

UNHCR Regional Bureau for Middle East and North Africa

COVID-19 Emergency Response Update #13

14 December 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 Turkey

Key Figures


20

out of 20 UNHCR countries / operations are reporting COVID-19 cases in the region


16 million

2020 planning figure for people of concern in the Middle East and North Africa


3,845

 cases of active COVID-19 reported among POCs¹ including fatalities

Regional Developments

The COVID-19 situation in the **Middle East and North Africa** (MENA) region has stabilized in some countries, while in others, a resurgence of COVID-cases among populations is being observed. During November, the COVID-19 situation in **Jordan** deteriorated significantly, with the total number of confirmed cases more than doubling in one month and the number of deaths more than tripling. In response, the Government has continued to expand health system capacities, including through designating additional hospitals to treat COVID-19 patients. In **Egypt**, the number of COVID-19 cases have increased since the height of the pandemic earlier this year, prompting authorities to caution citizens in adhering to preventative measures to avoid a resurgence.

In **Libya**, after nearly a year of delays due to COVID-19-related worldwide border closures and movement restrictions, [UNHCR evacuated a group of 79 vulnerable asylum-seekers](#) to safety in Rwanda on 19 November. Similarly, in **Lebanon**, since the

resumption of departure activities at the end of July, over 2,000 persons have departed for resettlement to third countries.

Meanwhile in **Iraq**, the government's announcement to accelerate solutions for over 250,000 internally displaced people (IDPs) and the subsequent initiation of [IDP camp closures](#) has created uncertainty for many IDP families, particularly in the context of COVID-19 and as the winter season has begun. Together with partners, UNHCR is supporting the authorities to inform families about the timeline of closures, options for those unable to return and assistance that will be provided upon return. UNHCR's Sub Office in Mosul has resumed ASSIST enrolment activities (used to determine beneficiaries of cash support but suspended since March due to COVID-19 prevention measures), to target areas of return from Hammam Al-Alil and other IDP sites – ensuring assistance continues to reach the most vulnerable populations during this challenging time.

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

¹ The breakdown of confirmed COVID-19 cases is as follows: Algeria (25), Egypt (36), Iraq (477), Jordan (1,315), Lebanon (1,977), Mauritania (7) and Yemen (8). The change in the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases among UNHCR POCs in MENA is a result of increased monitoring across Operations, and not indicative of a rise in COVID-19 transmissions.

Highlights from the field

COVID-19 cases across **Iraq** continue to rise but at a slightly lower rate than in previous weeks, with an average of 2,100 daily cases during the past few weeks. As of 3 December, a total of 477 COVID-19 cases have been identified among UNHCR persons of concern (199 refugees and 278 IDPs), including 354 recoveries and 42 fatalities. At present, there are 73 individuals in self-isolation either in their tents or in designated areas. Most of the new cases have affected IDPs in camps in Duhok and Kirkuk governorates. UNHCR is coordinating with the Directorate of Health (DoH) in the affected areas and is monitoring the situation closely, with contact tracing and testing conducted. Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM) COVID-19 preparedness and response plans have been activated and implemented in all affected sites, including movement restrictions and lockdown when required.

The Protection Working Group (PWG) in Iraq issued the [results](#) of the second round of protection monitoring of refugees in response to COVID-19 covering October 2020. The exercise covered all governorates of Iraq, surveying 1,605 Syrian refugees and refugees of other nationalities focusing on the impact of COVID-19 on the protection environment. Key findings reveal that:

- Overall evictions and impacts of movement restrictions remained low, with 27 total evictions in Round 2 and 86 in Round 1, mainly due to the inability to pay rent;
- Consistent with Round 1 of the PWG monitoring, over half of HHs reported reducing overall consumption of food, taking on further debt, and/or restricting movement in response to COVID, thus impacting access to livelihoods; and
- From Round 1 to Round 2, there was a sharp increase in the percentage of HHs reporting turning to child marriage (42 per cent), child labour (17 per cent), and/or selling household items (17 per cent) to generate funds.

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak in Iraq, UNHCR has adapted its programme to limit the spread of the virus and preserve the well-being of refugees, IDPs and returnees across the country. To date, 100,335 displaced families (over 570,000 individuals) living in urban areas have cashed out their assistance (36,045 refugee families and 65,309 IDP families) to

access basic hygiene items. Further to this, 70,780 dignity kits have been distributed for women and girls of reproductive age living in IDP and refugee camps.

