

UNHCR COVID-19 Preparedness and Response

Highlights

- During UNHCR's annual [Executive Committee](#), the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi, highlighted that maintaining levels of humanitarian aid is a comparatively inexpensive way to save lives and protect refugees and their host communities facing a "pandemic of poverty" resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.
- In a [key annual address](#) to UNHCR's annual Executive Committee meeting in Geneva, UNHCR's Assistant High Commissioner for Protection, Gillian Triggs, warned that COVID-19 is severely testing refugee protection.
- In a [statement](#) released on 30 September, UNHCR and some 100 NGOs called on global leaders to ensure that refugees are included in social safety nets and support services for COVID-19.
- On 29-30 September, UNHCR held its [first virtual multilingual global consultations with non-governmental organisations \(NGOs\)](#), with some 200 participants from international and national NGOs, and refugee-led organizations. The objectives of the consultations were to analyze the collective response and good practices to the challenges and opportunities presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, to develop recommendations for future collaboration between UNHCR and NGOs, and to feed into the process of the 2020 High Commissioner's Dialogue on Protection Challenges.

COVID-19 update



Almost **26,000** reported cases of COVID-19 among UNHCR's persons of concern



across **98** countries



increase of some **6,000** cases compared to previous reporting period

(numbers as of 08 October 2020)



Italy. UNHCR welcomes refugee students through UNICORE 2.0 project
© UNHCR/Valerio Muscella

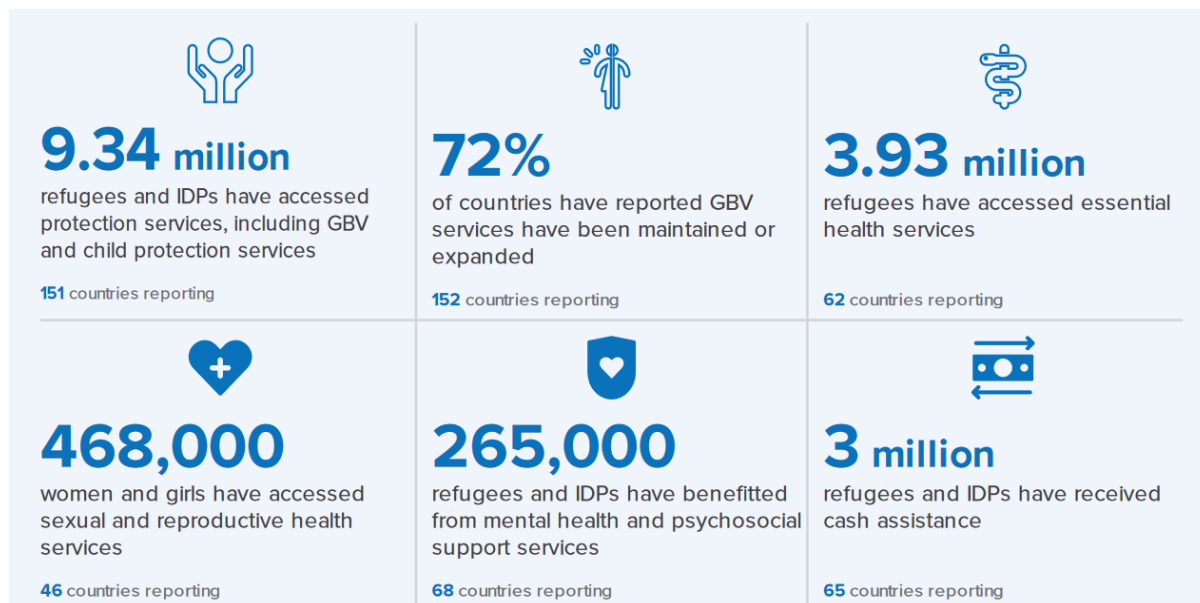
Global Overview

Reflecting on the achievements and challenges overcome, UNHCR’s High Commissioner, Filippo Grandi, provided an update of UNHCR’s COVID-19 response to date during his opening statement of the 71st Executive Committee. Major outbreaks have been prevented so far in large refugee settings, though most refugees and displaced people live in communities, not in camps, and are thus exposed to the same risks of contagion as their hosts. However, in many operations, COVID-19 transmission rates amongst people of concern remain similar or lower than among host communities, a testament to the strength of UNHCR’s risk communication and public health response.

In support of host governments, with guidance from WHO and in cooperation with partners, UNHCR has stepped up its health, water and sanitation responses, addressed overcrowded living conditions and increased cash transfers with USD 338 million distributed in total. UNHCR has also supported refugee education to mitigate the impact of school closures, including through distance education programmes. Further, UNHCR operations have increased communication with displaced and host communities, using technology and partnering with media and refugees themselves, especially in combating stigma, discrimination, mental health issues and gender-based violence.

