

# Regional Bureau for Europe

UPDATE # 11

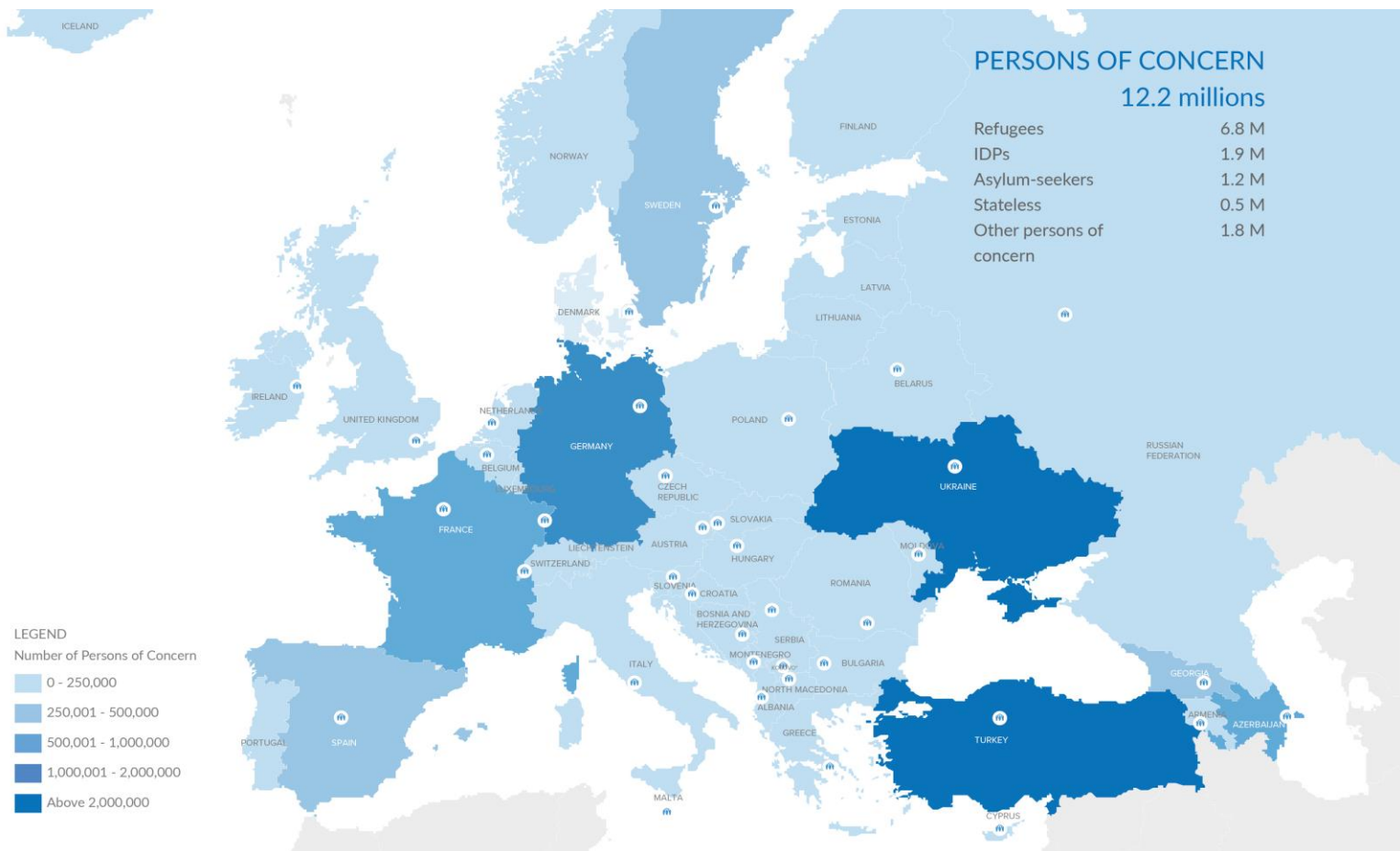
12 - 18 June 2020

Across the region, further **movement and border restrictions** were lifted, which shall facilitate **access to territory and international protection**.

UNHCR staff is gradually moving back to office premises. After 24 offices shifted **from full-time to partial telework**, no UNHCR office was in full teleworking mode as of 16 June.

**UNHCR and partners' physical access to persons of concern** is improving with the progressive lifting of movement restrictions, in compliance with COVID-19 preventive measures.

## Populations of Concern



SOURCE: UNHCR STATISTICAL REPORT AS OF END OF JUNE 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, 22 countries have reported cases among persons of concern, and some of them have already recovered. However, any figure or estimate at this point needs to be taken with caution due to differing approaches to testing, data segregation and reporting.
- As a result of lifted restrictions, some UNHCR country offices are planning to gradually resume some of the suspended activities, for example protection monitoring at borders. As of this week, 24 offices have shifted from full to partial telework, meaning that all 37 offices in the region are partially teleworking.