In **Jordan**, the first two deaths among the refugee camp population were recorded in Zaatari during November, both of whom had underlying conditions. The total cases of refugees testing positive for COVID-19 in the camps has reached 1,189 cases, of which 332 are currently active. Cases among refugees in camps remain below the national average, with 1 per cent of the refugee population in camps testing positive compared to 2.2 per cent of the total Jordanian population.

UNHCR continues to respond to COVID-19 in the camps, working closely with the Ministry of Health (MoH) and the Syrian Refugee Affairs Directorate. MoH teams continue surveillance and contact tracing exercises in the camps, while confirmed cases are being quarantined either in their own shelters or at isolation sites and transferred to hospital as needed and as per established protocol. In urban areas, UNHCR community-based protection teams are following-up on individual cases through phone counselling, to better understand the impact of COVID-19 on urban refugees and assess their needs. As of 30 November, UNHCR is aware of 124 urban refugees who have tested positive for COVID-19, while two have passed away. From March until the end of November, a total of 50,678 families have received emergency COVID-19 cash assistance at least once by UNHCR or partners, amounting to a total of USD 25.4 million. Meanwhile, UNHCR has been working to identify interested refugee medical professionals in Jordan, for the Government to potentially include in the national COVID-19 response plan. An initial list of some 130 resumes of qualified refugee medical professionals have been submitted to the MoH.

Since the start of the COVID-19 outbreak, UNHCR in **Lebanon** has been committed to supporting collective efforts to prevent and contain transmissions of the coronavirus and support the expansion of existing public and private hospital capacity and case management.

UNHCR's second phase of planned hospital expansions began at the end of October, as part of a three-phase plan to cover 800 additional beds and 100 additional ICU beds, including advanced equipment and medicine supplies. UNHCR's hospital expansion plan continues to be implemented gradually in line with WHO's capacity to recruit and train skilled medical staff. A total of nine additional ICU beds (out of a planned 31 under

phase 2) were inaugurated at Rafik Hariri University Hospital in Beirut. Challenges related to the availability of qualified medical personnel, particularly for intensive care, as well as coverage of costs, remain. UNHCR has also been expanding isolation capacities at the community (Level 2) and municipal level (Level 3) across Lebanon. An additional L3 facility in Mount Lebanon (Jihad Sports Centre in Mreijeh) is now ready to receive cases for isolation, bringing the total added capacity to 449 beds across 7 operational centres.

Meanwhile, outreach volunteers continued engagement with refugee communities across Lebanon, with continued reports of difficulties in purchasing basic items, due to elevated prices, particularly for persons of concern holding cards that identify them as beneficiaries of UNHCR cash assistance. Across the country, refugees' inability to cope with remote learning was noted, due to lack of technological facilities (Internet, phones, computers, etc.) and electricity. Child protection concerns, including children dropping out of school and engaging in work (including on the streets) to support their families in securing basic needs continue to be reported.



Syrian refugee children look through a window in their shelter during the visit of UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi to the Bekaa Valley. © UNHCR/Houssam Hariri

In **Syria**, since the start of the pandemic, over 120,000 individuals have been reached through 860 different WhatsApp groups and 363,000 refugees, IDPs and host community members have been reached through Outreach Volunteers across the country. To address increasing vulnerabilities among the refugee community as a consequence of COVID-19, UNHCR has also distributed a total of over USD 1 million in multi-purpose cash grants to support over 12,200 refugees with their everyday needs. Processing of resettlement cases for 2020 remains suspended due to restricted and limited access of staff and persons of concern to UNHCR's Office in Damascus. In **north-east Syria**, there was a reported spike in infections, mainly in the Al-Hasakeh Governorate, with the number of confirmed cases there reaching a staggering 6,945.

Of a total population of 4 million people **in north-west (NW) Syria**, there are some 2.7 million IDPs, who are considered to be in need of humanitarian assistance. Since January, UNHCR has sent across the border from Turkey into NW Syria 155,000 core relief item kits and shelter materials to assist over 820,000 individuals. Despite COVID-19 preventive measures that have caused delays in the procurement of items, during October, UNHCR organized four trans-shipments to transport 5,400 tents through Bab Al Hawa border crossing, which will assist over

32,000 displaced people in NW Syria. In October, UNHCR's partners also distributed a total of 322 tents to assist 1,932 conflict-affected and displaced people in Idlib. In November, eight trans-shipments were organized carrying 10,000 Non-Food Item (NFI) kits, 3,100 tents and 1,000 Refugee Housing Units (RHU). During the same month, some 13,400 conflict-affected people in north-west Syria were assisted with 4,245 NFI kits in Idlib and Aleppo Governorates, while 983 families received tents in Idlib.