UNHCR Response

Progress to date and Impact



Gaps and Challenges

- Despite efforts to support local authorities with reopening schools, many children in West and Central Africa have not been able to go back to school yet. In countries where students have returned to class, the statistics already show the negative effects of COVID-19 on the education of refugee children.
- In Middle East and North Africa, 84 per cent of persons of concern report a loss of livelihoods and income during the pandemic, further adding to their economic concerns and resulting in increased psychological anxieties and compromised mental health.

Middle East and North Africa

Since end of March 2020, USD 27 million have been disbursed in emergency cash assistance to nearly 670,000 persons as part of the COVID-19 response. In addition, 320 new income generating activities were developed or supported by UNHCR so far across five operations.

[Lebanon](#)

More than 480 refugees with medical background have been mobilized and trained on isolation procedures. In addition, almost 1,800 site community groups of 3 to 5 refugee volunteers have been established across the country to play an active role on isolation procedures. A second round of additional cash assistance for 3 months, targeting 12,000 vulnerable refugee families, was launched in August to help them cope with the emergency situation, on top of the nearly 58,000 vulnerable refugee families receiving regular multi-purpose cash assistance.

[Egypt](#)

UNHCR collaborates with WFP on data collection and data analysis, as well as delivering support to vulnerable individuals; a portion of the cash assistance is delivered through a common financial service provider. Since May 2020, a one-off hygiene support grant of EGP 100 was introduced, along with cash for unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) aged 16-17, enabling persons of concern to conveniently withdraw their assistance from the nearest Egypt Post Office branch.

[Jordan](#)

While curfew and some mobility restrictions have been lifted in Jordan since June, registration and other protection activities continue through remote modalities, including interactive voice response (IVR) messaging.

Asia and the Pacific

[Afghanistan](#)

Since the start of the pandemic, UNHCR reached some 1,9 million people including returnees, displaced people, and host communities through distribution of non-food items, hygiene kits, construction of hand washing facilities and awareness-raising activities on COVID-19 prevention were undertaken in 10 provinces. UNHCR also provided 102 Refugee Housing Units to improve health facilities and screening, as well as personal protective equipment, and recruited 30 staff to support border management.

[Bangladesh](#)

UNHCR partners in Bangladesh have completed cash distributions to the host community as part of the broader COVID-19 response. Over 5,500 local Bangladeshi households have received cash grants of approximately USD 53. On 15 September, the District Commissioner of Cox's Bazar officially inaugurated the cash assistance programme for the host community. Within a year, some 36,000 families will receive financial support in monthly instalments or one-off payments in both Ukhiya and Teknaf.

[Malaysia](#)

UNHCR has partnered with the University of New South Wales (UNSW) and other partners on the UNSW Women and Girls at Risk Project, which aims to develop safe sharing spaces for refugee women in response to anticipated increased mental and emotional stress for refugees due to the pandemic. Training was provided to women community focal points on basic psychosocial first aid, child protection and sexual and gender-based violence emergency responses, and online facilitation. These women now lead meetings that take place three times a month.

West and Central Africa

UNHCR continues to support governments of the region in their COVID-19 response. In response to recent floods, UNHCR has scaled up shelter interventions to prevent a potential increase in infections resulting from deteriorated living conditions. Across the region, infrastructure including medical facilities have been badly damaged by the floods, impacting national responses to COVID-19 and other illnesses such as malaria and measles.

The suspension of birth registration in some countries has raised the risk of statelessness for newborns there, particularly those of minority groups. However, the trend is somewhat positive in terms of the number of countries that have declared civil registration services essential and moved towards innovative ways to ensure birth registration can continue and the validity of nationality documentation can be renewed or the timeline for renewal extended.

[Burkina Faso](#)

In the past two weeks, UNHCR started the relocation of internally displaced families from flood-prone areas in the Sahel to the Dori Stadium. So far, UNHCR and its partners constructed 222 shelters and 70 relocated families received core relief items including mats, blankets, mosquito nets and kitchen sets.

[Ghana](#)

UNHCR has organized trainings for border officials in the Western and Bono Regions to strengthen their knowledge on international, regional and national legal instruments for the protection of refugees and asylum seekers and how to apply this normative framework in the context of COVID-19 restrictions.

East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes

Three countries in the region (Djibouti, Somalia and Tanzania) have fully reopened schools. In addition, Kenya, South Sudan, Sudan and Uganda are in the process of preparing schools in line with COVID-19 guidelines. Somalia and Tanzania report a re-enrollment rate of approximately 60 per cent. In these two countries, some of the reasons for low re-enrolment include long school closures leading to disinterest of students in school. Early pregnancies and early marriages are also contributing significantly to the low return rate of girls.

