

UNHCR COVID-19 Preparedness and Response

Highlights

- On 15 October, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee extended the [system-wide COVID-tailored IASC Scale-Up activation](#) for three months until 17 January 2021. This three-month extension reflects the continued need for joined-up efforts to sustain both ongoing humanitarian operations and to meet growing needs as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Since the start of the pandemic, USD 108.5 million worth of personal protective equipment (PPE) and medical items has been procured globally for the COVID-19 response and over 150 shipments have been organized to deliver these critical goods to field operations.
- After a seven-month suspension due to COVID-19, [UNHCR's life-saving flights from Libya resumed](#). A group of 153 vulnerable refugees and asylum seekers have been evacuated from Libya to the Emergency Transit Mechanism (ETM) in Niger.
- As Afghanistan grapples with mounting insecurity, in addition to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, [UNHCR has called for protection and support](#) for tens of thousands of civilians displaced by recent escalation of violence in Afghanistan's southern Helmand Province.

COVID-19 update



Some **28,000** reported cases of COVID-19 among UNHCR's persons of concern



across **100** countries



increase of some **2,000** cases compared to previous reporting period

(numbers as of 25 October 2020)



Kenya. Food and relief items distributed during COVID-19 global pandemic
© UNHCR/Samuel Otieno

Global Overview

This year's [High Commissioner's Dialogue on "Protection and Resilience during Pandemics"](#) focused on the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic for the protection and resilience of refugees and people who are internally displaced or stateless and their host communities.

The virtual opening session, held on 21 October, allowed for an inspiring discussion between the High Commissioner, a group of refugees and a UN Sustainable Development Goals Advocate, all engaged in the response to the pandemic. By discussing the protection and resilience challenges posed by the pandemic, panellists shared lessons learned and solutions that can help in the future to confront other global challenges, such as displacement related to climate change and disasters. These exchanges and testimonies will set the stage for the discussions in the virtual sessions to follow in November and December.

The next session on 4 November will focus on "Protection challenges and responses to COVID-19 for and by forcibly displaced communities" by highlighting how COVID-19 has created new and amplified challenges for refugees and internally displaced persons worldwide.

UNHCR Response

Progress to date and Impact

- UNHCR advocates that refugees and internally displaced people be included in national vaccination roll-out plans as soon as a vaccine becomes available.
- While the situation evolves differently in the regions, UNHCR continues to work very closely with local partners and community-based organizations to ensure that essential humanitarian services such as registration of refugees, public health, water and sanitation, education and community outreach are in place. In addition, trained refugee community volunteers assist UNHCR and other aid organizations in delivering vital services.
- Since the beginning of UNHCR's COVID-19 response in Southern Africa, 2.5 million people have been reached with COVID-19 risk prevention messaging; almost 54,000 families received additional relief items as a result of COVID-19 and over 4,700 additional handwashing facilities have been installed to help prevent COVID-19.

Gaps and Challenges

- UNHCR is particularly concerned about the socio-economic consequences of COVID-19, including loss of income, evictions, school closures, denial of access to health and social services as well as rising xenophobia. For refugees, losing jobs could mean returning to dangerous situations, including in their countries of origin.
- Due to the social and economic impacts of COVID-19, UNHCR is deeply concerned about the heightened risk of refugees and other displaced populations resorting to negative coping mechanisms. These include child marriages and the risk of displaced (or stateless) women being forced to resort to survival sex as a result of lost livelihood opportunities.

Middle East and North Africa (MENA)

In the MENA region and Turkey, all 20 out of the 20 countries where UNHCR operates have reported COVID-19 cases among their population. Since March, over 1,500 persons of concern to UNHCR have tested positive for COVID-19.

[Syria](#)

On 23 September, UNHCR Damascus re-opened its Registration Centre for two days to conduct interviews to renew the documents of refugees. The process was closed on 23 July due to public health concerns as a result of COVID-19. UNHCR is currently piloting the process in Damascus with enhanced safety measures. In addition, UNHCR continues its efforts to reach persons of concern with information on COVID-19. As of 14 October, UNHCR Syria has reached over 121,000 individuals through 860 different WhatsApp groups and some 309,000 persons of concern through outreach volunteers.