In cooperation with **Turkey's** Directorate General for Migration Management (DGMM), UNHCR launched a COVID-19 emergency cash assistance scheme, initially for 20,000 refugee households impacted by the pandemic, to respond to immediate economic hardship. The assistance is in line with the one-off cash support to vulnerable citizens of Turkey and avoids duplication with existing social safety schemes. By early September, over 20,000 households had received the cash transferred through the Turkish Postal Service. UNHCR and DGMM are in the process of implementing the second phase of emergency one-off COVID-19 cash assistance. The implementation has been progressing with the total number of identified households standing at over 50,000.

For the urban refugee programme in **Algeria**, lifesaving activities have been maintained, including health and cash-based assistance. Protection reception is managed remotely through dedicated phone lines. Other protection activities such as registration, documentation and refugee status determination have resumed with face to face interviews. However, daily appointments remain limited to 20 individuals per day - much lower than prior to the COVID-19 situation. UNHCR has continued its exceptional cash assistance for vulnerable urban asylum-seekers in Algeria, with 1,062 persons of concern benefitting from the cash since March.

For Sahrawi refugees living in the camps around Tindouf, basic and essential life-saving services continue to be provided. UNHCR is coordinating the COVID-19 response in the camps, alongside the Sahrawi health experts and the health department in Tindouf. Critical WASH services have been maintained in the best possible manner, with thanks to partners present in the field. UNHCR has undertaken the rehabilitation and equipping of Rabouni's central hospital, to adapt it to the new context. UNHCR is also supporting with the establishment of a specific COVID-19 ward in the same hospital, by equipping the inpatient ward.

Exacerbated by the COVID-19 situation, the registration backlog of persons of concern (both for document renewal and new registration) in **Egypt** remains significant. Since the onset of the COVID-19 crisis, UNHCR has advocated with the authorities to show tolerance towards refugees and asylum-seekers carrying expired cards and permits. Refugee communities have raised

their concern about their inability to obtain residence permits on expired UNHCR cards. Also, refugees and asylum-seekers reported facing numerous challenges due to expired UNHCR documents and permits including having their mobile phone lines discontinued, inability to collect assistance from the post office, difficulties in issuing birth certificates, risk of losing their jobs and risk of detention. As of December, registration processing capacity has been increased in the Cairo Office by staff working in two shifts, while maintaining COVID-19 precautionary measures. Furthermore, UNHCR's Field Office in Alexandria has resumed mobile registration missions for communities living in remote areas of Egypt's North Coast.

UNHCR Egypt continues its communication with members of the refugee community through phone calls, virtual meetings and mobile messaging groups. The Infoline and the registration hotline respond to enquiries by refugees and asylum-seekers, with over 139,000 calls responded to through these channels since March.

In November, UNHCR began its winterization programme in **Libya**, targeting LibAid over 1,000 IDP families as a first phase. The much-needed distributions include items such as blankets, winter clothes, hygiene kits, and solar lamps. Furthermore, in November, UNHCR distributed over 1,800 core relief items (CRIs) (hygiene kits, soaps, baby diapers, soap, and plastic sheeting) at its Community Day Centre (CDC) and the Serraj Registration Office. In November, 1,339 CRIs and hygiene kits were also delivered to persons held at four detention centres.



Libya. UNHCR resumes evacuation flights to Rwanda after COVID-19 restrictions.

"There are many suffering. Many who can't get sunlight. It's very difficult to spent years detained. I don't have enough words to describe it. I wish governments around the world to help. We get kidnapped, they sell us and others buy us."

© UNHCR/Mohamed Aaleem

In **Mauritania**, between November and December, UNHCR distributed cash assistance to 1,095 small entrepreneurs in Mbera camp, 332 vulnerable refugee families living out-of-camp and 500 vulnerable host-community households, affected by the floods in August 2020. This intervention is aimed at mitigating the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 in

Bassikounou at a time when refugees and host populations are coping with a reduction of assistance and slowdown of economic activities. Moreover, as part of UNHCR's support to the national COVID-19 response plan, UNHCR donated two additional prefabricated buildings (Refugee Housing Units) for patient triage in Nouadhibou.

