

UNHCR Regional Bureau for Middle East and North Africa

UNHCR urgently needs USD 343 million for the COVID-19 response to save lives and protect the most vulnerable in the Middle East and North Africa

27 May 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



USD 100 million cash distributed since January to persons of concern in MENA.



Over **550,000** calls have been received by UNHCR and partner call centers across MENA since mid-March



16 million² people forcibly displaced in MENA including refugees, asylum-seekers, IDPs, stateless persons and others



Over **50%³** of refugees and internally displaced person (IDPs) reported having lost jobs or sources of income

Two months into the COVID-19 crisis, the protection and socio-economic toll on host communities, refugees and other vulnerable persons in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) has been devastating. The impact of COVID-19 will be felt by all long after movement restrictions are lifted.

UNHCR's response to COVID-19 across MENA is focused on two pillars:

- Supporting national COVID-19 response plans and systems, including Health, WASH and Shelter assistance that responds to and reduces the risk of infection and transmissions; while advocating for the inclusion of refugees and other forcibly displaced in national plans.
- Adapting and delivering protection services and cash assistance to the most vulnerable, including host communities.

Thanks to generous contributions by donors, UNHCR has been able to stay and deliver. Past investments in virtual communication tools, remote protection services, and

innovative cash programming have meant UNHCR and partners have been able to respond quickly, safely and securely.

Following the updated United Nations COVID-19 [Global Humanitarian Response Plan \(GHRP\)](#), a revised [UNHCR Global COVID-19 Appeal](#) was issued on 11 May requesting USD 745 million until the end of 2020 for immediate needs in prioritized countries. A total of USD 235 million has so far been pledged or recorded (32 per cent), with a funding gap of USD 510 million (68 per cent)⁴.

Reflecting the scale of the crisis, and in line with the GHRP and UNHCR's Global COVID-19 appeal, UNHCR MENA's **comprehensive⁵ 2020 financial requirements for the COVID-19 preparedness and response is USD 343 million.**

¹ UNHCR Turkey reports to the Europe Bureau, although operations in Turkey related to the Syria and Iraq situations are included in the MENA reports.

² Figures from the 2020 UNHCR Global Appeal (excluding Turkey, which hosts 3.6 million Syrian refugees).

³ This is based on the call centre and survey data. Forty six per cent of the callers/survey respondents in Egypt, forty per cent in Iraq, forty-three per cent in Israel, and over 50 per cent in Lebanon reported having lost jobs or sources of income. More refined socio-economic studies are underway.

⁴ Figures as of 27 May 2020

⁵ Includes the total needs for COVID-19 response in 2020, reflecting both funds received, and funds reprioritized from regular programmes. Depending on how the crisis evolves, funding requirements will be updated.

The consequence of current underfunding is already evident. Vulnerable men, women, girls and boys are unable able to buy food, pay their rent, medical costs. Many are resorting to short-term but harmful strategies, reducing meals, increasing debt and sharing overcrowded accommodation. Some are unable to follow COVID-19 precautionary measures because of a lack of resources, potentially undermining national and global efforts to contain the pandemic.

This is an ‘emergency on top of an emergency’. Failure to respond risks worsening already desperate humanitarian crises, including in Iraq, Libya, Syria, and Yemen. Across MENA, the successes that have enabled some to provide for themselves, go to school and receive medical services risk being undone.

Additional funding is urgently needed, both for UNHCR MENA’s regular programme, and for the COVID-19 response. Regular programmes - including protection services, regular monthly cash assistance, education at all levels, shelter, camp management and basic relief items - help to prevent potential outbreaks and bolster the resilience of refugees and other forcibly displaced to cope with COVID-19 and its consequences.

UNHCR MENA’s 2020 financial requirement for its regular programme is USD 2.605 billion, currently 18 per cent funded.⁶

UNHCR’s COVID-19 response has been incorporated into and coordinated through the existing Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP) for the Syria crisis and Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) structures. UNHCR operations are actively engaging with national and UN contingency planning for COVID-19.

