

DEBATE PACK

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Effect of the covid-19 pandemic on refugee communities

Main Chamber

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Backbench Business Committee debate

Debate led by Rushanara Ali MP

The proceedings of this debate can be viewed on [Parliamentlive.tv](https://parliamentlive.tv)

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1. Background

In an August 2020 speech, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi said:

“the coronavirus disease (Covid19), knows no borders, no language barriers. It threatens everyone on this planet – including refugees and other displaced people”

This was part of a call to boost funding for the UN refugee agency, UNHCR, to help priority countries hosting large populations of refugees prevent and respond to the coronavirus.

UNHCR funding

UNHCR has requested US\$745 million for the Global Covid 19 Emergency response.

To date (28/10/20) it has received US\$468 million or 63% of the total requested.

The UK is the fourth largest donor

United States	\$186.3M
Germany	\$62.7M
European Union	\$32.4M
UK	\$25.7M
Japan	\$25.1M
African Development Bank	\$18.3 M

UNHCR notes that:

“Refugees and other displaced people belong to the most marginalized and vulnerable members of society. They are particularly at risk during this coronavirus disease outbreak because they often have limited access to water, sanitation systems and health facilities.

However, there are reports that for the first six months of the pandemic, case rates among refugees remained far lower than expected. While low testing rates in refugee camps could explain why so few cases have been reported, experts say that many camps’ isolation from host communities as well as the imposition of strict lockdown measures initially curbed the spread of the virus.

1.1 Challenges

The NGO, International Rescue Committee, said people in refugee camps in Syria, Greece and Bangladesh face a heightened risk of coronavirus due to living in more densely populated conditions than the Diamond Princess—the cruise ship where transmission of the virus was four times faster than Wuhan

The [most effective interventions](#) to protect against Covid 19 – frequent hand washing, adherence to social-distancing guidelines, and wearing a mask – often are unavailable to refugees. Many of the world’s forcibly displaced individuals lack access to [clean water or soap](#), let alone health care. They often live in cramped tents in overcrowded camps. An entire family may share a single mask.

This puts refugees at heightened risk of contracting – and dying from – the virus. In one hotel in southern Greece, [148 asylum seekers](#) tested positive for COVID-19. In Singapore, [93% of COVID-19 cases](#) occurred in dorms housing migrant workers.

UNHCR is particularly concerned about the socio-economic consequences of COVID-19, including loss of income, evictions, school closures, denial of access to health and social services as well as rising xenophobia. For refugees, losing jobs could mean returning to dangerous situations, including in their countries of origin.

Over 80 per cent of the world’s refugees and nearly all the world’s internally displaced people are hosted in low- and middle-income countries. These countries do not have the level of economic resources to respond to the implications of the pandemic on people’s livelihoods. Due to the social and economic impacts of COVID-19, UNHCR is deeply concerned about the heightened risk of refugees and other displaced populations resorting to negative coping mechanisms. These include child marriages and the risk of displaced (or stateless) women being forced to resort to survival sex as a result of lost livelihood opportunities.

1.2 Specific refugee groups

South Sudanese refugees

Amid increasing violence and deteriorating conditions, the situation in South Sudan has escalated to a full-blown humanitarian emergency. The total number of South Sudanese [refugees](#) has now passed 2 million, it is the largest refugee crisis in Africa, and the third largest in the world, after [Syria](#) and Afghanistan. Sadly, 63 percent of South Sudanese refugees are under the age of 18.

The majority of those fleeing South Sudan are women and children. They are survivors of violent attacks, sexual assault and, in many cases, children are traveling alone.

Uganda and Sudan both host over 800,000 refugees from South Sudan, totalling to over half of all South Sudanese refugees. Most of these refugees reside in crowded camp settlements with limited access

to their basic needs including water and sanitation items, making them even more vulnerable to Covid-19

Rohingya in Bangladesh

Since August 2017 Muslim Rohingya refugees have fled violence in Rakhine State, Myanmar, into Bangladesh. Over [850,000 refugees](#) are now living in highly congested conditions in 34 refugee camps around Cox's Bazar the [world's largest refugee settlement](#). Alongside the refugees are the host communities, which [number around 440,000 people](#). Humanitarian groups like the International Rescue Committee are concerned that people living in refugee camps [face a heightened risk of Covid-19](#) due to the crowded conditions and lack of sanitation facilities.

The [latest statistics](#) from humanitarian groups suggest that the cumulative totals for confirmed Covid-19 cases since the outbreak began are 277 cases in the refugee camps, and 4,635 cases in the host community. So far there have been 8 Rohingya refugee fatalities due to Covid-19, and 70 fatalities of host community members.

The refugees' fear of being isolated in quarantines and separated from their families, or even killed to slow the pandemic, can explain why aid workers in Rohingya camps report minimal testing among residents with Covid-19 symptoms. Covid-related stigmatization adds to this challenge.

Fears of refugees in the general public may be compounded by Covid-19 fears, increasing discrimination against these groups. The social stigma associated with Covid-19 may encourage illness concealment, delay early detection and treatment, increase distrust in health authorities, lower the likelihood of compliance and prolong recovery.

In July, the [Government said](#) that the UK has allocated £21 million to tackle the Covid-19 outbreak in Bangladesh. At an [international summit](#) in October, the Government [pledged a further £47.5million in new UK aid](#) to support Rohingya refugees and help Bangladesh deal with coronavirus and natural disasters.