*Mauritania.
Supporting Malian
refugees during
COVID-19 at Mbera
camp*

*UNHCR staff
prepare a food
distribution for
Malian refugees
struggling with the
impacts of COVID-19
measures at Mbera
camp in Mauritania.
© UNHCR*



UNHCR has started renewing documentation for refugees and asylum-seekers in **Morocco** for those whose documentation expired during the COVID-19 lockdown. Outreach missions to support documentation renewal are ongoing to prevent movements of persons of concern between cities. Missions have been conducted in Oujda, Tangier, Marrakesh, Agadir, Fes, Meknes and Oujda with over 2,000 documents renewed so far. Meanwhile, over 90 income generation activities negatively impacted by the COVID-19 crisis have been financially reinforced since September, enabling refugees to relaunch their activities and avoid long term dependency on cash assistance.

After a long period of no resettlement departures due to global COVID-19 movement restrictions, departures from **Israel** have slowly resumed. Since August, a total of 54 refugees and one family have left Israel as part of resettlement. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Interior Refugee Status Determination (RSD) Unit has gradually returned to work since the lifting of the lockdown, in

small groups of RSD staff on a rotating basis and resuming face-to-face interviews. The Registration Unit has reopened for visa renewals of asylum-seekers and completion of the registration process for those who filled out online asylum applications. Since March, UNHCR in **Yemen** has conducted awareness and sensitisation campaigns on COVID-19, reaching close to 62,000 refugees, asylum-seekers and Yemenis. Awareness-raising activities included physically distanced sessions with small groups, door-to-door visits, counsel at services points, including health facilities. Meanwhile and throughout the pandemic, UNHCR has used cash as a tool in its COVID-19 response to help already vulnerable displaced Yemenis, refugees and asylum-seekers cope with increased hardship caused by the pandemic. In November and December, UNHCR has reached over 20,000 refugee families in urban areas and 12,200 Yemenis households displaced by the conflict across the country. As famine looms and malnutrition increases, the cash received represents a lifeline for many.

Global Financial Requirements

UNHCR's [revised prioritized requirements to support the COVID-19 preparedness and response](#) in situation of forced displacement, including those for UNHCR MENA, has increased from USD 255 million to USD 745 million. **So far, a total of USD 473 million (63 per cent) has been contributed or pledged to the UNHCR Global Appeal out of USD 745 million required.**

MENA Financial Information

Earmarked contributions for the Coronavirus Emergency Situation in MENA amount to some USD 103 million, including:

United States of America 67.8M | Japan 9M | European Union 4.9M | Saudi Arabia 3M | African Development Bank 3.9M | Qatar Charity 3.5M | CERF 2.4M | United Nations Foundation 2M | Austria 1.8M

Special thanks to the major donors of softly earmarked contributions and pledges at the global level to the Coronavirus Emergency Situation:

Germany 63M | United Kingdom 25M | United States of America 20M | Denmark 15M | Canada 6.4M | United Nations Foundation 4.8M | Spain 3.5M | Ireland 3.3M | France 3M | Sweden 3M | Sony Corporation 2.9M | Private donors in the UK 1.7M | Norway 1.4M | Australia for UNHCR 1.3M | USA for UNHCR 1.3M | Japan 1.2M | UNO-Flüchtlingshilfe 1.2M

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

Sweden 76.4M | Private donors Spain 73.5M | United Kingdom 45.7M | Norway 41.4M | Private donors Republic of Korea 37.5 | Netherlands 36.1M | Denmark 34.6M | Private donors Japan 27.8M | Germany 25.9M | Japan 23.8M | Private donors Italy 17.6M | Switzerland 16.4M | France 14M | Private donors Sweden 12.8M | Private donors USA 10.8M | Italy 10.6M

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

Resources:

- [Donors show solidarity with refugees and steadfast support for UNHCR programmes for 2021](#)
- [UNHCR's Coronavirus Emergency Appeal \(Revision\)](#)
- [UNHCR MENA's comprehensive funding needs for the COVID-19 response](#)
- For MENA regional and country reports on COVID-19 response, please visit – [UNHCR Global Focus](#); [UNHCR Operational Portal \(Syria Regional Refugee Response\)](#); and [The 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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