[Egypt](#)

UNHCR is preparing to provide a second round of cash for hygiene for vulnerable cases in Egypt. On 29 September, a meeting of the Health Working Group took place, with health program activities discussed for refugees and asylum-seeker. Egypt joined the COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access (COVAX) facility with refugees and asylum-seekers to be included in the vaccine rollout plan.

[Iraq](#)

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak, UNHCR has distributed over 70,000 dignity kits for women and girls of reproductive age living in internally displaced and refugee camps. As part of the response to the COVID-19 outbreak in Iraq, UNHCR has also provided over 21,000 medical personal protective equipment (PPE) to medical staff in camps and at borders.

Asia and the Pacific

[Afghanistan](#)

Utilization of health services in Afghanistan has dramatically decreased during the pandemic according to WHO, indicating that many severe medical cases that required hospital care were unable to receive treatment for a variety of reasons. These reasons include health personnel falling ill with COVID-19, overwhelmed health facilities focusing on COVID-19 response, patients' unwillingness to attend health facilities, and movement restrictions. These unaddressed medical conditions will likely result in increased mortality as well as an increase in needs in the remainder of the year and into 2021.

Facilitated returns to Afghanistan have been affected by border closures and limited air travel. From 1 January to 2 October, UNHCR assisted the return of some 1,300 Afghan refugees from Iran, Pakistan and other countries under its facilitated voluntary repatriation programme. The number of Afghan refugees who returned in 2019 under UNHCR's facilitated voluntary repatriation programme was much higher (8,079 in total), demonstrating the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on returns.

[Bangladesh](#)

On 19 October, UNHCR, in the presence of government officials, inaugurated the expansion of Sadar hospital with an additional ward of 20 beds for critical COVID-19 patients. With a relatively low number of newly identified cases, bed occupancy is presently at 10% with 527 active beds. The Transit Center quarantine facility is at 41% occupancy.

Government authorities, partners and refugee volunteers continue with information dissemination among the community,

Jordan

In September, UNHCR Jordan focused on COVID-19 and education as one of the major highlights of mass communication. Related content covered social media posts, WhatsApp messages, SMS and e-posters.

promoting hygiene, social distancing and the need to wear face masks in public places. Community Psychosocial Volunteers also conducted almost 2,500 sessions on COVID-19 and how to improve well-being, reaching some 8,800 individuals.

West and Central Africa

As income-generating opportunities disappear and savings dry up due to the ripple effect of the pandemic, refugees and asylum-seekers are facing increasing difficulties to cover their basic needs and are resorting to negative coping mechanisms. Many who have earned self-reliance over the years, particularly in urban settings, risk losing it, and some are resorting to premature returns.

Nigeria

UNHCR's socio-economic assessment on the impact of COVID-19 showed that over 66 per cent of refugee and internally displaced households had to reduce their food intake as a coping strategy as their income declined. More than two thirds reported facing increased prices and food insecurity. Additionally, during COVID-19 almost 84 per cent reported difficulty in accessing vital services (health, water, sanitation, markets, education).

Cameroon

An assessment of refugees from Central African Republic found that the monthly earnings of 68 per cent fell below the country's minimum salary before the pandemic. More than 10 per cent have completely lost their pre-pandemic income-generating activity mostly as a result of movement restrictions (38 per cent) and dwindling economic opportunities (31 per cent). Like in Nigeria, restriction on food consumption has been a coping mechanism

East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes

The COVID-19 response challenges in the region are compounded by floods in several countries leading to additional displacement and, in many areas, affecting UNHCR's ability to access persons of concern.

UNHCR continues to assess the impact of border closures and travel restrictions on access to asylum. Movements continue through unofficial border crossing points where screening and provision of information is not in place. Across the region, UNHCR has appealed for special measures to be put in place, to allow for asylum-seekers to be screened, quarantined and admitted, and for UNHCR to be granted access to areas where new refugees are arriving.

