

UNHCR COVID-19 Response

Highlights

- UNHCR released the first [Global Compact on Refugees – Indicator report](#), which shows that progress has been made in increasing support for low-income countries hosting refugees. However, with around nine out of 10 refugees hosted in developing regions and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic felt acutely in these countries, UNHCR [calls](#) on stepping up responsibility sharing to meet the challenges.
- During the [monthly consultations with NGOs](#), UNHCR informed its partners that the UN [Vaccination Programme](#) has entered into phase two. This means that in countries where NGO partner staff do not have full access to a COVID-19 vaccine, staff of national NGOs and staff and the dependents of international NGOs can now be included under the UN Vaccination Programme. This meeting was crucial to inform NGOs of the steps they need to take to ensure that staff can receive the vaccine.



In **132** host countries, persons of concern are already receiving vaccinations.



63 countries have reported that almost **1,218,568** persons of concern have received a vaccine since the roll out of the vaccine.



Almost **116,983** cases of COVID-19 have been reported among forcibly displaced people.

(numbers as of 15 December 2021)

On the **International Day of Persons with Disabilities** on 3 December 2021, UNHCR [urged](#) national authorities to do more to secure the rights of forcibly displaced and stateless people with disabilities and to counter all forms of discrimination. The needs of people with disabilities need to be taken into account in COVID-19 prevention, response and recovery plans.

At least 12 million people with disabilities are forcibly displaced worldwide and their already precarious situation is becoming harder as the COVID-19 pandemic drags on.

Challenges and risks begin at the moment of flight

and continue when reaching safety. Services and facilities, including assistance programmes and protection, may be inaccessible. People with disabilities may face physical barriers and obstacles to reach, enter or use basic services, or key information may be delivered in formats not accessible to them. Refugees and internally displaced and stateless people with disabilities were already less likely to access health care, education and employment opportunities, and the global crisis has further compounded this situation.



Ecuador. Refugees receive COVID-19 vaccine with UNHCR support. (09 May 2021) © UNHCR/DanielaPérey Obando

Middle East and North Africa

Following a reported decline in COVID-19 cases across the MENA region in October, cases rose considerably during November. Several national health authorities detected cases of the Omicron variant, leading to reinforced travel restrictions and other precautionary measures.

Over one million people have now received at least one dose of the vaccine in **Mauritania**, making it among the countries in Africa with a high number of refugees also vaccinated in Mbera camp.

The total number of vaccinated individuals in **Yemen** doubled to 600,000 during November following the delivery of additional doses, while the number of vaccinated PoCs also rose considerably from under 100 in September to almost 2,000 by end-November.

In **Jordan**, 53 per cent of the eligible population aged 12+ in refugee camps and [33 per cent of refugees](#) eligible living in urban areas have now received their COVID-19 vaccine. Vaccination stations at UNHCR registration centres administered vaccines to over 1,100 people in November. Vaccinated refugees will also receive a cash compensation of \$10 to help to meet costs such as transportation to vaccination sites.

UNHCR in the South of **Lebanon** deployed [mobile vaccination units](#) to help refugees get vaccinated against COVID-19. UNHCR [provided fuel](#) to 18 hospitals across Lebanon to ensure they can continue providing uninterrupted lifesaving medical care.

Asia and the Pacific

Iran received the first shipment of COVID-19 vaccines donated as part of the Humanitarian Buffer mechanism of the COVAX facility. Given the high number of refugees in Iran, UNHCR had advocated for the donation and assisted with the application process. More than 1.9 million doses of COVID-19 vaccine have been administered for foreign nationals in Iran, regardless of their documentation status. UNHCR, in cooperation with the Government, provided cash assistance to 8,543 individuals who have been affected by the pandemic.

In **Indonesia**, refugees now have easier access to vaccines since the Ministry of Health issued a new circular, allowing refugees to be vaccinated through private or public schemes provided there is a 70 per cent vaccination coverage in the area they are residing.

In **Thailand**, 6,000 stateless persons and 33 per cent of the eligible refugees population are vaccinated. November has seen a peak in new infections in camps, as well as positive cases among the response teams.

The political situation in **Myanmar** has heavily impacted the national COVID-19 response – diminishing testing capacity, quarantine capacities, and essential health services. UNHCR and partners distributed PPE items to rural community health centers. In Rakhine State, UNHCR has reached over 5,712 internally displaced persons (IDPs) and other affected community members with COVID-19 related response (e.g. surgical masks) and/or NFI (non food item) support.

West and Central Africa

This month saw the arrival of the new WHO-designated variant Omicron in the region, with first cases reported in **Nigeria, Ghana** and **Senegal**.

Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, Mali, Niger and **Senegal** reported an increase of at least 20% in the number of new cases in the first week of December.

By the end of November, 31,166 refugees, asylum-seekers and IDPs are estimated to have been vaccinated. This represents a 40 % increase compared to the previous month, with vaccination progressing in all but three countries in the region.

Vaccine scarcity and the difficulty to bring vaccines to major hosting areas still represents a major challenge towards the inclusion of displaced population. UNHCR is addressing this in coordination with national authorities and key partners such as WHO and UNICEF.

In **Ghana**, UNHCR supported over 400 healthcare workers, environmental health managers and school health education programme coordinators in refugee-hosting districts with Infection Prevention and Control

(IPC) trainings as part of the UN systemwide contribution to the national Socio-Economic Response and Recovery Plan (SERRP).