Financial Requirements

UNHCR operations/countries	Financial requirements (USD)
Algeria	11,320,128
Egypt	27,001,422
Iraq	35,722,944
Israel	1,600,000
Jordan	79,960,000
Saudi Arabia	952,200
Kuwait	33,600
Lebanon	91,128,747
Libya ⁷	5,500,000
Mauritania	2,258,595
Morocco	1,200,000
Syria	5,048,572
Tunisia	3,366,000
Turkey	35,220,000
United Arab Emirates	215,148
Yemen	42,950,007
Total	USD 343,477,363

⁶ As of 21 May 2020

⁷ Libya does not require new additional funds for COVID-19 response as it has been able to reallocate USD 5.5 million from its regular programmes.

Situation overview and impact of COVID-19

COVID-19 is a public health crisis. However, it has resulted in a protection and poverty crisis for those living hand-to-mouth on the economic margins of society. Among the most affected are refugees, asylum-seekers, internally displaced persons (IDPs) and stateless persons, the majority of whom in the region already live below the poverty line. People have lost jobs and income opportunities, or have been unable to leave their houses to look for work. Many of those who were coping without cash assistance before COVID-19 are now becoming increasingly destitute and desperate, entering further into debt and spiraling into poverty. They are facing difficult choices in their daily lives, such as reducing the frequency of meals, sharing overcrowded shelters and missing rental payments, leaving them at risk of eviction.

National health systems continue to be the primary responders to the needs of refugees and of other forcibly displaced. Health system capacity has been tested, especially in intensive care. Countries which have witnessed years of conflict including Syria, Iraq, Libya and Yemen face additional challenges due to fragile health systems, limited qualified health personnel, and damaged essential infrastructure.

UNHCR has already identified a spike in domestic violence and psychological distress arising from isolation or loss of income. Groups at particular risk of exploitation include female heads of households, unaccompanied and separated children, older people, persons with disabilities or with a critical medical condition, LGBTI persons as well as single male and heads of households.

Due to mobility restrictions and border closures in many countries, access to safety and asylum has been impacted.

What are refugees and other forcibly displaced telling UNHCR

Across MENA alone, since March, UNHCR and its partners have received over 550,000 calls from refugees and IDPs since lockdowns and other public health measures came into force in many countries. The majority have asked for urgent financial assistance to cover their daily existential needs.

- In **Algeria**, the camp-based Sahrawi refugees report widespread loss of income, jobs, and shortage of cash resulting in reduced purchasing power and therefore increased food insecurity. The most vulnerable urban asylum-seekers continue to require emergency cash assistance to meet their basic needs.
- In **Egypt**, 46 per cent of those who contacted UNHCR during the first month of the COVID-19 outbreak expressed concern over having lost their source of income, fearing eviction or inability to cover rent and their families' basic needs (including hygiene products).
- In **Iraq**, 40 per cent of IDPs surveyed in March reported fear of eviction due to their inability to pay rent because of a loss of income. This is a staggering increase when compared to five per cent of IDPs reporting this fear in November 2019.
- In **Israel**, around 43 per cent of the persons of concern surveyed said that they do not have money to pay rent or buy food.

- In **Jordan**, according to the latest [Multi-sectoral Rapid Needs Assessment](#) jointly conducted by WFP, UNICEF, and UNHCR, most survey respondents have less than 50 Jordanian dinars of savings left, and only 35 per cent of refugees responded they expect to resume their previous work once the curfew is lifted.
- In **Lebanon**, UNHCR's protection monitoring of more than 3,000 refugees during March and April found that more than half reported having lost livelihoods such as daily labour. Around 76 per cent of the refugees consulted reported lack of money to buy food and 69 per cent reported lack of money to pay rent, while 70 per cent informed they had reduced the number of meals consumed per day and 69 per cent had gone into further debt to cover basic needs. The socio-economic situation is even more dire for older refugees and refugees with disabilities or chronic medical conditions. Due to inflation, families who are currently assisted are also increasingly unable to cover their daily needs.
- In **Mauritania**, in a recent rapid needs assessment conducted in urban areas, 86 per cent reported being severely affected by the COVID-19 measures (closures of schools and non-essential businesses, and limitation on movements), including through loss of jobs and income, inability to meet most basic needs (water, food, shelter), or being at risk of eviction.
- In **Morocco**, 75 per cent of calls highlighted on beneficiaries' inability to cover basic survival needs, with the majority requesting cash assistance.
- In **Syria**, UNHCR through partners reached more than 121,000 individuals through 860 WhatsApp groups. Protection was the main topic (53 per cent), followed by COVID-19 specific subjects (19 per cent), and education (13 per cent).
- In **Tunisia**, there is loss of income amongst refugees and asylum-seekers, and a dire need for assistance. Callers report that the greatest needs include food, rent, and medicine.
- In **Turkey**, as of mid-May, some 28,600 calls have been received by the UNHCR Counselling Line since the introductions of COVID-19-related restrictions in mid-March. The percentage of those asking for financial assistance increased from six per cent in January to 45 per cent during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- In **Yemen**, on-going protection assessments of IDPs' needs and vulnerabilities across the country reveal an increasing number expressing psychological anxiety. IDPs and the vulnerable host community members frequently mention their vulnerability and the fear of not having timely access to adequate medical care. The situation is desperate for some one million IDPs living in hosting sites, more than half of which do not have access to WASH facilities and report infectious disease as their main threat. Refugees and asylum-seekers are showing similar patterns of fear and vulnerability. Many have lost their jobs. The level of stigmatization and reported harassment against the refugee community had been increasing.

