

UNHCR Regional Bureau for Middle East and North Africa

COVID-19 Emergency Response Update #12

19 August 2020

Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, Western Sahara, Yemen, and Turkey¹

Key Figures



20

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



16 million

2020 planning figure for people of concern in the Middle East and North Africa



254

cases of active COVID-19 reported among POCs including fatalities²

Regional Developments

Operational Context

Following the deadly blast in **Beirut, Lebanon** on 4 August, nearly 220 people have died, 6,000 people injured and a reported 300,000 displaced. The impact of the Beirut Port explosion has been felt across much of Beirut, if not Lebanon, creating immediate humanitarian needs on top of what were already trying times.

The exposure has affected everyone, regardless of nationality or status. UNHCR is contacting all refugee households residing in affected areas and ensuring referrals for onward support. As of 14 August, UNHCR is aware that the total number of confirmed refugee deaths stands at 13 individuals, with 224 injured. The explosions hit as Lebanon faces a multi-faceted crisis. In recent months, the socio-economic situation of Lebanese, refugees and migrant workers has continued to deteriorate, with the cost of basic needs exponentially rising as a result of the deep economic and financial crisis, exacerbated by the impact of COVID-19. The number of positive COVID-19 cases in Lebanon has significantly increased over the past two weeks, with a further spike expected in the coming period.

UNHCR calls on the international community to stand by the people of Lebanon, show solidarity and provide meaningful support to this generous country that has hosted so many refugees even during a very difficult period.

UNHCR is mobilizing, together with other humanitarian partners to respond to the immediate needs to the most affected and most vulnerable households and individuals in Lebanon, including Lebanese, refugees and migrant workers. Efforts are focussed on shelter assistance and protection interventions which have been included in the recently launched [Inter-Agency Humanitarian Appeal for Lebanon](#), with financial requirements of USD 565 million, of which [USD 35 million are UNHCR's requirements](#). Health support is already covered under UNHCR's COVID-19 Appeal, launched earlier this year.

¹ UNHCR Turkey reports to the UNHCR Europe Bureau, although operations in Turkey related to the Syria & Iraq Situations are included in the MENA update

² The breakdown of confirmed COVID-19 cases is as follows: Egypt (25, with another 113 suspected and probable cases), Iraq (90), Lebanon (125), Mauritania (6) and Yemen (8). The change in the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases among UNHCR POCs in MENA is a result of increased monitoring across Operations, and not indicative of a rise in COVID-19 transmissions.

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

UNHCR Lebanon Health Response

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, UNHCR has been working within the framework of the national response to the emergency and in close collaboration with humanitarian partners to ensure refugees' needs are also met. Lebanon's COVID-19 response plan is three-fold, comprising prevention measures, containing transmission and providing treatment and case management, for which UNHCR has supported the expansion of the health sector's existing capacity at the testing and hospitalization levels.

Planned expansion works over a period of three phases included 800 additional hospital beds, 100 additional Intensive Care Unit (ICU) beds, provision of medical equipment and stocks of medication. As of mid-August, the first phase of expansion works has added a total capacity of 161 regular hospital beds and 15 ICU beds

in Baalbek, Halba and Tripoli governmental hospitals, as well as in Beirut's Rafik Hariri University Hospital and Saida Governmental hospital. Under Phase 1, more beds are planned in a Mount Lebanon hospital and in the Zahle Governmental Hospital. Medical equipment and consumables continue to be delivered to the expanded hospital units. Given that local hospitals are even more overwhelmed since the 4 August blast, UNHCR is further scaling up the health programme.

High Commissioner (HC) Filippo Grandi is [currently in Lebanon](#) to support and listen to the plight of all those affected by the devastating blast – the first mission since the global COVID-19 first wave lockdown. As part of his mission, the HC will also visit the public hospital expansions recently completed in northern Lebanon and the Bekaa.