Syrian refugees and coronavirus

Conflict raging since 2011 has driven more than 11 million Syrians from their homes. [5,554,915 Syrian refugees were registered with the UN High Commission for Refugees](#) in August 2020, making Syria the largest refugee crisis in the world. Many more Syrians are unregistered refugees, living alongside their compatriots in Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and elsewhere.

Internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees are particularly vulnerable to the pandemic because of cramped conditions, poor hygiene facilities and lack of access to medical services.

Turkey

Turkey hosts about 3.6 million Syrians registered as refugees, the largest Syrian refugee population of any country. [98% of these people live in urban areas](#) alongside Turks, generally in cramped living conditions.

Access to health care and other essential services is hampered by language difficulties, lack of information and the refugees' poverty. [Turkey's 2016 deal with the EU](#) prevented Syrians entering the EU from Turkey, in return for increased EU funding for the refugees in Turkey. The deal expires in 2021.

Lebanon

In Lebanon there are about 1.5 million Syrian refugees, [of whom some 900,000 are registered](#). Nearly half of whom live in tents or other temporary structures.

Lebanon has been undergoing a financial crisis since 2019, making the economic situation of refugees even more vulnerable. Already before the coronavirus outbreak, half of Syrian refugees were surviving on less than [\\$2.90 per person per day](#). When the pandemic struck in 2020 many refugees' fragile subsistence was destroyed; one Syrian father told a food NGO: "[What scares me most is that we could die of hunger](#)".

Jordan

Jordan hosts around [658,000 registered Syrian refugees](#), although the real total of Syrian refugees is estimated at around 1.3 million. Most refugees do not live in camps. Those living in official camps continue to receive basic help from the Jordanian Government and aid agencies. They may be better off than those outside camps, whose efforts to earn a living have been complicated by the pandemic.

In September, the [UN confirmed](#) that the virus had entered the Za'atari refugee camp in Jordan, home to well over 50,000 Syrians and the largest Syrian refugee camp in the world.

Some 10,000 refugees, mainly women and children, are stranded in the [unofficial Rubkan camp](#), in a military no-go area near the Syrian border. Humanitarian agencies have been denied access to the camp since the arrival of the pandemic.

Iraq

Iraq hosts about [245,000 registered Syrian refugees](#). Iraq, too, is in an acute economic crisis and has recently undergone major civil unrest.

For further information on [the covid 19 situation in different countries](#) UNHCR hosts a database.

2. Press Articles

The following is a selection of press and media articles relevant to this debate.

Please note: the Library is not responsible for either the views or the accuracy of external content.

[**Iraq camp closures to leave 100,000 homeless amid coronavirus pandemic, aid group warns**](#)

Washington Post
Louisa Loveluck
9 November 2020

[**6 Ways the UN Is Helping Refugees Cope With the COVID-19 Pandemic**](#)

Global Citizen
Joe McCarthy
6 November 2020

[**Space, shelter and scarce resources - coping with COVID-19**](#)

UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency
November 2020

[**Dispatch from a refugee camp during the COVID-19 pandemic**](#)

The Conversation
Petra Molnar and Kenya-Jade Pinto
13 October 2020

[**COVID-19 Outbreaks Are Now Emerging in Refugee Camps. Why Did it Take so Long For the Virus to Reach Them?**](#)

Time
Mélissa Godin
9 October 2020

[**Aid agencies warn of Covid-19 crisis in refugee camps as winter approaches**](#)

Guardian
Martin Chulov
23 September 2020

[**Three years since the Rohingya crisis, the coronavirus is robbing refugees of hope for a brighter future**](#)

Independent
Yasmin Qureshi
25 August 2020

[**If you felt cooped up in lockdown, think of refugees confined indefinitely in camps**](#)

Guardian
Moulid Hujale
24 August 2020

[Inside the world's largest refugee camp, as coronavirus takes hold among Rohingya refugees](#)

Daily Telegraph

Nicola Smith and Suza Uddin

22 May 2020

[Coronavirus crisis 'increases suffering of most vulnerable refugees'](#)

Guardian

Nazia Parveen

18 May 2020

[Middle East's refugees are vulnerable to an explosion of coronavirus cases](#)

Financial Times

David Gardner

26 March 2020

[10 things you should know about coronavirus and refugees](#)

Norwegian Refugee Council

Roald Høvring

10 March 2020

3. Gov.uk

[UK statement for the 71st session of the UNHCR Executive Committee](#)

Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office
7 October 2020

Let me begin by recognising the incredible commitment of UNHCR staff who, year after year, work in dangerous and challenging contexts to provide vital protection and support to the world's most vulnerable people. We thank them for their incredible dedication. The UK is a committed partner of UNHCR, through funding and political support.

The COVID-19 pandemic is the biggest threat the world has faced in a generation. Evidence shows that its impact on health, economies, stability and society will hit the world's most vulnerable countries the hardest. In this context, we appreciate UNHCR's approach to stay and deliver and we understand the pressures this has put on UNHCR staff.

These challenges and an impending global food security emergency, are why the UK has launched a call to action on famine prevention, appointing the UK's first Special Envoy for Famine Prevention and Humanitarian Affairs, Nick Dyer. We will use both our development and diplomatic levers to tackle famine. Urgent action is required now by the international community to mobilise funding, address access and protection issues, and deliver a strong coordinated response.