[Sudan](#)

With the partial easing of COVID-19 directives and restrictions of movements by local authorities, persons of concern can engage in casual labor and agricultural activities to earn their living in some parts of the country. The easing of curfews also allows for more flexible interventions of UNHCR. After several months of suspension due to COVID-19, biometric registration has resumed in White Nile State in agreement with the Commission for Refugees.

[Uganda](#)

Following the restrictions and measures of the government to curb the spread of COVID-19, many refugees were unable to engage in their regular casual work, leaving them vulnerable with challenges to meet basic needs. WFP and UNHCR are jointly providing one-time cash assistance to all urban refugees in Kampala through mobile money. Almost all respondents (95 per cent) to the post-distribution monitoring emphasised that the cash assistance improved their living conditions and reduced financial burden.

Americas

The region continues to shoulder the heaviest burden of COVID-19, with the region accounting for over 38 per cent of the total of new cases reported globally in the past days. However, several countries are easing mobility restrictions, and borders are progressively reopening. Following the opening of borders of Guatemala and El Salvador (18 and 21 September), increasing mixed movements were noted.

Venezuela situation

The economic impact of the outbreak has left many Venezuelans unemployed and homeless, pushing them deeper into poverty – which is one of the main drivers of sexual exploitation and trafficking. This, coupled with disruptions to schooling, has left children exposed to exploitation and abuse. Many young people have been forced into child labor or childhood sexual exploitation in a bid to help sustain their families.

Data from the Colombian government shows that in just the first four months of 2020, authorities had already identified a 20 per cent rise in trafficking involving foreign nationals, compared with the total for the entirety of 2019. In over half of those cases, sexual exploitation was the ultimate goal of the trafficking.

Mexico

UNHCR distributed more than 80,000 school kits to children and teens in pre-primary, primary and secondary schools. The donation – which was made in coordination with the national Ministry of Education, the Chiapas Ministry of Education and school principals – is part of a strategy aimed at promoting refugee children's access to education, as well as peaceful coexistence between communities.

Europe

Where asylum-seekers face difficulties to register asylum claims and long wait times to access refugee status determination procedures, families are reportedly increasingly resorting to dangerous irregular onward movement with the assistance of smugglers. Discussions to resume resettlement procedures have advanced with a number of resettlement countries.

Greece

UNHCR is assisting the authorities in establishing medical spaces and services at border locations, including in the new emergency site in Kara Tepe, where some 9,000 people are hosted as of the end of September. The population living on the site has decreased in recent days as some refugees and asylum-seekers have been transferred to the mainland, while others have been moved to alternative accommodations on Lesbos. To prevent and mitigate the spread of COVID-19, asylum-seekers underwent rapid COVID-19 testing by national health authorities before entering the emergency facility. Based on health protocols, any person testing positive was directed to one of the two designated isolation areas together with their family members.

Ukraine

On 22 September, the operation published its updated [Key Advocacy Messages on Internal Displacement](#) with several points related to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. UNHCR calls for further steps to maintain infrastructure but also ensure physical distancing at the Entry-Exit Checkpoints.

Southern Africa

Nearing the end of the year, additional funding is still required to sustain critical COVID-19 programming, maintain important protection and basic service delivery, and increase support to livelihoods and self-reliance programming for people of concern economically impacted by COVID-19. While UNHCR and partners have been working tirelessly to reach people of concern and host communities with scaled-up assistance and services during the COVID-19 pandemic, funding shortfalls across the region have had a notable impact on operations. For example, funding gaps have resulted in cuts to radio programming in UNHCR's risk communication campaign in the DRC, hindered UNHCR's ability to provide the necessary resources for home-based learning in Zambia, and halted UNHCR's high-demand cash assistance program in South Africa.

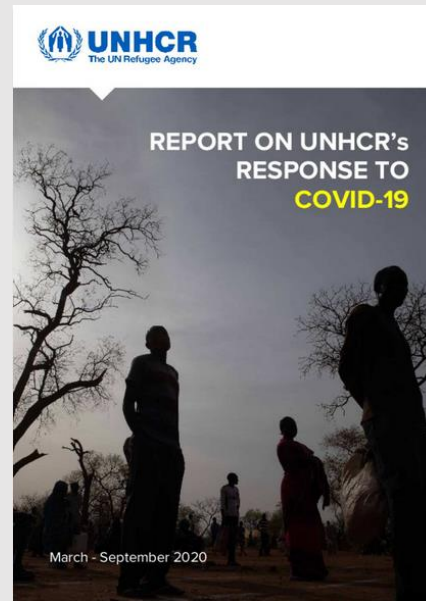
[South Africa](#)

Women refugee recipients of livelihoods grants in Cape Town report that despite the challenges of the pandemic, there have been some positive learning experiences for them as business owners through adaptations made, including running a business online, innovation and expansion into new areas such as making and selling masks, as well as online marketing.