UNHCR has prioritized the expansion and rehabilitation of hospital facilities in Lebanon as part of its COVID-19 response. © UNHCR

Highlights from the field

In **Iraq**, there have been a total of 90 COVID-19 cases (79 of whom are active) among UNHCR's persons of concern in Iraq; up from 18 cases in the previous weeks. Most of the new cases have been recorded in Baghdad and Erbil. UNHCR is coordinating closely with the Departments of Health of the affected areas and is monitoring the situation closely. Contact tracing and testing have been conducted, and the Camp Coordination and Camp Management COVID-19 preparedness and response plans have been activated and implemented in all affected camps, including strict movement restrictions.

Meanwhile, UNHCR continues to support vulnerable displaced persons across Iraq through cash assistance to access basic hygiene items. The distribution has so far reached 87,109 refugee and IDP families (over half a million individuals) in camps and in urban, peri-urban, and rural areas. Further to this, emergency cash has been provided to displaced families in extremely vulnerable situations, with more families requesting additional cash support in the past weeks. As a result of increasing requests and the ongoing COVID-19 crisis, UNHCR is reviewing the possibility of providing additional emergency cash assistance.

The [fourth round of data collection](#) through the National Protection Cluster (NPC) Remote Protection Monitoring Tool was published in July. Data was collected over 28 June – 19 July, with 11 organizations interviewing over 5,100 respondents across 17 governorates, to measure the protection impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on internally displaced communities in Iraq. Main highlights include:

In **Syria**, a notable increase of new COVID-19 cases have been registered, bringing the total number to 1,764. The prolongation of the COVID-19 crisis has lent itself to a further deterioration in the daily lives of Syrians. Prior to the COVID-19 crisis, an estimated 80 per cent of people in Syria already lived below the poverty line. According to estimates, 9.3 million people in Syria are now considered food insecure. Throughout July, the informal exchange rate continued to fluctuate, with the Central Bank of Syria devaluing the official exchange rate for the second time in six months. Due to exchange rate volatility, the regional banking crisis and other factors, including knock-on effects of the preventive measures of COVID-19 on the economy, dramatic price rises have been recorded in many

Impact of COVID-19 measures and regulations

- 62 per cent of respondents in camps report a ban on entry into / exit from camps, but with exceptions. The highest levels were reported in Ninewa and Anbar governorates (78 per cent), compared to Erbil (60 per cent), Duhok (16 per cent) and Kirkuk (0 per cent).

Access to services and basic needs

- Loss of employment and livelihoods was reported as the first main socio-economic impact by 86 per cent of respondents in camps, compared to 93 per cent out-of-camp. Other main impacts reported included inability to purchase basic necessities and difficulties in paying rent for out-of-camp groups.
- The first main coping mechanism reported by respondents was reducing or changing food consumption habits (70 per cent in camps and 76 per cent out-of-camps), following by going into debt, spending savings, and reducing the purchase of non-food items. In addition, use of child labour and begging to generate an income was cited by 14 per cent and 9 per cent of respondents respectively, and marriage (including child marriage) was reported by 9 per cent camp respondents as a way to generate income or settle debts.

basic commodities. According to WFP Vulnerability and Analysis Mapping data, the price of an average food basket in June was the highest on record, on average costing 48 per cent more compared to May, and 240 per cent more when compared to the same time in 2019. As part of the COVID-19 response since March, UNHCR provides cash assistance to refugees in Syria, with nearly 12,300 refugees benefitting from multi-purpose cash grants, worth a total of over USD 1 million. In **north-west Syria**, since the first positive case was detected on 9 July, local authorities have reportedly tightened COVID-19 mitigating measures, such as the suspension of public markets or of in-person learning activities.

Over in **Turkey**, the distribution of cash cards as part of the COVID-19 response that started on 29 May, has reach over 80 per cent of eligible beneficiaries, which total 15,255 households. A second cohort for about 12,400 households is currently under discussion and preparation.