The UK is at the forefront of responding to refugee crises and forced displacement globally. Our pledge of over £1 billion UK aid to respond to COVID-19 includes support specifically targeted at forcibly displaced populations. This funding will also go towards countering health, humanitarian, and economic risks, and to support the global effort to find a vaccine.

Since 2012, the UK has provided more than £3.3 billion in response to the Syrian conflict and since August 2017 £256 million for the Rohingya crisis. The UK also continues to provide UNHCR with significant levels of multi-year and un-earmarked funding.

The Global Compact for Refugees has played a critical role in informing the international approach to both new and existing refugee crises, and provides principles and practices that underpin the COVID-19 response. The UK remains committed to playing our part in its implementation.

I would like to make three specific points:

First, we commend UNHCR for its ongoing commitment to organisational reform. The UK strongly supports these efforts to become an even more effective and efficient organisation with coherent priorities, effective controls and transparent decision-making. The benefits of decentralisation and regionalisation are already being demonstrated through the ability of regional and country offices to act quickly in your COVID response. Deepening partnerships with international financial institutions and development actors have been

vital and will provide financial support to host countries and communities. We encourage UNHCR to remain on this trajectory, and further strengthen engagement with the Private Sector.

Second, on COVID-19 and access to asylum – We note, with concern, UNHCR’s report that exceptional measures adopted in certain countries to manage the COVID-19 pandemic are closing avenues of asylum or forcing people to return to situations of danger. We are reassured that some States have successfully protected the right to asylum alongside managing the public health risk posed by COVID-19. UNHCR’s role in profiling and advising on good practice on meeting refugee protection obligations in the context of the pandemic is critical.

Third, on IDPs – We are very concerned that the highest ever number of IDPs was recorded at the end of 2019. We therefore hope results from the UN High Level Panel on Internally Displaced People will lead to improvements in the humanitarian and development architecture that enable a more effective response to the needs of IDPs.

Finally, I want to reiterate the UK’s continued support for the vital work of UNHCR in assisting, supporting, and saving the lives of the world’s forcibly displaced people. We will continue to play our part in helping you do the remarkable job that you do.

4. PQs

[Syria: Migrant Camps](#)

22 Sep 2020 | 91044

Asked by: Jim Shannon

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what support his Department is providing to Syrian refugee camps to help tackle the spread of covid-19.

Answering member: James Cleverly | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

At the Brussels IV 'Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region' conference in June, the UK committed at least £300 million for 2020 to support Syria and the region, including Turkey, Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon. This will help to limit the spread of Coronavirus and mitigate its direct and indirect effects. With rising case numbers and high levels of vulnerability, we are helping refugees and those displaced from their homes because of conflict or humanitarian crises to help tackle the disease. This includes providing access to health services and medical supplies, improving shelters so people displaying symptoms can isolate, and making sure that there are adequate hygiene supplies and facilities for hand washing in camps and large settlements.

The UK has to date dedicated £764 million to the global fight against Coronavirus and British expertise to stop the spread of the global Coronavirus outbreak, find a vaccine and save lives around the world.

[Migrant Camps: Coronavirus](#)

21 Sep 2020 | HL7768

Asked by: Baroness Goudie

To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to support refugees in response to the health and humanitarian situation resulting from COVID-19 in refugee camps.

Answering member: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

Refugees and other forcibly displaced people are amongst the most vulnerable to the COVID-19 pandemic. Many live in close quarters without access to proper healthcare or shelter, and often in crowded camps where social distancing and regular handwashing are particularly challenging.

To date, the UK has committed £774 million in the international fight against COVID-19 and we are using our aid budget and British expertise to slow its spread in the most vulnerable countries. This includes significant support to the UN's refugee agency, UNHCR, and to other partners to address the needs and vulnerabilities of displaced populations. UK aid is supporting our partners to install hand-washing stations and isolation and treatment centres in refugee camps, and helping to provide protection and education services for forcibly

displaced children. We are also increasing access to clean water for displaced people living in areas of armed conflict.

In addition, we are matching, pound for pound, the first £10 million of public donations to the DEC Coronavirus Appeal, which is providing lifesaving aid to refugees and other displaced people and helping to stop the spread of COVID-19 in camps.

Developing Countries: Coronavirus

09 Sep 2020 | 82263

Asked by: Preet Kaur Gill

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent steps he has taken to support small, medium and large UK-based international development charities working to tackle the covid19 pandemic in the global south.

Answering member: Wendy Morton | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

Civil society organisations based in the UK and in developing countries are playing a very valuable role in the global response to COVID-19. There are a number of channels through which we are providing funding directly to civil society organisations (CSOs) to support vulnerable people around the world during this crisis.

We have allocated £18 million to charities through the Rapid Response Facility and over £24 million through our partnership with Unilever. In May, a new UK Aid Direct funding round was launched to support small and medium CSOs who can help us meet the challenges posed by COVID-19. In addition, we announced that we will match up to £10 million of donations from the British public to the Disasters Emergency Committee's (DEC) new Coronavirus Appeal which will fund the work of 14 UK aid agencies to tackle the pandemic among displaced people in Yemen, Somalia, South Sudan, DRC, Syria, Afghanistan, as well as the Rohingya refugee camps in Bangladesh. We have also made a contribution of £3.3 million to the Start Network providing rapid, short-term funding for humanitarian responses through its network of over 50 members. It has already funded 35 projects in 22 countries through its COVID-19 window.