## UNHCR Response

- UNHCR's response to the COVID-19 situation is focusing on:
  - Continuing to **provide protection assistance** including legal aid, 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, as necessary, confirmed or suspected COVID-19 cases;
  - 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;
  - In some operations, supporting authorities in identifying alternative **accommodation** or bringing current housing for asylum-seekers up to acceptable protection and hygienic standards;
  - **Ensuring the inclusion** of persons of concern, host communities and service providers in the provision and distribution of adequate hygienic items;
  - **Continuous advocacy** to ensure the inclusion of persons of concern in national COVID-19 preparedness and response plans;
  - **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.

## UNHCR Areas of Intervention



### PROTECTION

- During the reporting period, access to territory improved gradually in the region, with the ease of border restrictions. However, particular concerns remain in some countries, where reports of push-backs on land borders and at sea have persisted over recent months.
- In South Eastern Europe, the number of people in transit continues to raise. This has for example been the case in **Montenegro**, where a high and quick turnover of persons of concern in the country's asylum accommodation has been observed this week (20-30 entry and exit daily).
- In most countries in the region, freedom of movement for inhabitants of reception centres has been restored. However, centres remain congested pending availability of alternative accommodations and people continue being exposed to precarious conditions. In **Spain**, most of the 1,450 people accommodated in the Melilla centre have been living for over six months in a centre designed for short term stays and with a maximum capacity of 780 people. In addition, over 60 asylum-seekers are currently hosted

in the “Plaza de Toros”, a space that was initially designed for temporary accommodation and which was also designated as quarantine space for new arrivals. Of further concern is that NGO actors are only able to provide reduced services and activities. In [Cyprus](#), reception conditions in the Pournara camp remain concerning. In a positive development, as of 15 June, COVID-induced movement restrictions for persons living in the camp have been lifted.

- Access to registration has largely been restored in almost all countries in the region. In [Belgium](#), as a result of continued advocacy, action has been taken to ensure that all unaccompanied or separated children are able to register immediately at the reception centre without having to go through prior administrative steps online or with the police. This is a positive development, given that until this decision, unaccompanied children, among other persons of concern, were particularly affected by the restricted access to registration services, exposing them to protection risks. However, in other countries, challenges remain, including backlogs, slower intake procedures, and lack of clarity on how to access adapted registration procedures.
- Efforts to expand reception spaces continue in order to allow for better compliance with health regulations. In [Ireland](#), for example, around 600 residents have been relocated to new accommodations to enable greater social distancing in centres and limit exposure of the most vulnerable to the COVID-19 virus. In addition, four offsite self-isolation facilities with health and social care personnel have been opened with a capacity of 299 rooms in total.
- Asylum procedures have also resumed in most countries. However, in many instances, resumption of interviews and accumulated backlog present a challenge. UNHCR has been advocating for an enhanced backlog management from the moment procedures are resumed, in order to safeguard the quality of decisions. Similarly, as remote interviewing starts being used, good practices can be observed to adjust and optimize services in view of the new context. UNHCR Regional Bureau for Europe compiled practical [recommendations and good practices for States on remote interviewing across Europe](#).
- In [Ukraine](#), following the Ukrainian authorities’ announcement of the partial re-opening of the Entry-Exit Checkpoints (EECPs) along the ‘contact line’ in eastern Ukraine on 10 June, large crowds gathered on both sides, making it impossible to respect social distancing. De facto authorities in Donetsk and Luhansk oblast, however, decided that EECP should remain closed as a precautionary measure until further notice, except for permissions based on “socio-humanitarian” grounds. On 13 and 14 June, NGO partner R2P reported that almost 300 persons were able to cross the ‘contact line’ in both directions (133 to the NGCA and 165 to GCA). UNHCR and its partners secured the provision of food and shelter for some of the stranded people at the EECP.

  
**HEALTH**

- In [Greece](#), no further persons of concern have tested positive to COVID-19 this week, keeping the number at 212. Out of these, 207 are in mainland sites and five are located on Lesbos. After quarantining in the Mergala Therma area of the Apanemo site, four individuals were transferred to the Moria Reception and Identification Centre (RIC). As the 14-day quarantines on affected mainland sites ended, lockdowns were lifted as well. It is to be noted that, to date, the only two sites featuring an initial set-up for quarantine on the islands are on Chios and Lesbos, and both would require additional work to be fully functional and safe for persons of concern.
- The Megala Therma quarantine area in the Apanemo site is now hosting 163 people. Groups are separated according to arrival dates. Persons of concern have self-organized to apply physical distancing and limit possible spread of the virus, since there are no physical barriers to separate the groups for the time being. Additional tents and water tanks have been installed, while further planning to set up the required physical partitions is ongoing. However, authorities’ endorsement is still pending, creating security risks to persons of concern, as some of the local population have expressed objections against this site. Authorities have also yet to respond to the technical plan presented by MSF and IRC on 6 June, which would help implement the quarantine site under UNHCR coordination.

