

Beat: News

COVID-19 HAS UNLEASHED AN UNPRECEDENTED CRISIS CAUSING THE LOSS OF LIVES

ACCORDING TO UNHCR

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USPA NEWS - COVID-19 has unleashed an unprecedented crisis, causing the loss of lives and livelihoods and deepening existing inequalities that will make progress on the Goals even more difficult. A shortage of resources for humanitarian operations could have devastating impacts for millions of people around the globe. UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, has warned that millions of displaced people in need of protection and assistance, and their host communities, are feeling the pinch of massive underfunding, as the COVID-19 crisis continues to increase humanitarian needs globally.

UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, has warned that millions of displaced people in need of protection and assistance, and their host communities, are feeling the pinch of massive underfunding, as the COVID-19 crisis continues to increase humanitarian needs globally. The agency has so far received just 49 per cent (US\$4.5 billion) of the \$9.1 billion required for its global operations this year. The consequences of this funding gap are particularly devastating in low- and middle-income countries, which currently host more than 85 per cent of the world's refugees. In many such countries, the pandemic has destabilized economies, exacerbated internal displacement and reduced access to asylum.

A report released by UNHCR today describes the COVID-19 pandemic as a "force multiplier", increasing the needs of the displaced population including refugees in many countries while also making those needs more difficult to address.

A shortage of resources for humanitarian operations could have devastating impacts for millions of people around the globe "putting women and children in particular at heightened risk, and disrupting vital services including, health, shelter, water and sanitation, and many other essential relief programmes."

The report highlights 10 situations particularly affected by funding gaps: Afghanistan, Burundi, Central African Republic, the Central Mediterranean route, Iraq, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia, South Sudan, Syria, and Venezuela. These situations make up 56 per cent of UNHCR's annual budget. While some instances of underfunding are due to new needs resulting from COVID-19, many others pre-date the pandemic and demonstrate the impact that chronic underfunding can have on the lives of displaced populations and host communities.

"As violence, persecution and civil strife continue to uproot millions, the coronavirus pandemic is destabilizing entire sectors of the economy, with millions depending on fragile incomes that are now at risk," said UN Deputy High Commissioner for Refugees, Kelly T. Clements. "In these unprecedented times, the world needs to broaden its focus making sure displaced populations and their generous but under-resourced hosts are not forgotten. The time to step up support is now."

Underfunding has already brought many programmes to a halt. Other essential activities, such as child protection, support for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, health services, education, and water, sanitation and hygiene activities are on the brink of being cancelled or scaled back if more funding is not forthcoming soon. For example, child protection and psychosocial care services in Ugandan settlements hosting South Sudanese refugees had to be scaled down this year due to lack of funding. Further reductions in the number of case worker staff will result in at-risk children not receiving home monitoring visits.

Without adequate funds, UNHCR will also have to reduce or stop its winterization assistance to vulnerable displaced people in Syria and Syrian refugees in the region, which includes cash transfers and the distribution of relief items this winter.

Lack of funds already forced UNHCR to end its support to the Shaukat Khanum Memorial Cancer Hospital in Peshawar, Pakistan in March. A programme to provide medical equipment related to cancer treatment had benefitted both Afghan refugees and members of the host community. As of September 2020, a shortfall in funding will prevent UNHCR from assisting Venezuelan families with emergency cash, vouchers and core relief items in key border and urban areas in Argentina, Chile, Colombia and Ecuador. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, a US\$223 million funding shortfall has forced UNHCR to cut programmes across a number of sectors. The provision of emergency shelters to internally displaced families in South Kivu Province stopped in January and planned construction of classrooms for Congolese refugee children in Burundi and Zambia has been put on hold. As well as additional funding, UNHCR is calling for donor flexibility when contributions are made so that resources can be targeted to where the needs are the greatest. Source: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

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Editorial program service of General News Agency:

United Press Association, Inc.
3651 Lindell Road, Suite D168
Las Vegas, NV 89103, USA
(702) 943.0321 Local
(702) 943.0233 Facsimile
info@unitedpressassociation.org
info@gna24.com
www.gna24.com