

Operational highlights on successes and innovations in UNHCR's work in the field to prepare for, and respond to, the needs of people of concern related to COVID-19

(as of 8 May 2020)

Note that much more information can be found in the weekly sitreps from regions and operations, as well as the global synthesis, which can be found on the [COVID-19 situation page on Global Focus](#).

Strengthen and support primary and secondary health care and WASH services

Under this priority, UNHCR has worked with governments, partners and people of concern themselves to put in place preparedness measures; procure and distribute medical supplies; undertake risk communication; identify and respond to protection and rights violations affecting the effectiveness of the health response; and ensure continued access to essential health services. Some notable successes include the following,

Across Africa...

Burkina Faso: UNHCR donated 20 refugee housing units (RHUs), pharmaceutical products, an ambulance, some 2,000 wash kits, 50 hand washing devices, jerry cans, soap as well as 35,000 masks made by refugees to the Sahel Region. UNHCR also provided for construction of classrooms, latrines and administrative blocks for four schools in Dori, and the installation of four 5,000-liter water reservoirs and a water trucking system.

CAR: in Obo refugee camp, UNHCR installed 25 handwashing stations and distributed soap to 2,080 DRC and South Sudanese refugees. Soap distributions are planned in other refugee and IDP hosting areas.

Cameroon: UNHCR distributed 70,000 bars of soap and installed handwashing stations in Minawao camp, in the Far-North Region, and at the transit centre and refugee sites in Kousseri. Urban refugees received 15,000 bars of soap in Douala and 20,000 in Yaoundé, while 150 handwashing stations will be installed in public places.

Chad: UNHCR built 20 isolation points in refugee reception centers as part of its COVID-19 emergency preparedness and response plan. All 15 health centres serving the refugee areas in southern Chad have been provided with PPE (masks, gloves, hand sanitizer, soap). 29 handwashing stations have been installed at Moyo camp in Haraze.

Mali: UNHCR donated 100 family-sized tents for health structures in the Gao, Mopti, Timbuktu, Menaka, Kayes regions, and in Bamako, in agreement with the Ministry of Solidarity.

Niger: a needs analysis was undertaken with the Regional Directorate of Health and UNHCR will provide 350 RHU with A/C with 2 beds each. 53 RHUS have been set up in the national stadium to isolate and treat confirmed cases.

Sudan: UNHCR upgraded an artificial lake of 40,000 m³, along with pipes leading to 32 taps close to host and refugee homes, for the refugee settlement in Dar Batti in South Kordofan. In addition, UNHCR distributed over 950,000 bars of soap. To avoid large gatherings, the distributions were undertaken door-to-door with donkey carts. In West Darfur, UNHCR supported the Sudanese Red Crescent Society distribute core-relief items to 3,800 IDPs and conducted information sessions on protection against the virus. UNHCR will procure two additional water pumps in the area of Kosti to ensure an uninterrupted supply of water to IDPs and host communities in the area.

South Sudan: UNHCR and its partner Action Africa Help International began construction of 100 emergency latrines at health facilities, reception centres, general food distribution sites, schools and child-friendly spaces in Ajuong Thok and Pamir refugee camps and in some health facilities and schools in the host community.

Tanzania: 867 handwash points have been established and maintained. 1,014 kg powder soap and 151 litres of liquid soap distributed to handwash points in the three refugee camps. 150,043 kg of soap distributed to 63,286 households.

Somalia: UNHCR distributed hygiene kits consisting of soap and sanitary products to 41,000 people and plans to distribute another 54,000. UNHCR provided PPE to 780 IDP leaders who will raise awareness on COVID-19 in IDP settlements. UNHCR will also provide hygiene kits and PPEs to seven hospitals in Berbera, Bosaso, Garoowe, Hargeisa and Mogadishu for staff providing health care services to 30,000 refugees and asylum-seekers.

In the Americas...

Colombia: UNHCR has donated RHUs for use as health facilities and built hospitals and isolation and contingency areas in Maicao, Riohacha, Cucuta, Bucaramanga, Medellin, Pamplona and Arauca.

Ecuador: UNHCR has supported health authorities with RHUs for medical facilities, triage and other hospital facilities in Tulcan, Imbabura, Julcan, Quito, Santo Domingo and Arenillas.

