

## UNHCR COVID-19 Preparedness and Response

### Highlights

- A [report released by UNHCR](#) on 18 September describes the COVID-19 pandemic as a 'force multiplier', increasing the needs of the displaced population including refugees in many countries while also making those needs more difficult to address.
- A series of fires at the Reception and Identification Centre in Moria (Lesvos, Greece) on 8-10 September left 12,000 asylum-seekers and refugees without shelter. [UNHCR is supporting the government-led response](#) by scaling up immediate support to this urgent crisis and is seeking to mobilize additional resources to prevent the spread of COVID-19 through adequate health and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) capacity.
- [UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi concluded his visit to Syria and Jordan](#) with a pledge to maintain assistance to the most vulnerable as the situation in Syria continues to be extremely difficult for Syrian and refugee populations. Following a recent spike in COVID-19 infections in Syria and Jordan, including the first six confirmed cases in Jordan's two main Syrian refugee camps, UNHCR continues to ramp up measures to confront and contain the spread of COVID-19 among UNHCR's persons of concern.

### COVID-19 update



Almost **21,000** reported cases of COVID-19 among UNHCR's persons of concern



across **97** countries



increase of some **3,000** cases compared to previous reporting period

*(numbers as of 20 September 2020)*



Ecuador. Refugees in coastal city receive Unilever soaps to fight COVID-19

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### Global Overview

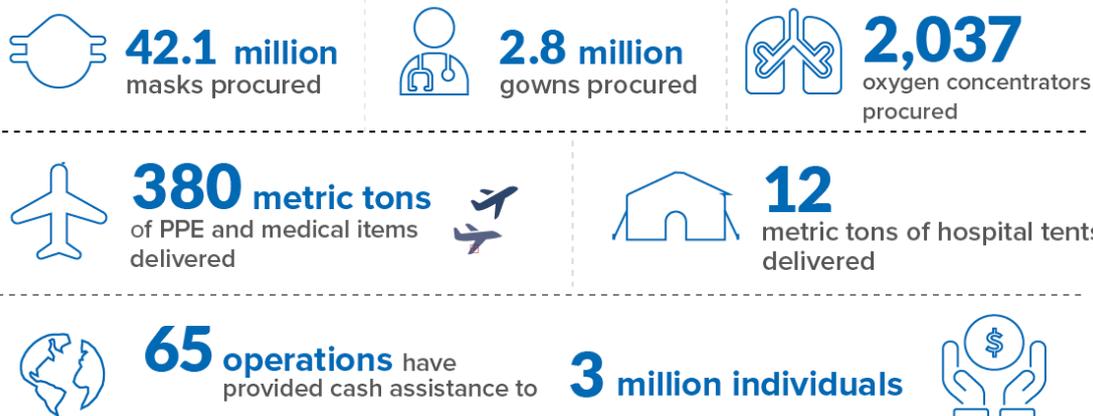
The COVID-19 crisis has exacerbated the already dire humanitarian needs globally, particularly in low and middle-income countries, which currently host more than 85% of the world’s refugees. The pandemic is destabilizing entire sectors of the economy, with millions depending on fragile incomes that are now at risk. More generally, violence, persecution and civil strife continue to uproot millions. Few conflicts have abated in recent months, while some, such as in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Libya, the Sahel and the Syrian Arab Republic, have gotten worse. Driven in part by the effects of the pandemic on livelihoods, gender inequality and gender-based violence have increased, internal displacement has been exacerbated, and freedom of movement and access to asylum reduced. All these trends are likely to continue through 2020, with the virus acting as a ‘force multiplier’, making the needs of people of concern to the Office more acute and more complicated to address.

UNHCR has taken steps to invest more in key areas in response to the protection, public health and socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 on people of concern. This includes ramping up cash assistance, which is fast, safe and can help cover rent, food, and other basic needs that arise for refugees and displaced persons. Water, sanitation and hygiene, shelter capacity, and health services are all being reassessed to take into account COVID-19 prevention and response.

