

Regional Bureau for Europe

UPDATE # 22

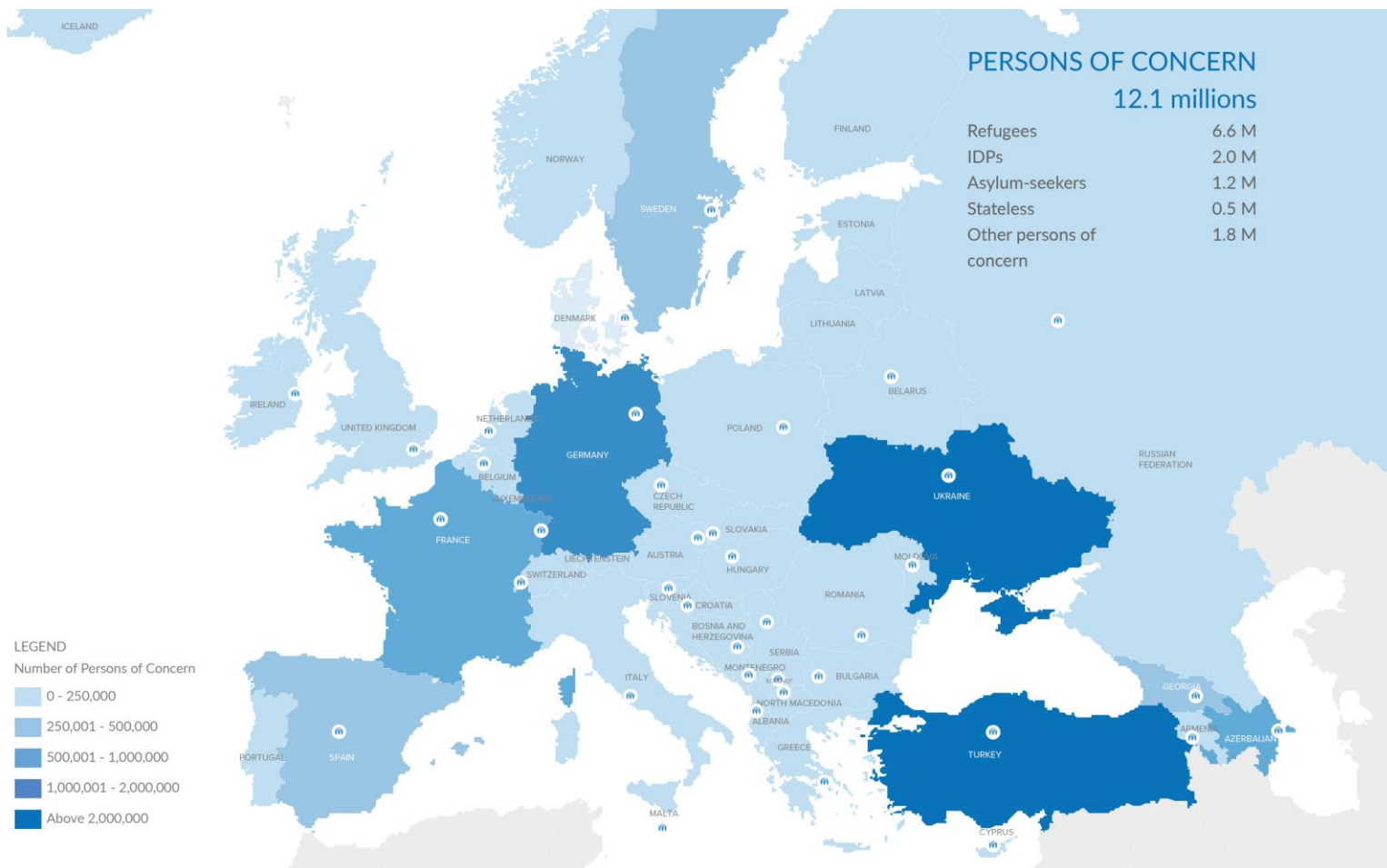
11 - 30 November 2020

COVID-19 infection rates remain high across the region, and many countries have defined **movement restrictions** applicable to the December holiday period.

Despite tightened COVID-19 prevention measures taken by some States, **access to territory for persons of concern** is generally maintained.

