

## Croatia: COVID-19 and earthquake response

UNHCR has been closely monitoring the situation with COVID-19 and its possible effects on forcibly displaced populations. In Croatia, refugees and other persons of concern are included in the national surveillance, preparedness, and response plans and activities.

Refugees and asylum seekers are all safe and accounted for following the devastating earthquake that hit Zagreb on 22 March. Reception centre Zagreb suffered minor damage and remains operational pending expert engineering assessment.

UNHCR and its partners adapted their activities in line with the advice of the health authorities. This includes social distancing and increased use of telephone counseling on legal, psycho-social and other matters. UNHCR is implementing remote monitoring of implementation of its projects.

### General overview

In January and February 2020, Ministry of Interior (MoI) registered 433 asylum seekers (top three countries of origin: Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan). In the same period, seven Iraqi nationals were granted refugee status.

As at 23 March, some 470 asylum seekers were accommodated in the two reception centers in Zagreb and Kutina (41 percent children, 38 percent men and 21 percent women).

So far in 2020, 13 families (19 people) were provided with housing under the Regional Housing Programme – RHP (<http://regionalhousingprogramme.org/>). Total number of beneficiaries receiving RHP assistance by 23 March 2020 in Croatia stands at 311 families (737 persons).

UNHCR and partners, the Croatian Red Cross, Croatian Law Centre and Civil Rights Project Sisak continue with comprehensive monitoring of the asylum system and RHP implementation, targeted integration support and provision of free legal aid to asylum seekers, refugees, stateless people and RHP beneficiaries on dedicated hotlines.

### Health Care

No virus spread has been detected among the refugee and asylum seeking population in Croatia. 20 asylum seekers at the Zagreb Reception center remain under strict self-isolation measures exhibiting no symptoms. The situation in the centers remains calm and intensified hygiene measures are in place.

Ministry of Interior, through its partners, developed and distributed leaflets with information on COVID-19 in Arabic, Farsi, English and French. UNHCR partner, the Croatian Red Cross (CRC) and MoI through its partners, prepared additional materials for refugees and opened hotlines in Arabic and Farsi for additional information.

### Education

As of 16 March, schools have been closed by the Government decree. Asylum seeking and refugee children have been attending distant learning programmes organized by the Government, same as Croatian children.

### Employment

Same as local population, some refugees are affected by the employment challenges due to the COVID-19 outbreak. UNHCR partner CRC is supporting refugees affected by such downsizing with access to the online procedures by the Croatian Employment's Office for collecting benefits and in looking for new employment opportunities.

### Unaccompanied and separated children (UASC)

Currently there are 27 asylum seeking UASC accommodated in facilities across the country. No new arrivals have been recorded since the outbreak of the COVID 19. All children accommodated in the children's facilities have access to healthcare providers and are kept informed on the COVID-19 measures in their own languages through CRC. Homes management were informed by the Ministry of Demography, Family, Youth and Social Policy of special measures to be introduced for child protection.

### CONTACTS

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