Uganda

Despite the country opening its borders to certain movements, the official government position is that borders remain closed to asylum seekers. Nevertheless, some 1,200 individuals crossed into Uganda from South Sudan between 28 September and 6 October after clashes broke out between factions of Sudan People's Liberation Movement-In-Opposition (SPLM-IO). The new arrivals are hosted in several collection centers and the villages close to the border. Arrivals reportedly continue and UNHCR is monitoring the situation closely.

Djibouti

UNHCR carried out a COVID-19 assessment mission to the refugee village of Markazi from

for many who lost part of or all their income during the pandemic.

To respond to these increased needs, UNHCR is stepping up its efforts to mitigate the economic impact of COVID-19 on displaced populations and foster their economic inclusion through livelihoods activities and an enhanced engagement with governments, development and private sector actors.

4-6 October with a view to strengthening local mechanisms for identifying child victims of abuse, neglect, exploitation and other forms of violence. The mission observed an increase in early marriages that occurred during the lockdown. A plan to coordinate child protection activities with protection partners and the Yemeni refugee community was agreed to with a view to prevent the violation of children's rights.

Americas

Cross-border movements are on the rise as mobility restrictions are eased throughout Latin America. According to Migracion Colombia, almost 111,000 people had returned to Venezuela either from or through Colombia as of 4 October. On the other hand, Colombian authorities expect as many as 200,000 Venezuelans to enter Colombia by the end of the year as the Colombian economy begins to reactivate. Venezuela-bound movements have also been noted in other parts of the region, such as the Ecuadorian border with Colombia, where some 150-200 people are crossing daily.

It is feared that, as the COVID-19 spread has not been contained yet in Latin America, growing cross regional movements of people and potential massive influxes once border restrictions are lifted, may pose challenges in terms of health, security and operational response in main border crossings. To mitigate its potential impact, UNHCR is enhancing its presence in main border areas, scaling up monitoring of non-official crossings, and also preparing the delivery of lifesaving assistance.

Costa Rica

For most refugees and asylum seekers, food security continues to be among their primary concerns. Over 840 inquiries to UNHCR's

Europe

With COVID-19 infection rates rising steeply across the region, many countries are progressively reinstating movement restrictions or extending states of emergency.

Despite the current trend and measures taken by some states, access to territory is generally maintained but quarantine measures are taken to prevent the virus from spreading.

Italy

In Italy, the COVID-19 prevention protocol in place was implemented, along with mandatory testing. The country continued to receive new arrivals between 29 September and 12 October, with some 2,100 persons arriving by sea, with almost 1,140 disembarking in Lampedusa. As of 12 October, some 850 individuals were quarantined onshore, and some 1,300 offshore in one of the five ferries that have a combined capacity for 2,400 people. However, UNHCR remains concerned about the limited access to medical attention on these ferries, with the reported presence of only one doctor per vessel.

Onward movements also continue through Central and South Eastern Europe, for example from Slovenia to Italy. As the current reception and quarantine capacity of the Friuli-Venezia area remains stretched,

Information Centre in Costa Rica demonstrate that refugees and asylum seekers are having a hard time keeping themselves and their families fed. Those who have tested positive for COVID-19 and have been issued a health order that prevents them from working or buying food are particularly hard hit.

Since September, some 500 households in dire need on account of the coronavirus crisis have received cash support, bringing the total thus far this year to 2,740 households. UNHCR has also distributed non-food items such as blankets to Nicaraguan households in and around the Costa Rican capital, San José, and along the country's northern border with Nicaragua.

authorities announced that two new quarantine facilities are being established.

[Spain](#)

Meanwhile, movement restrictions as well as confirmed and suspected COVID-19 cases at reception centres impacted outreach and information provision to residents in some countries. In Spain, UNHCR and the Spanish Red Cross have agreed to conduct online information sessions to ensure continuity of outreach activities to asylum-seekers and persons arrived by sea.