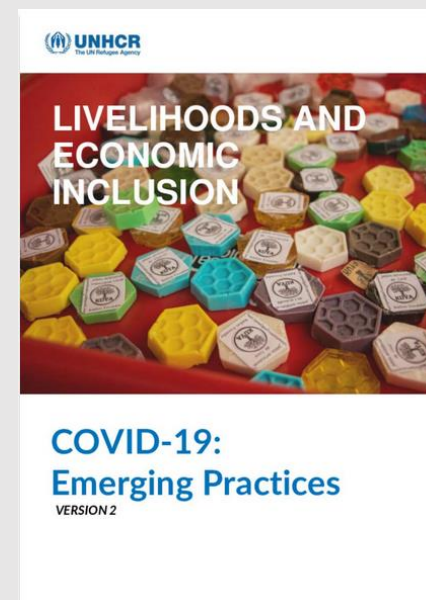
[Democratic Republic of Congo \(DRC\)](#)

A network of six associations of soap makers, comprised of 120 refugees in the Inke refugee camp, are currently scaling up production to satisfy the growing demand for soap. This is helping promote hygienic practices and reduce the risks of COVID-19.

New publications



UNHCR has published a [report on its response to COVID-19](#). The report shows progress against key priorities and objectives, and offers a wide range of information on UNHCR's response.



The [publication](#) contains examples of where UNHCR operations are engaging with development actors to include refugees in multi-agency socio-economic response plans.

Coordination and partnerships

In September, UNHCR organized a roundtable with Religions for Peace, a global, multi-religious movement representing the world's faith institutions and traditions, and which comprises 90 national and six regional Inter-Religious Platforms. The main outcome of this roundtable was the commitment to form a Multi-Religious Council of Leaders to strengthen efforts to address the root causes of conflict and displacement, and to support peacebuilding, inclusion and reconciliation efforts.

The UNHCR-led Global Protection Cluster together with IASC Results Group 3 on Collective Advocacy and Results Group 1 on Operational Response have developed [IASC Key Protection Advocacy Messages – COVID-19](#) to contribute to addressing the exacerbating protection concerns affecting vulnerable populations in humanitarian contexts as a result of COVID-19.

Joint Data Center on Forced Displacement (JDC)



Our COVID-19 Response

The COVID-19 pandemic has emerged as the most disruptive social event in decades. This crisis affects all sectors of our society, but for those forcibly displaced, the impact of the pandemic will be exacerbated by the conditions in which they live.

To further synergize efforts, the World Bank (WB) and UNHCR, with support from the Danish government, inaugurated the [Joint Data Center on Forced Displacement](#) in 2019.

To respond to the COVID-19 pandemic within the JDC's mandate, the Center is working to include forcibly displaced populations in research and phone surveys on socioeconomic impacts of the pandemic.

The JDC has also published a [Primer on the Consequences of COVID-19 on Forced Displacement](#), summarizing over 20 studies and

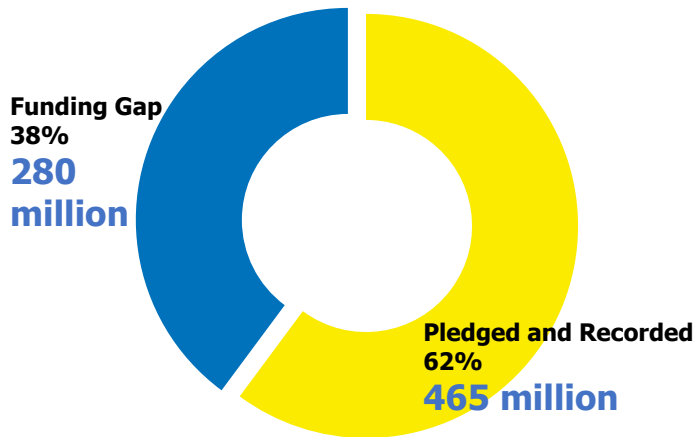
projects related to the pandemic and its impact on forcibly displaced persons. The Primer will be updated regularly with new research on this issue.

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:



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)



Total contributed or pledged to the COVID-19 appeal:

USD 465M

Including:

United States	\$186.3M
Germany	\$62.7M
European Union	\$44.0M
United Kingdom	\$25.7M
Japan	\$25.1M
African Development Bank	\$18.3M
Private donors	\$15.9M
Denmark	\$14.6M
United Nations Foundation	\$10.0M
CERF	\$6.9M
Unilever	\$6.5M
Canada	\$6.4M
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
USA for UNHCR	\$2.0M

Contact:

Lea Moser, moserl@unhcr.org