UNRWA: Coronavirus

03 Aug 2020 | HL6992

Asked by: Lord Judd

To ask Her Majesty's Government what discussions they have had with UNWRA about any additional funding required to meet costs resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic; and what assessment they have made of the decision of the governments of Germany and Italy to increase contributions to that organisation.

Answering member: Baroness Sugg | Department for International Development

We are aware of increasing needs in the region due to the impact COVID-19, including in Palestinian refugee camps and continue to monitor the situation closely. We are currently reviewing options for support to UNRWA and recognise the central role it plays in the region until a just solution is found for refugees. Until that time, we support all efforts to increase funding to UNRWA, including from key partners such as Germany and Italy.

[Bangladesh: Coronavirus](#)

27 Jul 2020 | 76908

Asked by: Apsana Begum

To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, whether she plans to allocate additional funding to help tackle the covid-19 outbreak in Bangladesh.

Answering member: Nigel Adams | Department for International Development

The UK has major health, humanitarian and extreme poverty programmes in Bangladesh. These have re-prioritised funding and interventions to tackle the immediate health needs and the broader social and economic impacts of COVID-19 on the poorest and most vulnerable. To date the UK has allocated £21 million to support the Government of Bangladesh's Preparedness and Response Plan objectives. This includes more than £7 million for testing and treatment by the national health system and £3 million through UNDP to reach more than 2 million of the poorest people living in urban slums. In the Rohingya refugee camps, over £11 million has been allocated to UN and NGO partners to prepare for COVID-19 and to provide critical humanitarian services, including testing, isolation and treatment. DFID is collaborating with Unilever on a mass global handwashing media campaign, which will run across Africa and Asia, including in Bangladesh.

[Coronavirus: Disease Control](#)

01 Jun 2020 | HL4798

Asked by: Baroness Sheehan

To ask Her Majesty's Government what representations they have made to foreign governments for the inclusion of (1) refugees, (2) migrants, (3) unregistered persons, and (4) persons without legal documentation, in national public health responses.

Answering member: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon | Foreign and Commonwealth Office

We recognise that refugees and Internally Displaced People may be at higher risk of infection by COVID-19 and other diseases due to high geographical mobility, overcrowded conditions, lack of safe sanitation and already poor health outcomes, and have focused our advocacy and aid commitments accordingly, working with international partners. The UK has committed up to £764 million aid funding so far to support

global efforts to combat COVID-19, which includes £276 million for supporting resilience in vulnerable countries. £145 million of this is focused on UN appeals, and support to particular vulnerable groups: £75 million for the WHO; £20 million for UNICEF and £5 million to Education Cannot Wait to help refugee, migrant and displaced children proving basic suppliers and lessons; £20 million for the UN Refugee Agency providing access to handwashing stations and drinking water for displaced people; £15 million for the World Food Programme; and £10 million to UNFPA to provide lifesaving Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) and gender based violence prevention. We have also adapted our bilateral programmes in a number of countries to respond to the particular challenges that COVID-19 presents to vulnerable communities. For example, in Bangladesh, UK aid is helping maintain essential humanitarian services in Rohingya refugee camps.

Covid-19: Refugee Camps

20 May 2020 | 803 cc1099-1102

Asked by: Lord Collins of Highbury

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the response of international institutions to the impact of COVID-19 on refugee camps.

Answered by: Lord Ahmed of Wimbledon | Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Department for International Development

My Lords, I am deeply concerned about Covid-19's impact on refugees. The United Kingdom is at the forefront of the response and we have pushed to ensure that vulnerable groups, including refugees, are factored into international plans. We are working closely with international partners to provide dedicated support in refugee camps, including hand-washing stations and isolation and treatment centres. Partners are rigorously assessed before they receive funding, with robust checks and measures to ensure that they are delivering effectively.

Asked by: Lord Collins of Highbury

My Lords, the head of the UN Refugee Agency warned earlier this week that Covid cases appear to be multiplying fast in Yemen. Almost 10 million people are one step away from famine and half the country's health facilities have been destroyed. Can the Minister detail what we are doing in the UN and with allies to urgently support the people of Yemen?

Answered by: Lord Ahmed of Wimbledon | Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Department for International Development

My Lords, the noble Lord raises a very important point. We have been at the forefront—he will be aware of the £744 million of UK aid funding which we have committed thus far to global efforts to combat the outbreak of Covid-19, split across three areas: building resilience in vulnerable countries, finding a vaccine and supporting the economic response. We are working with a raft of UN agencies, including the World Health Organization and UNICEF, as well as UNFPA and UNHCR, to support refugees specifically.

Asked by: The Archbishop of Canterbury

My Lords, the Minister will be aware of the *Global Humanitarian Response Plan* published by the UN and updated this month, which emphasises

“The importance of involving and supporting local organizations ... given the key role they are playing in this crisis.”

In all areas where the world’s 70 million displaced people gather, faith groups and especially churches are often the only remaining organisations with reach from grass roots to leaders, but they are often ignored by international and relief agencies. In many cases, shortage of money and logistics hamper food distribution. What steps are the Government taking to ensure that faith-based local groups are fully involved by all international agencies in all aspects of relief, reconciliation and moral and spiritual support?