In **Jordan**, following UNHCR advocacy with the Ministry of Interior, following the Eid Al Adha weekend at the end of July, the Syrian Refugee Affairs Directorate (SRAD) started the re-issuance of work/leave permits for refugees to exit the camps for work reasons. At present, the duration of permits for Zaatar camp residents are shorter (24-48hrs) than Azraq/King Abdullah Park (KAP) ones (2 weeks to 1 month). Additionally, no more individuals are present at quarantine areas in Azraq and KAP. However, with the rise in local COVID-19 cases in Jordan over the past two weeks, UNHCR, in coordination with the Ministry of Health is strengthening its response, including through enhanced active surveillance in refugee camps. Meanwhile, standard operating procedures (SOPs) for the reopening of the camps, including refugee movements in and out of camps have been finalized and activities are back at 75 per cent of total capacity. Contingency plans for all sectors are being revised in coordination with partners to enhance preparedness ahead of a potential second wave.

In **Yemen**, the threat of COVID-19 remains very much present although confirmed and recorded cases are fairly low. As of 17 August, there are 1,886 confirmed cases of COVID-19 with 536 deaths. As a result of COVID-19 related restrictions such as loss of income and the closure of businesses, refugees and asylum-seeker families have been deeply impacted. Cash assistance for those with heightened socio-economic vulnerabilities has been provided to more than 12,300 refugees and asylum-seekers since the start of the COVID-19 crisis, pending the finalization of the current distribution in Sana'a.

UNHCR in Yemen has also created a network of 280 refugee and IDP tailors country-wide to produce reusable face masks to guard against COVID-19 transmission. The provision of raw materials, training and production of samples began last month, with the aim of producing 80,000 masks as the first batch, part of which will be purchased and distributed by UNHCR as part of hygiene kits by UNHCR, while the rest will be sold by the tailors themselves as income support. With the ongoing COVID-19 crisis, the reusable facemasks are in high demand within the refugee and asylum-seeking communities. To cover this need, UNHCR is supporting the production of 11,000 additional face masks and is recruiting more tailors to become part of the network.

Israel continues to face a new wave of COVID-19 infections, with 92,680 persons infected by the virus, of which over 23,000 are active cases. It is not entirely clear how many of UNHCR's population of concern have been infected by COVID-19. Meanwhile, one of the two testing centres that was dedicated to COVID-19 testing of foreigners without health insurance was closed at the end of July.

In the **United Arab Emirates (UAE)**, in line with a whole of society approach and as a result of UNHCR coordination with Basmet Amal and the UAE Relief Initiative, UNHCR included 81 registered persons of concern (14 families) from the most vulnerable families based in Abu Dhabi to receive vital support to address their growing needs as a result of the COVID-19 crisis. An amount of AED 1,000 (approximately USD 270) was provided as cash grants to each of the families as well as food baskets. Basmet Amal is UNHCR's local community partner in Abu Dhabi and the UAE Relief Initiative is a community initiative established by an Emirati youth to support families affected by the COVID-19 crisis.

In **Egypt**, UNHCR is receiving an increasing number of queries by refugees and asylum-seekers in relation to residency procedures and the duration of residence permits, especially those who are not able to re-issue their residence permits because of less than six months validity. A particular concern lies in the enrolment of children in the public-school system before the registration deadline, with the worry that available spaces in nearby schools will be taken up. UNHCR is following up on these issues with the national authorities and continues to advocate for tolerance in relation to asylum-seekers and refugees with expired UNHCR cards or residencies, and those who do not yet have UNHCR documentation. Meanwhile, to address this issue, UNHCR is finalizing modalities for remote registration, not only for emergency cases and provision of temporary documentation. The disconnection of mobile phone lines of several refugee and asylum-seekers with expired residencies is also concerning, as this impacts on their collection of cash assistance. UNHCR has reached out to several mobile network providers to ask for tolerance for refugees and asylum-seekers with expired documentation and permits.