UNHCR priorities and response to date

In line with the “stay and deliver approach”, UNHCR and partners across the region have used different modalities to ensure the continuity of critical activities and delivery of protection services (including documentation) and life-sustaining assistance. Communication with communities has been strengthened. Critical protection activities, such as refugee status determination (RSD), resettlement, and two-way communication, and essential protection services have been maintained through remote means, in a manner that is secure and appropriate to the specific needs of individuals.

- **Algeria:** Through help.unhcr.org, all persons of concern are kept informed on UNHCR's response including on preventive measures and contact information/guidance in cases of suspected infection.
- **Egypt:** In May, multi-purpose cash assistance, targeting over 40,000 refugees and asylum-seekers, was supplemented by an additional 50 Egyptian Pounds per person to allow for the purchase of hygiene items. In addition, UNHCR is providing additional hygiene support (100 Egyptian Pounds) for approximately 15,581 cases (comprising 40,407 persons) at heightened risk, who are not on the monthly multi-purpose cash assistance list.
- **Iraq:** UNHCR continues to support refugees', IDPs' and returnees' access to basic hygiene items through the distribution of cash assistance across Iraq. To date, over 50,000 displaced families have cashed out their assistance (12,170 refugee families and 40,620 IDP families). The distribution is being conducted either door-to-door or in distribution centres. UNHCR aims to assist over 125,000 vulnerable displaced families; through this intervention, provided funding is available.
- **Jordan:** The distribution of a one-off emergency cash assistance to approximately 18,000 vulnerable refugee families living in urban areas has begun to help them cope with the economic impact of coronavirus. UNHCR has already been supporting the Government of Jordan's national response plan, donating USD 1.2 million to the Ministry of Health to purchase essential medical equipment as well as six ambulances, delivering medicine direct to refugees' homes and maintaining the operation of essential services, including medical clinics and hospitals, in refugee camps.
- **Lebanon:** Temporary cash assistance targeting 11,000 Syrian families and 500 families of other nationalities is being implemented for an initial period of three months from May. In addition, a total of 3,453 refugee volunteers and 650 UNHCR and partner frontline staff have been trained on COVID-19 awareness. Over 300,000 refugees in overcrowded settings have been reached with hygiene promotion and materials. Meanwhile, expansion plans have been finalized and submitted for five public hospitals. Medical equipment for 800 additional hospital beds and 100 additional ICUs is under procurement.
- **Libya:** In support of the COVID-19 health response, UNHCR has provided 200 mattresses, 200 hygiene kits, two prefabricated containers and two power generators to Misrata's Corona Crisis Committee. UNHCR has also provided ambulances in support of local healthcare services.
- **Mauritania:** To mitigate the immediate shock from job losses, cash distributions for social protection started in May for some 2,500 of the most vulnerable urban refugees. In response to the Government's request and in coordination with IOM, Refugee Housing Units are being constructed by trained refugees, for use as quarantine/isolation spaces at two border crossing points.
- **Morocco:** In April, nearly 3,000 most vulnerable refugee families have been provided with cash assistance. In coordination with the World Bank, UNHCR has entered into a partnership with the highest national authority dealing with planning and national statistics, the High Commissioner for Planning (HCP), to conduct a household survey on the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 on refugees.
- **Syria:** Despite the temporary closure of some 130 community centres, nearly 3,000 outreach volunteers (ORVs), including 250 health volunteers, have been active in COVID-19 awareness raising campaigns, reaching more than 200,000 persons across the country. Some 3,000 vulnerable persons received hygiene kits, food baskets and hot meals through community-led initiatives, while another 40 community-led initiatives are in progress and will be benefitting 20,000 people across Syria. Some 30,000 PPEs have been procured and distributed. In addition, nearly 12,000 vulnerable refugees received multi-purpose cash grants.