### UNHCR Response

#### Progress to date and Impact

Among the key items procured or delivered by UNHCR



#### Gaps and Challenges

- As of 18 September, 72 countries had their borders completely closed (mostly in Asia, Latin America and Africa), while 18 countries did not enforce any COVID-19 related restrictions at the border and 83 had imposed some restrictions, with exceptions for asylum-seekers.
- Reports of pushbacks continue in Central and South Eastern Europe. UNHCR has in some cases scaled up advocacy efforts to ensure access to territory and asylum procedures for individuals who have expressed their intention to seek asylum.

### **Middle East and North Africa**

#### Lebanon

UNHCR has been supporting the expansion and rehabilitation of six governmental hospitals across the country in order to receive and treat COVID-19 patients and avoid competition for care. UNHCR's COVID-19 support to hospitals will cover 800 additional beds and 100 additional intensive care unit (ICU) beds in total, including ventilators and other advanced equipment, as well as medicine stocks.

#### Jordan

The [Kolibri platform launched by UNHCR](#) in 2019, and developed by Learning Equality with support from Google.org, was successfully integrated within Noorspace, the online platform operated by the Ministry of Education and Queen Rania Center for Information Technology (QRC). This integration allowed the creation of virtual classrooms aligned with the national curriculum, enabling refugee and host communities to access diverse educational resources as part of their continued online learning.

### **West and Central Africa**

Heavy rainfalls and floods continue to affect several hosting areas, especially in the Sahel where UNHCR is stepping up its emergency interventions along with the implementation of its COVID-19 response.

#### Côte d'Ivoire

UNHCR proceeded on 10 September with the first facilitated repatriation of a convoy of 63 Ivorian refugees from Guinea-Conakry since the beginning of the pandemic. The returnees are now in quarantine for 14 days in line with the measures instated by the government to mitigate the risk against COVID-19.

### **Asia and the Pacific**

#### Afghanistan

The Intensive Care Unit (ICU) facility in Kabul, which was set up within three weeks, is now functional, with two ICU beds and 8 isolation wards and will also offer COVID-19 testing for UNHCR personnel.

#### Islamic Republic of Iran

UNHCR's persons of concern are reporting increasing difficulties in meeting the costs of internet and cell phones/IT equipment needed for children to continue their education. UNHCR is exploring ways to engage on this issue strategically to provide connectivity as well as equipment.

#### Bangladesh

As part of an initiative targeting vulnerable households impacted by reduced livelihood opportunities due to COVID-19, UNHCR partners in Bangladesh have completed the distribution of vegetable seeds to over 6,900 refugee households and provided training to some 2,900 refugee households on vegetable production. The distribution of organic fertilizer and other materials also started.

### **East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes**

So far, only three countries have re-opened schools (Somalia, Tanzania and Djibouti). UNHCR has evaluated the status of safe return to schools in Somalia for persons of concern and noted challenges that include high dropout rates due to long breaks and families that moved, and school spaces that are not following COVID-19 prevention measures.

#### Djibouti

UNHCR handed over two ambulances and almost 600 boxes of medication to the Ministry of Health. The contribution is aimed

### [Ghana](#)

UNHCR continues to support the Ghana Refugee Board to continue with refugee status determination (RSD) interviews via a virtual RSD procedure to ensure the core protection business of RSD does not suffer in the face of COVID-19. This measure ensures compliance with COVID-19 protocols while still ensuring asylum-seekers enjoy international protection by getting the opportunity to be interviewed.

at strengthening interventions and inclusion of refugees in the national health programme in response to COVID-19.

### [Uganda](#)

UNHCR and partners are continuing to improve and expand 21 quarantine centres and 109 health centres in refugee hosting areas to accommodate the increasing COVID-19 caseload.

## **Southern Africa**

### [South Africa](#)

UNHCR's partners have provided ad-hoc food parcel distributions for refugees and asylum-seekers since April, as hunger continues to be a major concern. UNHCR has also been providing affected families with cash assistance to help them through the economic hardships brought about by COVID-19. So far, over 12,000 people have been reached with cash assistance in South Africa.

### [Zambia](#)

With growing concerns about complacency and non-compliance with COVID-19 prevention guidelines, UNHCR has been seeking new ways of reaching refugees and host communities with information. In Mantapala settlement, with support from UNHCR and the government, the Livelihood Working Group integrated COVID-19 prevention and mitigation messages in the conservation agriculture and agri-business training modules.