Answered by: Lord Ahmed of Wimbledon | Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Department for International Development

My Lords, what the most reverend Primate said resonates with me. I am a strong believer in the role of faith groups, particularly in the response to Covid. Specifically, we have, for example, allocated £55 million to established agencies such as the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, as well as £20 million to international NGOs including Christian Aid. I share with noble Lords that I shall be convening a meeting of aid agencies working within the faith sector, to see what we can do in a more co-ordinated way across the world in our response to Covid-19, which will directly include faith leaders as well.

Asked by: Lord Sheikh

My Lords, I commend the Government on their commitment to provide £744 million to combat Covid-19 globally. I refer to the Zaatari refugee camp in Jordan, which I have visited. It is the largest refugee camp in the Middle East, housing nearly 80,000 Syrian refugees. It is a well-run camp and several international institutions are providing help and support. Following the pandemic, there has been lockdown in the camp. Conditions are being controlled but the camp needs additional help. The UK Government have agreed to provide £55 million in aid for refugees in Jordan for a period of three years. Can my noble friend the Minister confirm that aid will be continued, and that refugees in Jordan will have a share of the £744 million?

Answered by: Lord Ahmed of Wimbledon | Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Department for International Development

My Lords, my noble friend is right to raise the issue of the camps—not just the Zaatari camp in Jordan, which I too have visited, but elsewhere in the world. Of course, measures such as social distancing cannot apply in those camps, so we have been applying practical measures such as hand-washing and sanitation facilities. I confirm that we will continue to support refugees across the world, including in our work with the Jordanian Government to support refugees from the Syrian conflict.

Asked by: The Earl of Sandwich

My Lords, following the question from the noble Lord, Lord Sheikh, I know that the Minister is well aware that 5.6 million Palestinian refugees are among those most at risk. Of course, this is mainly because of congestion, so what are the Government doing to respond to the \$93.4 million appeal from UNRWA—UNRWA often gets left out of this scene—to make up the shortfall left by the United States?

Answered by: Lord Ahmed of Wimbledon | Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Department for International Development

My Lords, of course we are aware specifically of the plight of the Palestinian refugees. The noble Earl will be aware that the United Kingdom has increased its support for UNRWA, and we continue to support that agency for the vital support it provides to Palestinian refugees.

Asked by: Lord Dubbs

My Lords, the Minister will be aware of the “Panorama” programme earlier this week showing the conditions in some of the Greek refugee camps. He will have seen that, for example, in Moria, social distancing is impossible: if the virus were to get into that camp it would be unstoppable. The implications would be disastrous for the people in the camp, but equally disastrous for Greece and the rest of Europe, because it would spread from that camp further afield, so it is in our interest to help them. There are very few washing facilities there, and no social distancing is possible.

Answered by: Lord Ahmed of Wimbledon | Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Department for International Development

My Lords, the noble Lord is quite right to raise the issue of Greece. The UK is one of the world’s leading refugee resettlement states, resettling more refugees than any country in Europe. Specifically, we are offering Greece technical support to meet the challenges it currently faces and we regularly liaise with Greece on the challenges and burdens it is currently having to endure in relation to refugees within the country.

Asked by: Baroness Sheehan

My Lords, given that cross-border aid delivery to Syria remains the most viable option for getting vital humanitarian aid into the north-west of the country, will the Government do all they can to urge members of the UN Security Council to reinsert the Iraq-Syria crossing at Yaroubiya as a named border crossing when Resolution 2504 comes up for renewal in July?

Answered by: Lord Ahmed of Wimbledon | Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Department for International Development

I can assure the noble Baroness and all noble Lords of our commitment to Resolution 2504 and the need for an extension of the humanitarian corridors that currently operate in the north-west of the country.

Asked by: Baroness Helic

My Lords, according to UNHCR, we need to pay urgent attention to the protection of refugee, displaced and stateless women and girls during this pandemic. They are among those most at risk: doors should not be left open to abusers and no efforts should be spared to help women surviving abuse and violence. What specific steps are the UK Government taking to ensure that refugee women and girls in camps do not become victims of abuse at this time?

Answered by: Lord Ahmed of Wimbledon | Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Department for International Development

My noble friend is quite right to raise this issue. I recently engaged in a virtual call with Pramila Patten, the SRSG on preventing sexual violence in conflict for the UN. I will be having further discussions on this to ensure that we give maximum support to girls and women who suffer because of conflict—and the Covid crisis brings this into focus.

Asked by: Baroness Coussins

My Lords, will the Minister pay tribute to the work of Translators Without Borders, which DfID helps to support? Its work with Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, for example, found that older women have very limited access to information about Covid-19. It provides support in 89 languages, has produced a multilingual glossary on Covid to help health workers and monitors social media in multiple languages to eliminate fake or inaccurate data—work that no other international organisation undertakes. Will the Minister look positively at TWB's need for more funding to leverage language technology to meet the needs of refugees?

Answered by: Lord Ahmed of Wimbledon | Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Department for International Development

My Lords, I fully align with the sentiments of the noble Baroness and of course I will look at all future funding requests.

Asked by: Lord McConnell of Glenscorrodale

My Lords, thousands of asylum seekers, potential refugees, are now unaccounted for in Libya, following hundreds being returned to the shore and many detention camps being closed as a result of Covid-19. Will the UK actively support safe, direct humanitarian evacuation corridors out of Libya in order to ensure the protection of the most vulnerable at this most difficult time?