In **Mauritania**, in partnership with WFP, the monthly, targeted ³ food distribution for July and August took place for 57,729 refugees in Mbera camp. Despite the imminent needs revealed during the rapid sampling survey ⁴, WFP reverted to providing both components of the hybrid ration (food and cash) to the most food insecure households (groups 1, 2 and 3), while group

4 (fragile) received cash only. Groups 5 and 6 (described as catalyst/emergent beneficiaries) did not receive any assistance during this round due to the lack of funding. The transfer value of cash assistance was also reduced from 450 MRU to 250 MRU (around USD 7) per person and per month to all groups who received cash (groups 1 – 4).

In **Libya**, the recent extension of curfew and movement restrictions (including 24-hour lockdown during weekends) imposed by the government as preventative measures against COVID-19 have taken their toll on UNHCR and partners' capacity to provide cash assistance to vulnerable refugees and asylum-seekers. As a result, only five households (six individuals) received the first instalment of emergency cash assistance in the second week of August. The number of hotline calls from persons of concern also decreased in the first half of August due to electricity cuts and blackouts which lasted more than 24 hours.

Meanwhile, UNHCR and its partners conducted the first steering committee meeting for two Quick Impact Projects (QIPs) planned in the east to support the authorities respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. These will include provision of medical equipment to Benghazi Medical Centre and provision of in-kind assistance to the National Laboratory in Benghazi.

³ Further information on the targeted nature of food and cash assistance can be found here: <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/77041>

⁴ UNHCR Mauritania (July 2020) Results of a sampling survey on the impact of COVID 19 on the socio economic and protection situation of refugees in the Mbera refugee camp <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/77947>



UNHCR and partners, under the supervision of the Ministry of Public Health and WHO, initiated a two-week national PCR testing campaign for Syrian refugees in Lebanon. Over 3,500 samples were collected. © UNHCR

Global Financial Requirements

UNHCR's [revised prioritized requirements to support the COVID-19 preparedness and response](#) in situation of forced displacement, including those for UNHCR MENA, has increased from USD 255 million to USD 749 million. **So far, a total of USD 459 million (62 per cent) has been contributed or pledged to the UNHCR Global Appeal out of USD 745 million required.**

MENA Financial Information

Earmarked contributions for the Coronavirus Emergency Situation in MENA amount to some USD 100 million, including:

United States of America 67.8M | Japan 9M | African Development Bank 3.9M | Qatar Charity 3.5M | CERF 2.4M | United Nations Foundation 2M | Austria 1.8M

Special thanks to the major donors of softly earmarked contributions and pledges at the global level to the Coronavirus Emergency Situation:

Germany 62.7M | United Kingdom 25M | Denmark 15M | United States of America 20M | Canada 6.4M | United Nations Foundation 4.8M | Spain 3.5M | Ireland 3.3M | France 3M | Sweden 3M | Sony Corporation 2.9M | Norway 1.4M | Private donors in the UK 1.6M | UNO-Flüchtlingshilfe 1.1M | USA for UNHCR 1M

Special thanks to the major donors of unearmarked contributions to UNHCR's 2020 programme:

Sweden 76.4M | Private donors Spain 45.9M | Norway 41.4M | Netherlands 36.1M | Denmark 34.6M | United Kingdom 31.7M | Germany 25.9M | Private donors Republic of Korea 23.9M | Switzerland 16.4M | Private donors Japan 15.2M | France 14M | Private donors Italy 10.8M

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 – Standing in Solidarity with Lebanon \(17 August\)](#)
- [UNHCR Flash Update on Lebanon: Beirut Port Explosions \(17 August\)](#)
- [UNHCR mobilizes aid for Beirut in aftermath of deadly blast \(16 August\)](#)
- [Beirut blast death toll includes dozens of refugees, emergency response ramps up \(11 August\)](#)
- [UNHCR rushes support for Beirut in the aftermath of massive blast \(7 August\)](#)
- [UN Lebanon Flash Appeal \(August 2020\)](#)
- [UNHCR's Coronavirus Emergency Appeal \(Revision\)](#)
- [UNHCR MENA's comprehensive funding needs for the COVID-19 response \(May\)](#)
- 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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