UNHCR Regional Bureau for the Middle East and North Africa

COVID-19 Response

Update #25 (1 – 30 November 2021)

Key Figures

17.4 million

people of concern in the Middle East and North Africa (2021 planning figures)

18,664 cases

of COVID-19 reported among people of concern (POCs) to UNHCR since March 2020, including fatalities

19 out of 19 countries

in the MENA region have confirmed the inclusion of refugees in their national COVID-19 vaccination programmes or plans

19 out of 19 countries

in the MENA region have started COVID-19 vaccinations for refugees

Regional Developments

Refugees and IDPs in Iraq are vaccinated through the national health system.
Photo by © UNHCR/Shaza Shekfeh

Following a reported decline in COVID-19 cases across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) in October, daily reported cases rose considerably during November. Several national health authorities detected cases of the Omicron variant, leading to reinforced travel restrictions and other precautionary measures. Vaccination campaigns continued throughout the region, with many health authorities expanding booster shoots and authorizing vaccination for youths in anticipation of a further wave of the virus.

UNHCR continued to reinforce local health responses through deployment of temporary and mobile vaccination centres in camps and at UNHCR premises, delivery of PPE, medical and hygiene equipment to health authorities, and continuing community outreach initiatives to inform on COVID-19 prevention and vaccination.

Over one million people have now received at least one dose of the vaccine in **Mauritania**, making it among the countries in Africa with the highest rate of vaccination, with Mbera camp also reporting a high vaccination rate among refugees. The total number of vaccinated individuals in Yemen doubled to 600,000 during November following the delivery of additional doses, while the number of PoCs reported to have received the vaccine rose considerably from under 100 in September to over 1,985 by end-November. In light of rising daily infections, countries including **Egypt**, **Israel**, **Lebanon** and **Tunisia** began authorizing COVID-19 vaccination for children and youths.

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

Highlights from the Field

In **Algeria**, a third vaccination campaign continued in the Sahrawi camps in Tindouf following a donation of 5,000 vaccine doses from the Government of Algeria. UNHCR continued to support vaccination campaigns with logistics and payment of incentives for health workers. UNHCR also completed a three-week training for outreach volunteers, which included a session on COVID-19 prevention and vaccines, to strengthen community awareness in urban areas.

Between October - November, UNHCR in **Egypt** distributed a third round of COVID-19 multipurpose cash assistance; a total of 3,093 vulnerable refugee and asylum-seeking families (9,414 individuals) were provided with a one-off cash grant to help cover their basic needs for up to three months (7,665 families/24,203 individuals in 2021). Additionally, the Office conducted two virtual awareness sessions for approximately 30 refugee community leaders from eight different nationalities on vaccine registration procedures, types of vaccines available, and general information on vaccination.

In **Iraq**, UNHCR and partners continued to offer mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) to Syrian refugees in camps to preserve mental wellbeing and treat underlying mental issues, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. MHPSS community workers held awareness sessions in primary health centres and other locations in the camps covering topics including on coping mechanisms, stress management, relaxation techniques, and positive parenting skills. Social media is also being utilized for disseminating information, with health partners circulating mental health updates on camp management pages and on Facebook.

In **Jordan**, over 53% of the eligible population aged 12+ in Syrian refugee camps has received at least one dose of the vaccine. In urban areas, 33% of Syrian refugees have also been vaccinated. Temporary 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 meet costs such as transportation to vaccination sites.

In **Lebanon**, UNHCR mobile vaccination teams observed an increase in the daily vaccination rate of refugees, with more refugees receiving vaccines and registering on the national vaccine portal (IMPACT) during November than the month prior. Meanwhile, UNHCR launched three surveys to assess how different phrasings of COVID-19 messaging affect refugee perceptions and hesitancy towards vaccination, with the findings to inform future outreach and communication activities.

A mobile vaccination campaign takes place for refugees and host community members in Aarsal, Bekaa, Lebanon.
Photo: © UNHCR / Hamza Mokdad

Between 29 November - 5 December, UNHCR in **Mauritania** and the Ministry of Health set up vaccination points during the bi-monthly food distribution in Mbera refugee camp, during which 270 refugees received vaccine doses over the first two days alone.

In addition to regular info sessions on COVID-19 prevention for PoCs in Tunis, UNHCR **Tunisia** organized a session on access to health services for PoCs along with several NGOs and health authorities in Gabes governorate. UNHCR continues to engage with local authorities on the inclusion of PoCs with chronic illnesses into national health-care programs, given their heighten vulnerability in the context of COVID-19.

In **Yemen**, following the ongoing vaccination campaign in parts of the country as well as UNHCR and partners' awareness-raising activities, the number of PoCs reported to have received the vaccine rose from less than 100 in October to over 1,985 by the end of November. Community health workers' COVID-19 awareness-raising activities in Aden, Hadramaut, and Kharaz refugee camp in Lahj reached 20,130 people from asylum-seeking and host communities, while UNHCR partners in the north reached 4,560 refugees and asylum-seekers with awareness-raising sessions as part of the COVID-19 response. UNHCR also distributed hygiene materials to several health facilities to help reduce infection among patients and frontline health workers.

Refugees and IDPs in Iraq are vaccinated through the national health system
Photo: © UNHCR/Shaza Shekfeh

Global and MENA Financial Information

In 2021, UNHCR is seeking $924 million, of which over 50% is mainstreamed in the annual budget and some $455 million is sought through the COVID-19 Supplementary Appeal, for activities in 2021 related to the exceptional socio-economic and protection impacts of COVID-19. **As of 14 December**, UNHCR's total financial requirements for the COVID-19 Emergency are **50% funded**, with **$465.8 million received** (inclusive of indicative allocations of softly earmarked and unearmarked funds), of which **$98.2 million** is for the MENA region.

Resources:

- UNHCR's 2021 COVID-19 Supplementary Appeal
- For MENA regional and country reports on COVID-19 response, please visit – UNHCR Global Focus; UNHCR Operational Portal (Syria Regional Refugee Response); and 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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