Since 23 July 2021, convoys are being organized by UNHCR to repatriate those Ivorian refugees who expressed the wish to return from **Liberia** to **Côte d'Ivoire**. UNHCR is working closely with the Country Health Teams to adequately prepare for the administering of the Rapid Antigen Tests for COVID-19 for repatriating refugees. Upon arrival in **Côte d'Ivoire**, returnees do a PCR test in transit centres before they receive their return package, and those who test positive undergo a quarantine.

East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes

COVID-19 transmission rates still continue to decline in all countries in the region. However, following the discovery of the Omicron variant, **Rwanda** announced additional measures including a temporary suspension of flights between Rwanda and Southern Africa countries and 24-hour mandatory quarantine for all passengers arriving from the affected countries.

A total of 101,155 refugees have so far received at least 1 dose of a COVID-19 vaccine. Despite successful inclusion, less than 1 per cent of persons of concern have been vaccinated.

In **Burundi**, the refugee vaccination plan is currently underway. UNHCR continues to support the Government of Burundi with rapid antigenic tests. UNHCR is also constructing a COVID-19 treatment center to support the Government of Burundi's COVID-19 response, with a capacity of 100 beds.

In **Djibouti**, the People's Republic of China donated 1.1 million doses of the Sinovac vaccine and a similar quantity of sterile injectable syringes.

In Sudan, the State Ministry of Health and Social Development has included refugees in their COVID-19 vaccine roll out. UNHCR supported a training for medical personnel in refugee camps.

Southern Africa

While November began with a downward trend in reported cases, many countries began

recording an upward trend in cases toward the end of the month, attributed in part to the emergence of the Omicron variant. South Africa in particular has seen a sharp increase in positive cases.

In the **Democratic Republic of the Congo**, UNHCR is supporting the construction of a COVID-19 isolation center in a hospital, as well as two surveillance blocks to improve screening during departures and arrivals at the Gbadolite airport. A screening kiosk was also set up at the humanitarian coordination hub.

55 Central African refugees in the **Democratic Republic of the Congo** were tested positive during screening activities prior to voluntary repatriation. After isolation and upon recovery, their repatriation will continue through special convoys.

In **Angola**, refugees started receiving digital vaccination certificates issued by the Government of Angola.

Vaccine hesitancy continues to be a significant issue compromising vaccine uptake in the region. For example, in **Namibia**, COVID-19 vaccination facilities are available to persons of concern, however uptake has been slow as most are unwilling to receive the jab. Similarly, vaccine hesitancy continues to be observed in **Malawi**, largely linked to misinformation.

UNHCR is running awareness-raising programmes across the region where misinformation is contributing to slow vaccine uptake, despite availability of the vaccine. In **Zimbabwe**, there are concerns that cross-border travel between Zimbabwe and South Africa over the holiday season will increase COVID-19 transmission. UNHCR's health partner is ensuring that new arrivals and persons that have been away from the camp are referred to health personnel for quarantine and testing.

In **Zambia**, UNHCR provided support to 81 persons of concern through cash grants through a mobile money platform. The grants facilitate socio-economic recovery and rebuilding of small businesses and agriculture/farming activities that had been impacted by COVID-19.

Europe

Regional COVID-19 infection increased sharply for the second consecutive month in November. Authorities in all countries tightened measures to mitigate contagion risks.

Vaccinations progressed in reception centres in **Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Italy, Romania** and **Serbia**, as well as in **Bosnia and Herzegovina** (BiH), where interest in vaccination has increased among persons of concern as more vaccine types have become available.

In **Greece**, two new government decisions facilitate access to vaccination and to the digital vaccination certificate for undocumented refugees and asylum-seekers.

Vaccination of persons of concern was also reported in **Armenia**, the northern part of **Cyprus**, and **Montenegro**, including those in private accommodations in some cases. In the **Russian Federation**, partners continue facilitating vaccination through the programme offered by the Russian Red Cross.

In November, UNHCR initiated a survey on COVID-19 vaccination among refugees and asylum-seekers in **Azerbaijan**, revealing that of the 700 surveyed so far, 85 per cent had been inoculated through the national vaccination programme, while a similar survey in **Turkey** showed that 72 per cent of refugee respondents had been vaccinated with at least one dose, consistent with the trend among the general population.

On 16 November, a legislative act was promulgated in **Hungary** extending until 31 December 2022 the measures enacted in May

tested positive for COVID-19 at the end of the reporting period.

UNHCR in **Italy** is advocating with the Ministry of Interior to ensure early vaccination of persons of concern in quarantine facilities, as some local health authorities have decided not to vaccinate persons of concern in light of their limited stay in quarantine upon arrival and high mobility.

Asylum-seekers in **North Macedonia** have previously faced obstacles in accessing vaccination but, in a positive development, following joint efforts by UNHCR and reception centre management, a solution was found in November, and a small number of asylum-seekers were able to get vaccinated during the month.

In **Turkey**, UNHCR's new round of COVID-19 cash assistance started in November, targeting 85,000 vulnerable refugee and asylum-seeking households.

Americas

After a consistent drop, the number of new COVID-19 infections started going up again in North and South America. The biggest jump took place in **Ecuador** and **Paraguay**.

Around 51 per cent of people across Latin America and the Caribbean have been fully vaccinated. **Brazil** and **Panama** announced they will offer booster shots for everyone older 18.

In **Colombia**, Venezuelans are crossing into the country to access vaccination. Four vaccination points are operating at the border in the department of Santander and a new point opened in Cartagena for Venezuelan refugees

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