



UNHCR – FEBRUARY 2021

UPDATED KEY CALLS

TO THE EUROPEAN UNION ON THE COVID-19 RESPONSE

In the face of the ongoing coronavirus (COVID-19) crisis, we are all vulnerable. The virus has shown that it does not discriminate – but many refugees and forcibly displaced and stateless people are at heightened risk. No one is safe from COVID-19 until everyone is protected.

Ensuring access to COVID-19 vaccines in both European Union (EU) and developing countries, and including forcibly displaced people in vaccine programmes are key if we are to keep everyone safe.

Over 85 percent of the world's refugees are hosted in developing regions where health systems are already overwhelmed and under-capacitated. The socio-economic impact of this crisis will likely strip many forcibly displaced of their income. The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) together with our sister UN agencies and other partner organizations are working to respond to and mitigate the impact of COVID-19. UNHCR has been advocating for the equitable inclusion of refugees, internally displaced and stateless populations through the COVAX Facility.

The EU can reinforce its role as a global leader in protecting refugees, forcibly displaced and stateless people both inside and outside its borders. Through financial and political support, and ensuring forcibly displaced and stateless people are included in national vaccine programmes, the EU can further help to manage a global crisis which is exacerbating vulnerabilities and inequalities. With a long term 2021-2027 budget and a recovery fund adopted, the EU is equipped to address the crisis and support recovery.

This crisis demands a coherent, effective international approach that leaves no-one behind. We can only overcome this when each and every one of us is protected.

1

ENSURE ACCESS TO ASSISTANCE FOR ALL: The impact of COVID-19 exacerbates inequalities and any EU response must include the world's most vulnerable. The health of everybody is linked and everyone – including refugees, asylum seekers, and internally displaced and stateless people – should be able to access national vaccine programmes, health facilities and social and economic services, with access to relevant information, wherever they may be.

2

PROVIDE MORE FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE GLOBALLY: COVID-19 has brought many aspects of life to a standstill – but wars and other crises have not stopped, and action to save lives, alleviate suffering and end displacement remains imperative. The consequences of COVID-19 pose a threat to long term stability and peace. Building on its global response (Team Europe) to the COVID-19 crisis and with new external financial instruments in place, the EU, the largest donor globally, should continue on its good path to provide further and flexible financial support to countries managing the impact of COVID-19, and to aid organizations delivering essential services to the forcibly displaced and their hosts.

3

PRESERVE ACCESS TO ASYLUM: We can only tackle this virus when each and every one of us is protected. This also means continuing to uphold international standards and laws and good practice when it comes to protecting people fleeing war, persecution and conflict, to ensure that the essential aspects of asylum are preserved, including access to territory and dignified reception conditions. UNHCR has provided guidance on how this can be done in its [Practical recommendations and good practice on the response to COVID19](#). Rescue at sea also remains a humanitarian imperative, and rescue and subsequent disembarkation in a place of safety can be managed in a manner which respects international human rights and refugee protection standards, including the principle of non-refoulement, while sensitive to legitimate public health considerations, through quarantine and health checks.

4

ENSURE SOLUTIONS AND SOLIDARITY: With refugee resettlement at a record low, EU States should offer places and save lives. They should continue their efforts to increase resettlement places, speed up processing by implementing flexible modalities, and help to find solutions for people most in need and at greatest risk. States can assist and expand pathways to protection in the EU. In addition, solidarity between EU Member States, including through relocation, is needed to ensure the safety of the most vulnerable, especially children.

5

EMPOWER REFUGEES TO ASSIST IN THE RESPONSE: In the spirit of a whole of society approach, we must also remember that refugees, forcibly displaced and stateless people have skills and resources to assist in the response. By recognizing their qualifications, refugees can be part of the solution.

