

COVID-19 and Migration Digest  
Friday, April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2021

**Thank you for following the COVID-19 & Migration Digest for the past year. This will be our final digest, but you can continue to engage with the Program on Forced Migration and Health's work on COVID-19 through the [PFMH Action Hub on COVID-19 and Displacement](#). The archived digests will remain accessible on the [PFMH website](#).**

**Headline: [Nepal becomes first country in Asia Pacific to vaccinate refugees against COVID-19](#)**

**Source:** UNHCR

**Date:** March 30, 2021

**Notes:** Nepal, which hosts approximately 20,000 refugees who are mostly from Tibet and Bhutan, is now the first country in Asia Pacific to vaccinate refugees against COVID-19 as part of the national immunization plan. Refugees over the age of 65 are included in the second phase of vaccine rollout, which began on March 7<sup>th</sup>. As of March 24<sup>th</sup>, around 668 refugees above the age of 65 were vaccinated.

**Headline: [A virus that respects no borders: protecting refugees and migrants during COVID-19](#)**

**Source:** WHO

**Date:** March 25, 2021

**Notes:** In a survey about how COVID-19 has affected them, migrants and refugees reported living in unhealthy conditions as a result of travel restrictions with a lack of access to healthcare and other essential services. WHO and UN partners are working to ensure that host governments consider the health needs of refugees and migrants and provide them with equitable care. Dr. Santino Severoni, the director of WHO's Global Health and Migration Programme, stressed the central role of vaccine access equity in ending the pandemic.

**Headline: [COVID forces India's former Gulf workers to forge new futures](#)**

**Source:** Al Jazeera

**Date:** March 31, 2021

**Notes:** The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in the largest reverse migration from the Gulf to India in over 50 years. According to the UN, more than 90% of India's migrant workers work in Southeast Asia and the Gulf region. More than 1.1 million people returned in the past 10 months, 70% of whom had lost their jobs overseas. Returning overseas workers are coming back to a tight job market.

**Headline: [Four things to know about Covid in the world's largest refugee camp](#)**

**Source:** Oxfam

**Date:** March 11, 2021

**Notes:** In Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar, the COVID-19 pandemic has led to increased hunger, with only half of refugee households having adequate amounts of food, and has increased the vulnerability category of approximately a quarter of refugee households. The lockdown increased the burden of unpaid labor at home on women and girls, increased the risks of violence that they face, and limited their access to COVID-19 related messaging, so they were less aware of COVID-19 risks than men. In the camp, refugees led the response to COVID-19, volunteering to help keep people safe. The COVID-19 safety restrictions also resulted in humanitarian innovation in methods of communication and design of water and sanitation facilities in the camp.

**Headline:** [COVID-19 cases among unaccompanied migrant children in facilities spark concerns over crowding](#)

**Source:** ABC News

**Date:** March 31, 2021

**Notes:** Large numbers of unaccompanied migrant children have tested positive for COVID-19 after they were transferred out of Customs and Border Patrol facilities, which do not conduct COVID-19 testing. Advocates have expressed concerns that the number of COVID-19 cases coming out of these facilities is a result of negligence. The CDC commented that, "CBP facilities are currently housing increasing numbers of individuals, including children, and this is contributing to increased risk for COVID-19 outbreaks in these congregate settings."

**Headline:** [Greece: Migrants in camps to be vaccinated in May](#)

**Source:** Info Migrants

**Date:** March 30, 2021

**Notes:** According to the Migration Minister, staff and residents of migrant camps in Greece will start getting vaccinated in May. He stated that he saw "no reason" to vaccinate them earlier. A government spokesperson had previously said that migrants were "not a priority." Humanitarian groups and health workers argue that migrants in camps fit into the European Commission's list of groups that should be vaccinated early due to their susceptibility and vulnerability. Various other governments, including Spain, Jordan, and the Netherlands, have included and prioritized asylum seekers and refugees in their vaccine rollout plans.

**Headline:** [UN seeks \\$10bn for Syria as COVID adds to refugee suffering](#)

**Source:** Al Jazeera

**Date:** March 30, 2021

**Notes:** The United Nations seeks ten billion dollars for Syria, as civilians experience increased hunger and poverty, as well as continued attacks during the pandemic. Of this sum, 5.8 billion dollars will be directed toward Syrian refugees and host countries in the Middle East, and the remaining 4.2 billion dollars will be directed toward the response within Syria. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres stated on March 10<sup>th</sup> that Syria is "a living nightmare," as 60% of Syrians face the risk of hunger and around half of children have known war their whole lives.

**Headline:** [Bangladesh: Refugee Camp Fencing Cost Lives in Blaze](#)

**Source:** Human Rights Watch

**Date:** March 25, 2021

**Notes:** On March 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2021, a devastating fire spread throughout Rohingya refugee camps in Bangladesh, killing at least 15 people and displacing more than 50,000 people. The true number

of deaths is yet to be determined, as there are approximately 400 people missing. Hundreds of people sustained injuries, including people who were injured as they attempted to climb over or cut through the barbed wire fencing that is around the camps in Cox's Bazar.

**Related:** [Rohingya refugees face another relocation amid devastating fires, COVID outbreaks in camps](#)

**Headline:** [Serbia vaccinates refugees against COVID-19](#)

**Source:** UNHCR

**Date:** March 30, 2021

**Notes:** Serbia, which hosts approximately 4,880 refugees and asylum seekers, has started vaccinating refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants in asylum, transit, and reception centers. As of March 30<sup>th</sup>, more than 300 asylum seekers and refugees residing in government shelters have been given the first dose of the vaccine. UNHCR has advocated for including refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants in Serbia's immunization plan.

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*Compiled by Sally Beirut*

For an archive of past digests, please click [here](#).

#### Additional Resources from the Program on Forced Migration and Health

The Program on Forced Migration & Health's [Action Hub on COVID-19 & Displacement](#), an initiative that harnesses the expertise of public health practitioners, scholars and leaders to provide targeted advice, generate rapid impact research to strengthen the response, and to collate and communicate clear and credible public health information. This Action Hub is targeted at policymakers, advocates, humanitarian actors, and affected communities, and will help ensure that public health research and public health voices will be leveraged to support the rights of refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants everywhere.

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Blog: <https://pfmhcolumbia.wordpress.com/>

Latest PFMH Blog Post: [Defining principled humanitarian action: Beyond the dichotomy of neutral and non-neutral humanitarianism](#). *Written by Mhd Nour Audi MPH, MD, former member of the Syrian Red Crescent Society and DrPH candidate at Mailman School of Public Health, Department of Population and Family Health.*