Answered by: Lord Ahmed of Wimbledon | Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Department for International Development

My Lords, the noble Lord highlights an important issue around Libya and the conflict that continues to engulf the country. We are of course working with international partners to see what we can do in-country to reach a political settlement, as well as to provide support for the vulnerable, including refugees, in the country.

Rohingya: Coronavirus**20 May 2020 | HL4172****Asked by: Baroness Tonge**

To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the Written Answer by Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon on 5 May 2020 (HL 3447), how UK health workers disseminate public health messages on COVID-19 in Rohingya refugee camps.

Answering member: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon | Department for International Development

The UK is reaching refugees with information and support to reduce rumours, myths, fear and panic about COVID-19, through the Communications with Communities Working Group. This includes a large array of methods to disseminate messages to refugees and the host community including community meetings where possible; radio, posters and leaflets; videos, loudspeakers and information service centres. Messages are being endorsed by the Cox's Bazar Civil Surgeon, translated into the Rohingya language and Bangla, and are being developed in consultation with Rohingya people, including religious leaders, to ensure they are effective. We are reaching out to vulnerable older people directly and child-friendly messaging is also being used. We continue to make representations to the Government of Bangladesh to lift internet restrictions so public health messages can be shared more easily.

Rohingya: Coronavirus**20 May 2020 | HL4157****Asked by: Baroness Tonge**

To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the Written Answer by Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon on 5 May (HL 3447), whether the Essential Service Package disseminated in refugee camps includes personal protective equipment to protect health workers and clients during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Answering member: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon | Department for International Development

Humanitarian response is procuring personal protective equipment (PPE) for health workers to prevent the spread of COVID-19. While each service provider is responsible for obtaining the PPE it needs, agencies are coordinating and sharing information, including supplier contacts, through the UN Logistics Cluster. The UN has quality control guidelines and is establishing a global common supply chain. Similarly, the Bangladesh Government is coordinating procurement and dissemination of PPE to all government hospitals, including those in Cox's Bazar to which refugees with severe cases of COVID-19 or other illness may be referred.

Overseas Aid: Coronavirus

20 May 2020 | HL4066

Asked by: Baroness Uddin

To ask Her Majesty's Government what support they have provided, as part of their International Aid programme, to alleviate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in (1) Bangladesh, (2) Sri Lanka, and (3) Liberia.

Answering member: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon | Department for International Development

The UK is at the forefront of the global response to COVID-19, through our diplomatic efforts and the provision of £744 million of UK aid to counter the health, humanitarian, and economic impacts.

UK aid is supporting Bangladesh's efforts in fighting COVID-19 across the country. The UK has allocated around £21 million so far to support the priorities set out in the Government of Bangladesh's National Preparedness and Response plan. This includes more than £7 million to support the national health systems and £3 million to the UN Development Programme to reach at least 2.16 million of the poorest inhabitants. More than £10 million has been allocated to existing UN and NGO partners to prepare for COVID-19 and maintain critical humanitarian services in the Rohingya refugee camps. Furthermore, DFID and Unilever are collaborating on a mass global handwashing campaign, which will run across TV, radio and print, social and digital media to help change people's behaviour in countries across Africa and Asia, including Bangladesh. Messages will be tailored to communities in these countries to ensure they are effective.

The UK does not have a bilateral aid programme in Sri Lanka but through our support to the UN and other international bodies, UK aid will indirectly support Sri Lanka in tackling COVID-19. The UK has also adapted our Conflict, Security and Stability Fund work in Sri Lanka to respond to mitigate the impacts of COVID-19 on vulnerable and conflict affected communities.

The UK is a significant contributor to the IMF Catastrophe Fund which Liberia has accessed for debt relief. DFID is aware of the existing levels of poverty and fragile economy in Liberia and is therefore working to address the impacts that COVID-19 will have. In order to do this, we are prioritising our health response as well as the provision of social protection.

Turkey: Coronavirus

19 May 2020 | HL3929

Asked by: Lord Turnberg

To ask Her Majesty's Government what discussions they have had, or plan to have, with the government of Turkey about providing personal protective equipment to refugee camps on the Turkish-Syrian border.

Answering member: Baroness Sugg | Foreign and Commonwealth Office

We are speaking regularly to Turkey about our shared concerns relating to the significant risks posed by COVID-19 in Syria, including in camps

for internally displaced persons. We are supporting our UN and NGO partners to lead the response in camps and across Syria. This support includes personal protective equipment for health workers, as well as provision of IPC (infection prevention and control) supplies, cleaning supplies and hand sanitiser. This is part of the UK's global efforts to combat the outbreak of COVID-19 and help the most vulnerable. This includes a global contribution of £65 million to the World Health Organisation (WHO).

Overseas Aid: Coronavirus

19 May 2020 | HL3923

Asked by: Baroness Goudie

To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to reduce the impact of COVID-19 on vulnerable populations around the world, including (1) women, (2) refugees and, (3) migrants.

Answering member: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon | Department for International Development

To date, the UK has committed £744 million in the international fight against COVID-19. We are a key contributor to the UN's Global Humanitarian Response Plan, which is supporting the most vulnerable, including women and girls, refugees and migrants.

New UK funding to the UN's refugee agency (UNHCR) and other partners will help install hand-washing stations and isolation and treatment centres in refugee camps, provide protection and education services for forcibly displaced children, and increase access to clean water for displaced people living in areas of armed conflict.