Southern Africa

While case numbers continue to increase, the rate has slowed as compared to recent weeks, with a three per cent decrease in total active cases. Governments of some countries in the region continue to ease restrictions that were put in place to limit the spread of COVID-19, such as lifting lockdowns and movement restrictions opening of international borders, and reopening schools, shops, and other businesses. In most cases, basic prevention measures, such as mask wearing, screening and hand sanitizing in public spaces remain in place.

[Republic of the Congo \(ROC\)](#)

UNHCR and partners continued efforts to strengthen health systems and services across the region to prevent and respond to COVID-19. In ROC, UNHCR provided technical support for a mass COVID-19 testing campaign, rolled out by the Ministry of Health, to identify cases and reduce the spread of the virus.

[Democratic Republic of the Congo \(DRC\)](#)

Months of COVID-19 restrictions have had severe economic impacts on vulnerable populations, including refugees, asylum-seekers and internally displaced persons. Lost income as a result of limitations on movement and economic activity has meant that the number of people requesting assistance from UNHCR has increased significantly, notably among those who had previously been self-sufficient, as they now struggle to put food on the table, pay rent, or cover the cost of utilities. In the DRC, UNHCR and partners distributed core relief items to refugees from Central African Republic and their host communities to improve their living conditions at a time of dwindling resources and price hikes due to COVID-19 restrictions. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 response, UNHCR has provided additional relief items to some 16,500 households.

Coordination and partnerships

Two years after its first gathering with over 30 members, the [Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela \(R4V\)](#) held its 13th meeting on 1 October, with more than 200 participants from across the region, including host governments, the donor community and other stakeholders. The Regional Platform is monitoring Venezuelan return movements, triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic, and sharing relevant trends and information with all Platforms and Regional Sectors.

Refugees giving back: Somali refugees support host community during COVID-19



A Somali refugee business-owner hands an assistance package to a South African man during a distribution in Pretoria.

©UNHCR/ H. Caux

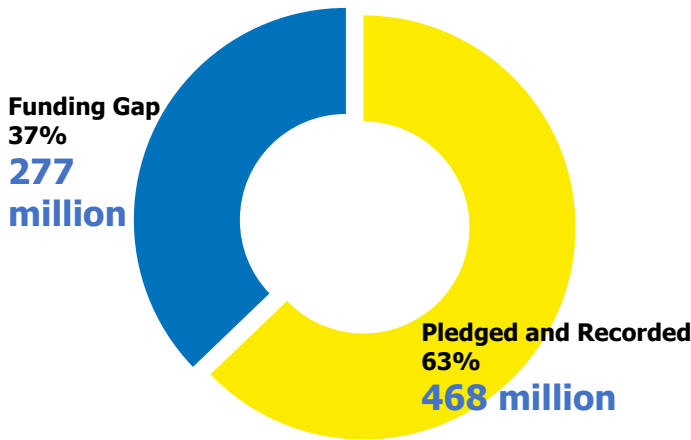
The Somali business community in South Africa launched a care and compassion campaign as COVID-19 lockdown began, to help vulnerable people. They distributed masks, hand sanitiser and food parcels to residents of informal settlements in Pretoria and Johannesburg, then moved on to other parts of the country. As the pandemic continues to affect more and more people in the country, including those in refugee-hosting communities, the Somali initiative is making an important impact.

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. As the impact of the pandemic on affected people is increasingly severe, especially in certain areas such as livelihood and education, additional resources will be needed in 2021 to mitigate the devastating impact of COVID-19.

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 468M

Including:

United States	\$186.3M
Germany	\$62.7M
European Union	\$32.4M
United Kingdom	\$25.7M
Japan	\$25.1M
African Development Bank	\$18.3M
Private donors	\$16.3M
Denmark	\$14.6M
United Nations Foundation	\$10.0M
Unilever	\$7.2M
CERF	\$6.9M
Canada	\$6.4M
Education Cannot Wait	\$3.9M
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
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 | Japan 23.8M | Private donors Japan 21M | Switzerland 16.4M | Private donors Italy 14M | France 14M | Private donors Sweden 11.7M | 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)



Contact:

Lea Moser, moserl@unhcr.org