The government has further eased COVID-19 restrictions by announcing the country-wide re-opening of primary and secondary schools, as well as colleges and universities. Learning centers in the refugee settlements will also re-open, and UNHCR is working with education authorities and partners to ensure COVID-19

## **Europe**

As COVID-19 infection rates increase again across the region, many countries have reacted by reinstating some movement limitations as well as targeted travel restrictions.

### [Greece](#)

As a result of the series of fires that broke out at the Moria Reception and Identification Centre (RIC) in Lesbos on 8-10 September, an estimated 12,000 asylum-seekers and refugees were initially left without shelter.

Close to 5,000 people are now being housed in a new emergency facility in Kara Tepe which has capacity to accommodate some 8,000 people, while works are ongoing. The site was set-up by Greek authorities - who hold overall responsibility for the management and coordination of the humanitarian response - with the support of UNHCR and other organizations.

Before entering the facility, all new residents underwent rapid COVID-19 testing to help contain the virus. As of 18 September, some 150 positive cases were identified as a result of mass testing. All have received medical attention and are isolating in a quarantine area within the new site.

preventive pre-requisites are in place before classes commence.

#### [Ukraine](#)

On 10 September, UNHCR transported a [humanitarian convoy with 92 tons of assistance](#), including construction materials for a shelter programme in Luhanska Oblast, through Donetsk non-government-controlled area.

#### **Americas**

During the last weeks, the number of COVID-19 cases in the US and Brazil is stabilizing, as reported by the Pan American Health Organization. However, these two countries still account for most COVID-19 cases globally.

In Central America, tropical storms affected several countries in the region, including Belize, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua where floods, landslides, and damage to infrastructure were reported. The rainy season also raises alarms with regards to potential increases in malaria, dengue, and leptospirosis cases, which would add to the existing pressure on national healthcare systems already strained by the existing COVID-19 outbreak.

With the progressive lifting of COVID-19 restrictions across the region, UNHCR is reactivating its presence in communities. Despite borders remaining closed throughout the region, asylum claims continue to be filed, with at least 27,000 claims remotely filed in Peru since June and some 24,000 claims filed in Mexico as of 31 August.



In March 2020, Malawi included refugees in its national Education COVID-19 Preparedness and Response Plan and secured a USD 10 million grant from the Global Partnership for Education's Accelerated Education COVID-19 Response Grant Fund. This supported the implementation of [Malawi's wider pledge to integrate refugees in its National Development Agenda](#), benefitting both refugees and the host community through this inclusive approach.

The [Refugee Consortium of Kenya \(RCK\)](#) announced progress on their pledge made at the Global Refugee Forum on meaningful refugee participation by providing more than 6,000 hours of legal aid and representation to refugees in several refugee camps and urban areas in Kenya this year alone. Despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, RCK has leveraged the use of technology to continue providing free legal aid remotely by telephone and disseminating legal information through online platforms.

### Coordination and partnerships

- From March 2020, COVID-19 has emerged as a major, worldwide disruptor to the provision of protection and assistance of UNHCR and partners to refugees, internally displaced persons and stateless persons. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the traditional in-person Global UNHCR Consultations with NGOs could not take place in June. This notwithstanding, UNHCR held global weekly virtual consultations with NGO partners between March and July on preparedness and response to COVID-19 in refugee situations. Co-organized with ICVA, the objective of these consultations was to create a space for regular dialogue between UNHCR and NGOs on challenges and for sharing of good practices on emerging responses to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Building on these weekly exchanges with NGOs, the [2020 Annual NGO consultations on 29 and 30 September 2020](#) will inform preparations for the 2020 UNHCR's High Commissioner Dialogue on Protection Challenges focusing on "Protection Challenges in Pandemics".

- With regards to COVID-19 inter-agency coordination in the East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes, the first meeting of the Opportunities/Issues Based Coalition (O/IBC)-7 on Forced Displacement and Migration (co-led by UNHCR and IOM) was held in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2030. The Terms of Reference for the O/IBC-7 with a focus on COVID-19 were endorsed.