- **North-west Syria:** As part of the UN Whole of Syria response, UNHCR has been putting in place mitigation measures and has increased, prioritized and expedited trans- shipments and distributions of hygiene kits in north-west Syria. UNHCR partners have reviewed all their activities to align with the recommendations and guidelines issued by WHO, the clusters and the relevant coordination fora.
- **Tunisia:** In April, 478 vulnerable refugees and asylum-seekers hosted in shelters and in apartments in urban areas received cash assistance in replacement of food vouchers. Moreover, 290 vulnerable refugees and asylum-seekers not hosted in UNHCR-managed structures received multi-purpose cash assistance. Mental health and psychosocial support through remote counselling have been reinforced to respond to increasing needs expressed by persons of concern.
- **Turkey:** In collaboration with the Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM), UNHCR is providing one-off emergency cash assistance to vulnerable registered Syrians under temporary protection and international protection applicants and status holders. If fully funded, the programme aims to assist up to 100,000 households.
- **Yemen:** UNHCR is providing psychosocial support for the families affected while enhancing awareness-raising activities regarding preventative measures regarding COVID-19. For refugees and asylum-seekers, UNHCR provided cash assistance to families affected by job losses, for three months.

Financial information

UNHCR is grateful to donors who have provided generous and timely support to the Coronavirus Emergency Situation globally, and to MENA as well as those who have contributed to UNHCR programmes with unearmarked funding.

Earmarked contributions to the COVID-19 financial requirements for MENA | USD

Earmarked contributions for the Coronavirus Emergency Situation in MENA amount to some **US\$ 36.5 million**, including:

United States of America 22.6 M | Japan 9 M | CERF 2.4 M | Qatar Charity 1.5 M

Softly earmarked contributions and pledges to the COVID-19 appeal | USD

Special thanks to the major donors of softly earmarked contributions and pledges at the global level to the Coronavirus Emergency Situation giving UNHCR critical flexibility to rapidly respond to evolving needs.

Germany 38.0 M | United Kingdom 24.8 M | Denmark 14.6 M | United States of America 8.0 M | Canada 6.4 M | Ireland 3.3 M | Sweden 3.0 M | Sony Corporation 3.0 M | Norway 1.4 M | USA for UNHCR 1.0 M

Unearmarked contributions to UNHCR's 2020 programme | USD

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

Sweden 76.4 M | Norway 41.4 million | Netherlands 36.1 M | Denmark 34.6 M | United Kingdom 31.7 M | Private donors Spain 26.6 M | Germany 25.9 M | Switzerland 16.4 M | Private donors Republic of Korea 13.9 M

More information

- UNHCR Media Briefing Note: [Displaced people urgently need aid and access to social safety nets as coronavirus causes severe hardship](#)
- UNHCR News Story: [Refugees across Arab world feel economic pain of coronavirus](#)
- [Jordan Inter-agency Multi-sectoral Rapid Needs Assessment – COVID-19 – Jordan \(May 2020\)](#)
- UNHCR MENA Report: [Communicating with Communities during COVID-19 and what are they telling UNHCR?](#)
- 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](#)



UNHCR and partner staff distribute sanitary kits to a Syrian woman, one of 13,000 refugees living at Darashakran camp in Erbil, Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

Photo by UNHCR / Shaza Shekfeh

For more details, please contact UNHCR MENA Regional Office in Amman (Jordan) at: MENAreporting@unhcr.org