- The transfer of older and immunocompromised asylum-seekers from island RICs to alternative accommodations continued, where compliance with COVID-19 preventive measures is easier. To date, 1,254 persons have been moved. Reception conditions on the islands remain dire for the 31,600 people living in overcrowded and unhygienic conditions in the RICs with a hosting capacity for 5,400 people. It was further observed that the ending of reception support for some recognized refugees as of 1 June led to spontaneous movements to mainland, where many are left without adequate access to services and shelter and, as a result, face higher protection and health risks.
- At the land border, the Evros RIC is operating as a closed facility. The Operation has provided containers that were used as isolation places for new arrivals and supported setting up health units and upgrading sanitation installations. However, new arrivals are kept in a detention facility for 14 days, which is of great concern to UNHCR as detained people have no access to registration before being transferred to the RIC, where they may stay in quarantine another 14 days due to lack of testing and coordination between medical actors in the detention facilities and the RIC.
- In the North Aegean Region, the clinics operating as screening centres for the residents of the RICs of Lesbos, Chios and Samos are resuming their activities. They had temporarily stopped due to lack of funding for medical personnel. They are now funded by the Ministry of Interior and are an important aspect of the COVID-19 response on these islands.



#### COMMUNICATION WITH COMMUNITIES

- In light of the lifted restrictions and shifting health requirements, authorities and partners continue informing persons of concern of new developments, especially regarding their rights and obligations. In **Malta**, UNHCR continues to compile, translate and disseminate relevant information as restrictions are progressively relaxed, and it has also produced specific information materials, including a list of online multimedia resources to support refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants in accessing information and content for children, education and health.
- In **Ireland**, health authorities have established a national clinical hotline to provide advice to centre managers and staff, and a dedicated email address for centre residents. The operation has been providing support in authorities' communications with centre management, staff, residents and support organisations.
- In **Portugal**, the Fórum Refugio platform, composed of several refugee-led associations, will employ a donation received from the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation in collaboration with state authorities, to set up hotlines for refugees in four languages, as well as a separate line for women and children to address these populations' need for information.
- In **Turkey**, partners continue to conduct online recreational activities with refugees, including women solidarity group meetings, regular speaking clubs, story-telling activities for adults, dance workshops with children groups, as well as psycho-social support and counselling for adolescents, group counselling on access to social assistance and health services during COVID-19.



#### CASH-BASED AND IN-KIND ASSISTANCE

- Cash assistance has been continuously delivered to persons of concern in the region throughout the pandemic. In total, 11 country operations in the region provided one-off emergency cash grants to support over 23,000 families to help them covering their basic needs. benefitted from this initiative. A post-distribution monitoring (PDM) survey has been developed and will be conducted shortly in these operations in order to better understand the use and quantify the impact of these cash distributions, and how it has helped beneficiaries to survive COVID-related containment measures and related economic hardships. The initial key findings of the survey are expected to be available by the end of July.

- In **Turkey**, on 15 June, the distribution of one-off cash assistance cards for more than 2,000 families started, after a first group of 7,000 families received the assistance across the country earlier this month.
- In **Ukraine**, this week, one-time emergency cash reached 89 additional families affected by quarantine restrictions, having lost their income due to COVID-19 measures, or having specific needs with serious medical conditions and at heightened risk of homelessness. This is a second round of cash-based support since the COVID-19 outbreak, after 454 vulnerable families received support in May. In addition, the operation provided monthly subsistence allowance to another 104 families with specific needs whose situation was aggravated by COVID-19 measures. This assistance was calculated to support each beneficiary family for a duration of four months.
- In-kind assistance in form of 17 kits containing food packages and hygiene items also reached orphans and stateless persons (or at risk of statelessness) in conflict-affected localities in Luhansk oblast. So far, a total of 84 persons have been provided with similar assistance since the beginning of June, to ease their hardship during the lockdown period.

## 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**, the operation continues supporting the Government's 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 globally boost preparedness, prevention and response activities to address immediate public health needs of refugees and host communities. The amount presented in the appeal does not represent the magnitude of UNHCR's engagement to support governments' efforts in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, including in Europe.
- UNHCR Regional Bureau for Europe is grateful to donors who have provided generous and timely support to the Coronavirus Emergency Situation globally and to Europe in particular, including for non-COVID-19 related interventions, which are critical to ensure business continuity.

### **Total contributed or pledged to UNHCR COVID-19 appeal**

#### **USD 252 M (34%)**

Including: United States of America \$64.0M | Germany \$38.6M | European Union \$33.5M | United Kingdom \$24.8M | Japan \$23.9M | Denmark \$14.6M | United Nations Foundation \$10.0M | CERF \$6.9M | Private donors \$6.7M | Canada \$6.4M | Ireland \$3.3M | Sweden \$3.0M | Sony Corporation \$2.9M | Finland \$2.4M | Austria \$1.8M | Education Cannot Wait \$1.8M | Qatar Charity \$1.5M | Norway \$1.4M | USA for UNHCR \$1.0M

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

Sweden 76.4M | Norway 41.4M | Netherlands 36.1M | Denmark 34.6M | Private donors Spain 33.1M | United Kingdom 31.7M | Germany 25.9M | Private donors Republic of Korea 17.3M | Switzerland 16.4M

**Useful Links**

[UNHCR's revised Coronavirus Emergency Appeal](#)

[UNHCR operations overview in Europe](#)

[COVID-19: UNHCR's response](#)

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