribution. On 3 May, 391 people were transferred from Lesbos.
- In **Croatia**, a joint advocacy effort with UNICEF on 20 April resulted in the extension of a project supported by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF), providing basic health services for asylum-seekers in reception centres until the end of July.
- In **Turkey**, Bebemoss, a social enterprise and partner of **Made51**, a global, collaborative initiative designed to connect refugee artisans with markets, is producing masks with their artisans, including Syrian refugees. They currently have the capacity to produce up to 1,000 masks per week, which, in compliance with applicable regulations, are mostly exported.
- In **Ukraine**, 21 hygiene and sanitizing kits were distributed to three collective centres in Donetsk oblast, where 632 IDPs reside, to ensure proper cleaning and regular disinfection of the facilities. These kits contain sanitizers, cleaning products and paper towels, which will improve hygiene conditions in these facilities. Based on an initial assessment, the operation plans to provide hygiene items for 43 collective centres.

**COMMUNICATION WITH COMMUNITIES**

- In **Malta**, cooperation with the Government aimed at ensuring the translation of information and the availability of interpreters, but also included recommendations to review the necessity and proportionality of limitations to the freedom of movement in open and closed centres.
- In **Ukraine**, amplifiers have been installed within communities near the contact line to strengthen telephone connectivity, so that villagers can use online banking and remotely access pensions and health information. Partners also facilitated sessions for older people to learn how to use their devices for these purposes.
- Virtual information sessions for groups of new arrivals in the asylum system were introduced in **Spain**, and online community counselling continues in **Ukraine**, in view of improving access to information for this population.

**CASH-BASED ASSISTANCE**

- In **Ukraine**, an additional one-time emergency cash assistance is being prepared for 454 refugees and asylum-seekers living in vulnerable households, including persons who have lost their primary source of income due to quarantine and other related measures, those with serious medical conditions and

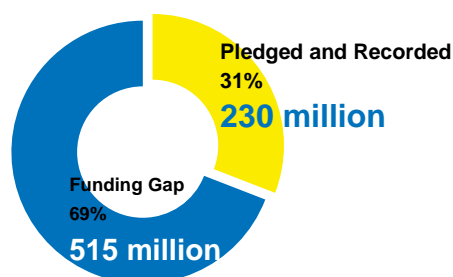
persons at heightened risk of homelessness. This assistance will also help beneficiaries protect their assets, as well as enhance their resilience and post-crisis recovery capacities.

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**, the operation continues supporting the Government's efforts by enhancing coordination mechanisms in response to the COVID-19 situation, with a particular 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 authorities.
- In **Turkey**, UNHCR is also part of the COVID-19 Socio-Economic Impact and Response Task Team that has been established at the request of the UN Turkey Crisis Management Team and in follow-up to guidance by the UN Secretary-General, to assess the economic and social impact of the COVID-19 crisis in Turkey.

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 globally boost preparedness, prevention and response activities to address immediate public health needs of refugees and host communities. The amount presented in the appeal does not represent the magnitude of UNHCR's engagement to support governments' efforts in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, including in Europe.
- UNHCR Regional Bureau for Europe is grateful to donors who have provided generous and timely support to the Coronavirus Emergency Situation globally and to Europe in particular, including for non-COVID-19 related interventions, which are critical to ensure business continuity.



Total contributed or pledged to UNHCR COVID-19 appeal

USD 230M

Including: United States of America \$64.0M | Germany \$38.0M | European Union \$31.8M | United Kingdom \$24.8M | Japan \$23.9M | Denmark \$14.6M | CERF \$6.9M | Canada \$6.4M | Ireland \$3.3M | Sweden \$3.0M | Sony Corporation \$3.0M | Finland \$2.4M | Education Cannot Wait \$1.8M | Private donors \$1.7M | Qatar Charity \$1.5M | Australia \$0.8M | Monaco \$0.2M | Iceland \$0.1M | Portugal \$0.1M | Liechtenstein \$0.1M | Slovakia \$0.1M

Unearmarked contributions to UNHCR's 2020 programme

Sweden 76.4M | Norway 41.4M | Netherlands 36.1M | Denmark 34.6M | United Kingdom 31.7M |
Germany 25.9M | Private donors in Spain 20M | Switzerland 16.4M |
Private donors in Republic of Korea 10.5M

Useful Links

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

[UNHCR operations overview in Europe](#)

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

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