The UK is also providing significant support to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) to help make sure life-saving family planning, HIV drugs and equipment needed to care for the survivors of sexual assault can get to the most vulnerable in developing countries. Further support to UNICEF and the Education Cannot Wait initiative will ensure disadvantaged children do not get left behind and deliver protection services for children and women affected by violence.

Coronavirus: Greece

14 May 2020 | HL3647

Asked by: Baroness Altmann

To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the difficulties of social distancing in refugee camps in Greece, what (1) financial, (2) medical, and (3) infrastructure, support they have provided in such camps.

Answering member: Baroness Williams of Trafford | Home Office

The UK has a strong bilateral relationship with Greece and continues to offer support and exchange expertise on effective migration management to alleviate the pressures on the islands. In previous years, this has included expert deployments to advise on camp security and functioning, and translators to assist with the processing of arriving migrants. Current UK humanitarian support includes a UK Border Force

cutter to conduct search and rescue in the Aegean, as well as over £500,000 of humanitarian supplies.

The UK Government is concerned about the risk of coronavirus in relation to the migrant camps on the islands. The Greek Ministry of Migration and Asylum has enacted emergency measures to contain potential coronavirus outbreaks in the migrant camps, including the provision of additional medical facilities and staff through the EU's Emergency Support Instrument – these measures have so far been effective and there are currently no reported cases of COVID-19 in the camps on the Greek islands. Our Embassy in Athens continues to closely follow developments.

In total, the EU has provided 700 million euros, half of it immediately on 3 March 2020, to help Greece manage the current migrant situation and COVID-19. The UK Government currently has no plans to provide funds to Greece for development of infrastructure.

Migrant Camps: Coronavirus

13 May 2020 | 43696

Asked by: Rachael Maskell

To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what discussions she has had with (a) Cabinet colleagues and (b) international partners on protecting refugees in UNHCR camps and other camps during the covid-19 pandemic.

Answering member: James Cleverly | Department for International Development

The UK has committed £744 million in the international fight against COVID-19. We are a key contributor to the UN Global Humanitarian Response Plan which aims to support the most vulnerable groups including refugees and other forcibly displaced populations.

The Secretary of State regularly engages with Cabinet colleagues on a wide range of matters including COVID-19 and its impact on developing countries.

The UK is taking decisive and co-ordinated action to support the global response to COVID-19, working with our international partners. The UK is also using its membership of the G7 and G20 to urge collective action and help drive a timely and effective international response that ensures the most vulnerable groups, including refugees, are not left behind.

Our most recent funding includes new support to the UN's Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and other partners to help install hand-washing stations and isolation and treatment centres in refugee camps, support vulnerable displaced families, provide protection and education services for forcibly displaced children, and increase access to clean water for displaced people living in areas of armed conflict.

Refugees: Coronavirus**04 May 2020 | HL3255****Asked by: The Lord Bishop of Coventry**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what action they are taking to limit the vulnerability of refugees around the world to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Answering member: Baroness Sugg | Department for International Development

One of the main risks to ending the COVID-19 pandemic is the weakness of developing countries' healthcare systems. Those countries already struggling with humanitarian crises will be particularly stretched. Refugees are amongst the most vulnerable. They often live in close quarters without access to proper healthcare or shelter, many in crowded and unsanitary camps where social distancing and regular handwashing are almost impossible.

The UK has long been supportive of initiatives to build resilience amongst refugees and their host communities, including in health and disease control. We have done this through programmes that are providing access to public health information, clean water, sanitation and health services. We are also working closely with all our international partners to coordinate a global response that includes actions to address the vulnerability of refugee populations. We have committed £744 million to date in the fight against COVID-19. Our most recent funding includes new support to the UN's refugee agency (UNHCR) and to UNICEF to help install new hand-washing stations and isolation and treatment centres in refugee camps as well as provide protection services and education opportunities for forcibly displaced children.

Migrant Camps: Coronavirus**29 Apr 2020 | 39687****Asked by: Afzal Khan**

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the Answer of 30 March 2020 to Question HL2717 on Migrant Camps: Coronavirus and with reference to the Department for International Development's concern about the risk posed by coronavirus in relation to migrant camps in Greece, if her Department will increase the number of unaccompanied child refugees taken out of those camps and brought to the UK; and if she will make a statement.

Answering member: Chris Philp | Home Office

Protecting vulnerable children remains a key priority of this Government and we have a proud record of doing so through our asylum system and our resettlement schemes. The UK remains fully committed to meeting our obligations under the Dublin III Regulation and we are keen to ensure that children who have family members in the UK, including those currently in Greece, are transferred as soon as it is safe to do so.

Palestinians: Coronavirus

21 Apr 2020 | 34400

Asked by: Alex Norris

To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what assessment she has made of the potential effect of the covid-19 pandemic on levels of health in Palestinian refugee camps (a) in Lebanon and (b) throughout the Middle East.

Answering member: James Cleverly | Department for International Development

The UK recognises the United Nations Relief and Works Agency's (UNRWA) unique mandate to provide protection and core services to Palestinian refugees in Gaza, the West Bank, Lebanon Jordan and Syria. In 2019/20 the UK has committed £65.5 million to UNRWA, matching our 2018 contribution. Overcrowded living conditions, physical and mental stress and years of protracted conflict make the population of over 5.6 million Palestine refugees across the Middle East particularly vulnerable. UNRWA is supporting the delivery of national pandemic response plans and has put in place a range of measures to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 and to treat patients with symptoms, working in cooperation with WHO and other partners.