Movement restrictions continue to impact UNHCR staff in country offices. To date, 34 offices are **partially teleworking** while 3 are on **full telework mode**.

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, 36 countries have reported cases among persons of concern at some point, and some of the concerned individuals have in the meantime recovered. However, any figures or estimates should be taken with caution due to varying approaches to testing, data segregation and reporting.
- With COVID-19 contagion rates remaining high region-wide, numerous countries have imposed partial lockdowns and curfews. Mask requirements, limitations on private and public gatherings, remote education formats and closing of non-essential commerce are among the additional prevention measures that authorities have introduced. Health providers and hospitals continue expressing concern about operating close to their capacity limit.
- As countries prepare plans for potential vaccine rollouts in the coming weeks and months, the incoming Portuguese Presidency of the EU Council announced it will promote enhanced cooperation between Member States in the area of health, with the aim to help “produce and distribute a safe and accessible vaccine,” among other priorities. UNHCR is advocating with governments across the region to ensure the equitable inclusion of refugees and persons of concern in national vaccination plans.
- During the reporting period, three UNHCR offices remained on full telework mode while 34 offices 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. As a result, access to UNHCR premises by persons of concern is subject to adjustments, in line with respective national health regulations.

UNHCR Areas of Intervention



PROTECTION

- **Quarantine measures for new arrivals:** Between 10 and 30 November, 1,926 individuals arrived by sea in **Italy**. Lampedusa remained the primary disembarkation site. To ease the pressure on the Lampedusa hotspot, authorities increased its hosting capacity from 200 to 260 people and continued daily transfers to quarantine facilities and ferries. Some 40 persons were accommodated in the hotspot as of 30 November, including 16 unaccompanied children. Difficulties persist in the timely transfer of UASC in the absence of available places in dedicated facilities. As of 27 November, 1,802 persons were observing quarantine, mostly onboard one of the five offshore ferries.
- In **Spain**, 9,815 persons arrived by sea between 2 and 30 November, a 49% increase compared to last month. Consistent with recent trends, 81% of these arrivals occurred in the Canary Islands (7,990). Some 22 arrivals tested positive for COVID-19 in the Andalusian coast, the highest number of cases identified in a month since the beginning of the pandemic. Positive cases and those travelling on the same boat were referred to quarantine reception centres as per protocol. Two COVID-19 outbreaks were reported in reception centres located in Cádiz, with employees and residents placed in quarantine.
- **Mixed movements** across **South Eastern and Central Europe** have not receded despite the resurgence of the pandemic in autumn. Pushbacks continue to be reported as well as omission of referrals to asylum systems, on which UNHCR is following up. Meanwhile, reception centres host an increasing number of people. In **Croatia**, the country office reports an 18% increase in the number of asylum-seekers hosted in two reception centres compared to October. Authorities in the region take different steps to alleviate the pressure on individual centres. In **Serbia**, authorities have transferred some 1,650 people from squats and overcrowded centres in the west and north to centres in the southeast of the country. The combined capacity of the six centres in **Bosnia and Herzegovina** (7,410 people) could be reached soon, since there were some 6,630 people in said centres on 30 November. To mitigate overcrowding risks, authorities are reportedly considering plans for a new reception centre that could accommodate up to 2,500 persons.
- Close to the land border between **Italy** and **Slovenia**, the Italian Red Cross Society has set up a new quarantine facility inside the Cavarzerani barracks in Udine, in the northern Friuli-Venezia Giulia region. UNHCR remains present in the border province to strengthen coordination among local institutions and civil society, collect testimonies from persons of concern and document readmission practices at the border.