### UN Common Cash Statement (UNCCS)



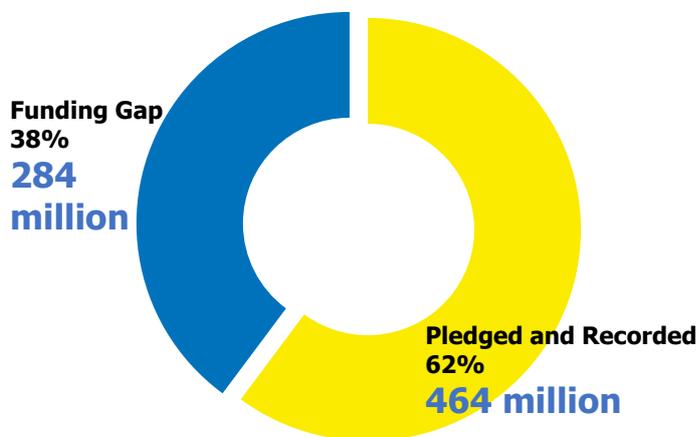
The [UN Common Cash Statement](#) was launched in December 2018 by the four principals of UNICEF, OCHA, UNHCR and WFP to collaborate on cash and voucher assistance, using common cash systems wherever possible. Recognizing that cash represents a significant reform in the humanitarian sector, it aims to better assist affected populations in a principled and dignified manner with an intention to improve complementarities, synergies and accountabilities among UN agencies and other organizations. While COVID-19 has brought complexities to the UNCCS, the strength of collaboration for accelerating responses has been evident in the surge of collaborative procurement and shared delivery mechanisms.

### Financial Information

On 17 July, the second revision to the COVID-19 Global Humanitarian Response Plan (GHRP) was launched, seeking USD 10.3 billion to support global humanitarian response through December 2020. UNHCR seeks USD 745 million for all refugee and internally displaced operations worldwide. While the initial appeal focused on preparedness and prevention, the revised appeals are increasingly focused on response activities to address the immediate public health, protection and humanitarian assistance needs in countries already facing humanitarian situations. Within the GHRP, UNHCR's focus is on meeting the needs of refugees, stateless, the internally displaced and host communities. More detailed information on UNHCR requirements within the GHRP was shared in the [11 May revision to the UNHCR Coronavirus emergency appeal](#).

**USD 745M**

Requested for UNHCR's COVID-19 response globally until the end of the year:



**Total contributed or pledged to the COVID-19 appeal:**

**USD 464M**

Including:

United States	\$186.3M
Germany	\$62.7M
European Union	\$50.0M
United Kingdom	\$26.9M
Japan	\$23.9M
African Development Bank	\$18.3M
Private donors	\$16.4M
Denmark	\$14.6M
United Nations Foundation	\$10.0M
CERF	\$6.9M
Canada	\$6.4M
Unilever	\$5.9M
Education Cannot Wait	\$4.7M
Qatar Charity	\$3.5M
Spain	\$3.4M
France	\$3.4M
Ireland	\$3.3M
Sweden	\$3.0M
Sony Corporation	\$2.9M
Austria	\$2.5M
Finland	\$2.4M

**Unearmarked contributions to UNHCR's 2020 programme:**

Sweden 76.4M | Private donors Spain 52.9M | Norway 41.4M | Netherlands 36.1M | Denmark 34.6M | United Kingdom 31.7M | Private donors Republic of Korea 27.2M | Germany 25.9M | Private donors Japan 17.9M | Switzerland 16.4M | France 14M | Private donors Italy 12.4M | Italy 10.6M

*Contributed without restrictions on its use, unearmarked funding allows UNHCR critical flexibility in how best to reach refugees, the internally displaced, stateless persons and other populations of concern who are in the greatest need and at the greatest risk.*

**More information:**

[Global Humanitarian Response Plan COVID-19](#)  
(launched 17 July 2020)



[Global Focus COVID-19 Situation page](#)  
(including UNHCR's Coronavirus emergency appeal and sitreps)



[UNHCR COVID-19 data portal](#) (including global guidance, sitreps and links to other UNHCR COVID-19 related sites)



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