Migrant Camps: Coronavirus

31 Mar 2020 | HL2718

Asked by: Baroness Tonge

To ask Her Majesty's Government what discussions they have had, and intend to have, with the UNHCR about the control of COVID-19 in refugee camps.

Answering member: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon | Department for International Development

The Department for International Development (DFID) is supporting the UK's global efforts to combat the outbreak of COVID-19 and help the most vulnerable, including refugees in camps and settlements as well as host communities. The UK has committed up to £241 million of UK aid to support the global efforts to combat the outbreak of COVID-19.

The International Development Secretary has talked to Filippo Grandi, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, and they agreed to work together to minimise the impact of this crisis on refugees. Officials are in regular contact with their United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees counterparts and we are working closely with all our international partners to coordinate a global response that includes actions to address the particular vulnerability of refugee populations.

Migrant Camps: Coronavirus**30 Mar 2020 | HL2717****Asked by:** Baroness Tonge

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the impact of COVID-19 in refugee camps in (1) Lesbos, and (2) elsewhere.

Answering member: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon | Department for International Development

The Department for International Development (DFID) is supporting the UK's global efforts to combat the outbreak of COVID-19 and help the most vulnerable, including refugees in camps and settlements as well as host communities. The UK has committed up to £241 million of UK aid to support the global efforts to combat the outbreak of COVID-19.

DFID recognises that refugees may be vulnerable to acquiring diseases such as COVID-19. The UK is already helping to prevent the spread of diseases like coronavirus in refugee camps around the world, through providing access to clean water and sanitation.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees are not aware of any cases of COVID-19 in refugee camps at present.

The UK Government is concerned about the risk of coronavirus in relation to the migrant camps in Greece, given the overcrowding and limited medical facilities in camps on the islands. The Greek Ministry of Migration and Asylum announced emergency measures to contain potential coronavirus outbreaks in the migrant camps. Our Embassy in Athens continues to closely follow developments.

UN Resident Coordinators have been tasked by WHO to assess these risks and consider needs at country level, which will include refugee populations. The International Development Secretary has spoken with Filippo Grandi, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, and agreed to work together to minimise the impact of this crisis on refugees.

Migrant Camps: Coronavirus**09 Mar 2020 | 23605****Asked by:** Imran Hussain

To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, whether his Department plans to make additional funding available to prevent covid-19 outbreaks in refugee camps throughout the world.

Answering member: James Cleverly | Department for International Development

The Department for International Development (DFID) is supporting the UK's global efforts to combat the outbreak of COVID-19 and help the most vulnerable, including refugees in camps and settlements as well as host communities. This includes a contribution of £5 million to the World Health Organisation (WHO).

DFID recognises that individuals in refugee settings, including urban areas, may be vulnerable to acquiring diseases such as COVID-19 as well

as facing associated protection risks. UN Resident Coordinators have been tasked by WHO to assess these risks and consider needs at country level, which will include refugee populations. UK officials are in discussion with humanitarian agencies including the UN's refugee agency, UNHCR, to ensure that such considerations are factored into evolving plans. UNHCR are not aware of any cases of COVID-19 in refugee camps at present.

5. Other Parliamentary material

5.1 Debates

[International Covid-19 Response: Innovation and Access to Treatment](#)

05 Nov 2020 | 683 cc561-577

[Rohingya Humanitarian Crisis: Covid-19](#)

03 Nov 2020 | 683 cc41-62WH

5.2 Early Day Motions

[Covid-19 global ceasefire](#) **EDM 563 (session 2019-21)** **Claudia Webbe** **4 June 2020**

That this House notes United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres' recent call for a global ceasefire to combat the rapid spread of COVID-19; further notes that Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab endorsed this call for peace; is concerned that little action has been taken by the UK government to make this a reality; laments the fact that there are currently thousands of British forces in at least 35 countries around the world, including 1,000 in Afghanistan and more than 1,000 in the Middle East including in Iraq and Saudi Arabia; is appalled that Britain remains complicit in the Saudi-led coalition's war in Yemen; recognises that the coronavirus outbreak offers our government a unique opportunity to step away from global conflicts; and calls on the Government to immediately draw up a plan to withdraw British troops from war zones.

6. Further reading

House of Commons Library

[Coronavirus: international dimensions](#)

Commons Library Research Briefings

*(*The House of Commons Library has published a series of briefings on international dimensions of the coronavirus pandemic since March 2020, ranging from general surveys of its impact on developing countries to assessments of its effects in specific situations.)*

[The Rohingya humanitarian crisis and the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic](#), Commons Library Debate Pack, 28 October 2020

International Development Committee

[Humanitarian crises monitoring: coronavirus in developing countries: secondary impacts Inquiry](#)

[Impact of COVID-19 on developing countries and the international response examined](#)

Organisations

[United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees](#) (webpage)

[International Rescue Committee](#) (webpage)

[Norwegian Refugee Council](#) (webpage)

[British Red Cross](#) (webpage)

[International Organization for Migration](#) (Covid-19 webpage)

[Amnesty International](#) (Refugees, Asylum-Seekers and Migrants webpage)

[Human Rights Watch](#) (Refugees and Migrants webpage)

[All-Party Parliamentary Group on Refugees](#) (webpage)

[All-Party Parliamentary Group on Refugees](#) (membership and contact details)

DEBATE PACK

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