- **Reception conditions:** Overcrowded and inadequately equipped reception areas continue to pose a challenge to residents' implementing social distancing and other preventive measures. In **Spain**, the port of Arguineguin (Gran Canaria) hosted some 2,200 persons in unsuitable conditions up to mid-November. After a joint mission by UNHCR and IOM and after Spain's Ombudsperson called for the Arguineguin camp to be shut down, all persons were transferred to a former military camp on the island and to Government-funded hotels run by the Spanish Red Cross Society.
- Elsewhere, COVID-19 prevention measures have resulted in suspended access by UNHCR and partners to reception centres. In **Cyprus**, for example, authorities closed reception and detention centres on 12 November to mitigate further COVID-19 spreads, thus limiting access by UNHCR and partners to the Pournara main camp. Similarly, as **Greece** entered a renewed lockdown on 7 November, movement in and out of refugee sites was suspended. Further measures continue to be applied, but not yet uniformly, pending guidelines from central authorities; UNHCR continues to monitor the implementation of measures in refugee hosting sites. Access by UNHCR and partners providing psychosocial services to reception centres has also been suspended in **Hungary** as part of broader national measures starting on 15 November.
- **Access to procedures:** Increasing COVID-19 infection rates among the general population have challenged the capacity and continuation of registration and asylum procedures and are likely to negatively impact processing times and backlogs. In **Spain's** Canary Islands, for example, COVID-19 measures, including mandatory quarantine, are preventing swift asylum registration procedures for new sea arrivals. In **Italy's** regions with the highest COVID-19 incidence, eligibility commissions continue scheduling a reduced number of daily in-person refugee status determination, if they have not temporarily suspended interviews altogether. In **Cyprus**, on 17 November, the Asylum Service extended the suspension of in-person asylum interviews in the Pournara camp for an additional week. To address the challenge of reduced interview capacity and to prevent backlogs, some authorities in **Belgium** launched a videoconference pilot for asylum interviews; however, bar associations raised concerns with the proposed pilot and challenged the decision. UNHCR's Regional Bureau for Europe has earlier this year issued "[Practical Recommendations and Good Practice to Address Protection Concerns in the context of the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)", with useful standards to ensure due process, support a progressive normalisation of processing times, and mitigate risks of backlogs.
- Meanwhile, after cancelling the registration of asylum claims and refugee status determination (RSD) interviews scheduled for November in all locations, authorities in **Bosnia and Herzegovina** announced that registrations in UNHCR's Information Centre will resume in December. **Belarus**, despite closing all land borders as of 1 November, still permits asylum-seekers and persons granted refugee status and complementary protection to enter the country and access relevant procedures.
- **Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs):** In **Ukraine**, since the movement restrictions introduced in March, only two Entry Exit Checkpoints (EECPs) allowing people to cross the "contact line" have remained operational - in Stanytsia Luhanska and Novotroitske/ Olenivka. Although declared open on 10 November, the two new EECPs in Zolote and Shchastia (Luhanska oblast) remain non-operational. On 25 November, the Government amended two resolutions to allow people to cross through the EECPs for humanitarian reasons even when they are otherwise closed (family reunion, death in the family, medical reasons). In November, eight so-called "humanitarian corridors" were organized allowing for a combined 1,300 persons to cross in both directions. Of those, 17 persons were transferred to the observation facilities on GCA side to undergo the required self-isolation. At the Stanytsia Luhanska EECP, a warming point has been installed for those queuing for COVID-19 testing, and an ambulance from the NGO "International Medical Care" began providing services.
- On 25 and 26 November, UNHCR facilitated two convoys transferring humanitarian cargo to Donetsk NGCA, including 30 metric tons of hygiene items by the NGO Polish Humanitarian Aid as well as construction materials, furniture, sports equipment, stationary and electric appliances for UNHCR-led projects.

**HEALTH**

- In **Greece**, as of 29 November, 1,254 persons of concern had tested positive for COVID-19 since the beginning of the pandemic. Of these, 524 were on the mainland and 730 on the islands. In the meantime, some of these people have recovered.
- Works to upgrade the Megala Therma (Lesvos) quarantine site for new arrivals began on 13 November, including groundwork and installation of temporary shelter, hygiene facilities and solar streetlights. An isolation area at the Evros

reception and identification centre (RIC) is close to completion while works for an additional isolation area in RIC Samos are ongoing.

