

UNHCR Regional Bureau for the Middle East and North Africa (MENA)

COVID-19 Response Update #22 (1 – 31 August 2021)

Key Figures

 17.4 million

people of concern in the Middle East and North Africa (2021 planning figures)

 16,268 cases

of COVID-19 were reported among people of concern to UNHCR since March 2020, including fatalities

 19 out of 19 countries

in the MENA region have confirmed the inclusion of refugees in their national COVID-19 vaccination programmes or plans

 19 out of 19 countries

in the MENA region have started COVID-19 vaccinations for refugees

Regional Developments

During August, the majority of countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) witnessed a downward trend in COVID-19 cases, although Iraq, Lebanon, Morocco, Syrian Arab Republic (Syria) and Yemen were still recording high infection rates.

While great strides have been made in the MENA region for the COVID-19 response, the COVID-19 situation for UNHCR globally is the most [underfunded of all situations](#) so far in 2021. Only one-third of the budget requirements of \$924 million has been received, leaving a massive gap in UNHCR's ability to protect people of concern from the fallout of the pandemic. Evidence from the Mashreq region shows how COVID-19 has aggravated the socio-economic conditions of both those forcibly displaced and their hosts, with consequences on their poverty levels. Specifically, the [Compounding Misfortunes report](#) published by UNHCR and the World Bank in December last year estimated that 4.4 million people in the host communities and 1.1 million among those forcibly displaced in Lebanon, Jordan and the Kurdistan region of Iraq have been driven into poverty in the immediate aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis. An [update](#) to the report published in March of this year indicated that by the

end of 2021, an additional 2.5 million Lebanese individuals and 430,000 Syrian refugees would be forced into poverty, as calculated based on the national poverty line.



Mauritania. UNHCR distributes KF94 medical masks to its implementing partner and local NGO ALPD. Photo: © UNHCR/Brahim Kane

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

Notable MENA-wide achievements in the first half of 2021

Cash assistance: Across MENA, cash was transferred to nearly 2.4 million IDPs, refugees and asylum-seekers, to the value of some \$131 million, as part of the COVID-specific response or regular operational activities.

Protection: Across MENA, over 3 million individuals accessed protection services, including registration, legal assistance, case management and community-based protection.

Health: Nearly 568,000 people of concern received essential health-care services. In addition, some 27,000 women and girls received sexual and reproductive health services and over 51,000 people of concern received mental health and psychosocial support services, as part of the COVID-specific response or regular operational activities.

Education: Nearly 63,000 children and youth were supported with distance/home-based learning.

Communicating with Communities: On average, 75% of areas inhabited by IDPs, refugees, migrants and host communities in 12 countries across MENA were reached by information campaigns about the COVID-19 pandemic.

In **Algeria**, in the Sahrawi refugee camps, the total number of active cases dropped from 300 at the end of July to some 120 by the end of August. Since the start of the national vaccination campaign, some 4,000 Sahrawi refugees have been fully vaccinated. Although findings show a slight overall improvement in vaccine uptake, rates remain low and UNHCR and partners continue to encourage vaccination among people of concern (PoCs) through sensitization campaigns. Refugee youth in the camps are also conducting door-to-door sensitization on COVID-19 prevention and mitigation.

In **Egypt**, UNHCR conducted a joint assessment with the Ministry of Health (MoH) to support mental health clinics and help strengthen their capacities in the context of COVID-19. Additionally, UNHCR is procuring laptops to support the MoH's vaccination drive, in coordination with the World Health Organization. UNHCR's health partners continue to support PoCs with online registration for vaccination, including through language support and internet access. To date, a total of 295 PoCs were supported with online registration, including 93 who were vaccinated.

In **Iraq**, since June, UNHCR has been rolling out a second round of cash assistance for eligible refugees, asylum-seekers, IDPs and returnees. The assistance consists of IQD 240,000 (\$164) aimed at mitigating the impacts of COVID-19 and reliance on harmful coping mechanisms, and covers the cost of basic household and individual hygiene items. So far in 2021, close to 12,000 refugee families and 4,100 IDP families have been assisted with cash assistance to help mitigate the economic impacts of COVID-19, while 4,700 refugee and 800 IDP

families are undergoing verification or are in the process of receiving cash assistance. Separately, while courts, Civil Affairs Directorate offices across Iraq, and Residency Offices in the KR-I (responsible for issuance of residency documents to the refugees there) have been functioning, capacities were slightly reduced over August in some locations due to COVID-19, slowing down the completion of legal assistance and civil documentation.

In refugee camps across **Jordan**, the number of vaccinated refugees continued to increase, reaching over 27,300 refugees in total (40% of the eligible population in Azraq and Zaatari camps), with close to 40,000 registered to receive the vaccine. Meanwhile, as of mid-August, UNHCR reached nearly 40,000 refugee families with a new round of emergency COVID-19 cash assistance to cover their needs for up to three months.

In **Lebanon**, more than 2,800 refugees benefitted from COVID-19 vaccinations through UNHCR-deployed mobile vaccination teams targeting country-wide refugee settings. Moreover, in the context of increasing hospital shortages, UNHCR continued distributing hospital equipment and supplies.

In **Mauritania**, the Government launched its second and third vaccination campaigns. Subsequently, some 2,600 refugees in Mbera camp were vaccinated over a period of four days, with vaccinations of refugees and asylum-seekers also taking place in Nouakchott. Meanwhile, UNHCR procured medical supplies (beds, protective equipment, and oxygen) to accommodate patients with mild and moderate COVID-19 symptoms in the Mbera refugee camp clinic managed by the Ministry of Health.

While the Government of **Morocco** has confirmed the inclusion of migrants and refugees in the COVID-19 vaccination campaign, national institutions, civil society organizations and UNHCR are closely coordinating to ensure effective inclusion of asylum-seekers and refugees in practice. So far, more than 250 refugees have been vaccinated.

In **Syria**, UNHCR continued to provide PoCs access to refugee status determination (RSD) procedures during August using an alternative approach to in-person interviews, designed with the necessary procedural and integrity safeguards in place such as identity verification, confidentiality, data protection, secure communication and due process. Under such an arrangement, cases are processed remotely with caseworkers and persons of concern located in UNHCR premises and communicating via secured video-conferencing tools. In **north-west Syria**, the second shipment of COVAX-facilitated COVID-19 vaccines (36,000 doses) arrived through Turkey, following a first shipment of 50,000 doses in May.

In **Tunisia**, outreach workers targeted people of concern living in remote areas in the Governorates of Kairawan, Monastir and Sousse as part of efforts to register all refugees and asylum-seekers in the national vaccination campaign.

In the **United Arab Emirates**, the government of Abu Dhabi announced vaccinations would be available to persons with expired residency or entry visas as of June. UNHCR expects more PoCs will be able to benefit from this decision.

In **Yemen**, government authorities in the south are bracing for a new COVID-19 wave and are preparing health facilities and quarantine sites for a possible influx of cases. UNHCR in Yemen

continued to sensitize refugee and IDP families, as well as host communities, on COVID-19 prevention. Through its partners, UNHCR supports 16 refugee community leadership committees that play a crucial role in reporting cases, organizing awareness activities, and disseminating information. In August, UNHCR and its partners reached more than 7,000 refugees and 3,700 Yemenis with awareness-raising activities on COVID-19. Moreover, UNHCR continued distributing personal protective equipment and hygiene kits and delivering health-care services to refugees and the host community countrywide through its five supported clinics. Since May 2021, UNHCR has provided 186,050 surgical masks and 141,400 surgical gloves to its health partners to support health facilities and staff working on the frontlines.



*In Tunisia, refugees and asylum-seekers are sensitized against risks of COVID-19.
Photo: © UNHCR/
Callum Francis
Redfern*

Global and MENA Financial Information

In 2021, UNHCR is seeking US\$ 924 million, of which over 50% is mainstreamed in the annual budget and some US\$ 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 28 September, UNHCR's total financial requirements for the COVID-19 Emergency are **33% funded**, with **US\$ 307 million received** (inclusive of indicative allocations of softly earmarked and unearmarked funds), of which **US\$ 79.6 million** is for the MENA region.

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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