- Between 16 March and 29 November, UNHCR has provided accommodation and protection services to 2,157 asylum-seekers at high risk of COVID-19 complications, by moving them out of the islands' RICs and the Lesvos emergency site.
- The Greek Ministry of Health has confirmed to UNHCR that persons of concern will be included in COVID-19 vaccinations campaigns to be conducted by national health agency EODY once a vaccine is available.
- An estimated 7,300 people are hosted in the Mavrovouni emergency site on Lesvos as of 30 November. To prevent and mitigate the spread of the pandemic, asylum-seekers have undergone rapid COVID-19 testing by national health authorities before entering the emergency site. Based on health protocols, all persons testing positive have been directed to the isolation area, alongside family members. Some 17 persons remain in quarantine, of which 12 are COVID-19 positive and isolated alongside family members. Major technical works were completed for the creation of the medical hub in the Mavrovouni emergency site on Lesvos, which will bring together healthcare providers and services under one roof, including for COVID-19 testing, quarantine and isolation. Hygiene and sanitary facilities were enhanced but remain inadequate overall.
- In **Cyprus**, the so-called Eden Centre, where all people having tested positive for COVID-19 observe quarantine, is currently at full capacity. Authorities have constructed a new quarantine section within the Pournara camp for residents who test positive.



COMMUNICATION WITH COMMUNITIES

- To ensure persons of concern remain apprised of the latest information on relevant procedures, services and COVID-19-related restrictions, offices disseminate information through established channels, as well as new ones. UNHCR offices in **Belgium** and **North Macedonia**, for example, launched online help pages, to supplement existing hotlines, where persons of concern can access vital information, including about COVID-19 and related support services.



CASH-BASED AND IN-KIND ASSISTANCE

- **Cash-based interventions** remain important where livelihoods of refugee and asylum-seeking families have been compromised due to the pandemic and lockdown. In **Ukraine**, UNHCR had provided 82 households with four months of cash assistance covering October-January by 30 November. 42 additional families received cash as individual protection assistance, while UNHCR reimbursed 22 individuals for medical expenses, including persons testing positive for COVID-19.
- In **Turkey**, UNHCR and the Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM) continue preparing the second phase of emergency COVID-19 cash support for which over 50,000 households have already been identified. UNHCR has reached 21,555 households with the first phase of COVID-19 emergency cash support, and the total figure is expected to reach to 85,000 households by the end of 2020 with the support of the European Union.
- **In-kind:** UNHCR continues delivering COVID-19-related in-kind support, where needed, to persons of concern, host communities or authorities working with them. In **Montenegro**, for example, UNHCR partner the Civic Alliance and the German Embassy donated 200 food and hygiene parcels to the Spuz asylum centre on 27 November. UNHCR also distributed PPE and hygiene and sanitary items to all six reception centres in **Romania**, while the office in **North Macedonia** distributed disinfection liquids and dispensers, as well as bed linens, to reception centres to support the Government's COVID-19 response.

- In **Ukraine**, UNHCR extended COVID-19 related assistance to 11 shelters for SGBV survivors and centres for persons with specific needs. Assistance included hygiene kits, disinfectant liquid, PPE, temperature sensors, washing machines, beds and mattresses.

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.

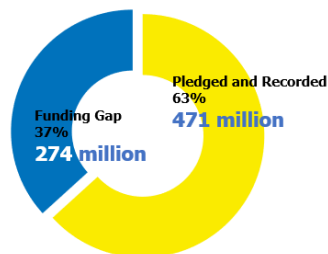
Working in partnership

- 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 471 M (63%)**

Including: United States of America \$186.3M | Germany \$62.7M | European Union \$34.1M | United Kingdom \$25.7M | Japan \$25.1M | African Development Bank \$18.3M | Private donors \$18.0M | Denmark \$14.6M | United Nations Foundation \$10.0M | Unilever \$7.9M | CERF \$6.9M | Canada \$6.4M | Education Cannot Wait \$3.9M | Qatar Charity \$3.5M | Spain \$3.4M | France \$3.4M | Ireland \$3.3M | Austria \$3.1M | Saudi Arabia \$3.0M | Sweden \$3.0M | Sony Corporation \$2.9M | 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 | Private Donors Japan \$25.1M | Japan \$23.8M | Switzerland \$16.4M | Private Donors Italy \$15.7M | France \$14 M | Private Donors Sweden \$11.7M | Italy \$10.6 M |

Useful Links[UNHCR's revised Coronavirus Emergency Appeal](#)[UNHCR operations overview in Europe](#)[COVID-19: UNHCR's response](#)

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