Trinidad & Tobago: software licenses for the Ministry of Health's Geographic Information Systems have been renewed at their request, which will greatly enhance their ability to conduct contact tracing. An offer to mobilize qualified medical professionals registered with UNHCR who are willing to volunteer was also made to the Ministry of Health along with an offer to provide Refugee Housing Units to boost patient isolation capacity.

In Asia and the Pacific...

Afghanistan: UNHCR is ramping up emergency response for IDP returnees, refugees and host communities, prioritizing provision of personal protection kits and hygiene kits for government and partners, medical equipment, RHUs and tents for hospitals and government institutions, expansion of WASH facilities, awareness raising campaigns, and cash assistance and hygiene kits.

Bangladesh: the health and protection sectors are mitigating risks for older persons through strengthened community engagement, enhanced and targeted messaging on how to protect older persons, and modalities for collection of relief items and provision of health care.

Islamic Republic of Iran: UNHCR is providing essential equipment and medicines to the country's health system and has distributed hygiene and sanitation products to refugee-hosting areas and refugee settlements.

Myanmar: to support the national health response, UNHCR has procured four WHO-designed COVID-19 commodity packages sufficient to support an outbreak of 40,000 people with various degree of treatments, including up to 2,000 in ICU. UNHCR joined with UNOPS, UNICEF and WFP to contribute 10,000 out of a UN-wide contribution of 50,000 COVID-19 test kits. Authorities in Rakhine, Kachin, Kayin and northern Shan states have requested UNHCR support to develop dignified isolation centres and a preventative health response, particularly near the 128 IDP sites. UNHCR support will include construction of isolation centres and PPEs for health workers.

Pakistan: UNHCR has provided 10 fully equipped ambulances and 28 large housing unit facilities to the provincial health departments and disaster management authorities in Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab Provinces.

Across Europe...

In **frontline countries** hosting considerable numbers of refugees and new asylum-seekers, UNHCR is supporting governments in ensuring adequate supplies of hygienic items are readily available.

Greece: UNHCR is moving over 1,000 asylum-seekers at risk of COVID-19 complications out of overcrowded island centres to safer accommodation in apartments and hotels. For people remaining in the centres, UNHCR is increasing medical infrastructure, access to clean water and soap, and information in support of the Government's efforts.

In the Middle East and North Africa...

Syria: some 3,000 vulnerable people received hygiene kits, food baskets and hot meals through community-led initiatives, while another 40 ongoing community-led initiatives will benefit 20,000 people across Syria. Some 30,000 PPEs have been distributed, and nearly 12,000 vulnerable refugees received multi-purpose cash grants.

Lebanon: expansion plans have been finalized and submitted for five public hospitals. Medical equipment for 800 additional hospital beds and 100 additional ICUs is under procurement.

Libya: in support of the national health system, UNHCR provided 200 mattresses, 200 hygiene kits, two prefabricated containers and two generators to Misrata's Corona Crisis Committee, and ambulances to the local healthcare services.

In **many countries around the world**, UNHCR has engaged refugees and internally displaced people in the production of masks, soaps and other hygienic products. In *Kenya* and *Niger*, for example, UNHCR-trained artisans and dressmakers are making dozens of washable and stylish masks per day.

Strengthen risk communication and community engagement, critical protection services, including case management, protection monitoring, GBV and child protection services, and registration

Under this priority, UNHCR has mitigated potential protection risks and ensured continuity of essential protection services, including registration, status determination, documentation, protection counselling, GBV and child protection. It has leveraged existing networks of outreach volunteers and other groups and has worked to prevent, anticipate and address risks of violence, discrimination, marginalization and xenophobia by countering misinformation. UNHCR has also worked to ensure people of concern have access to timely, relevant and accurate information, especially people or communities at heightened risk of discrimination. Some notable successes include the following:

Across Africa...

Angola: refugee journalists have been trained by UNHCR to lead a mobile radio campaign on COVID-19 prevention. Journalists were provided with a speaker and microphone as well as a sound system and motorbike to disseminate messages to different villages in Lovua settlement.

DRC: in refugee-hosting areas, UNCHR is providing mobile phones with SIM cards as well as walkie-talkies to refugees, health centers and focal points to improve community-based communication and report mechanisms.

Nigeria: UNHCR is working with Government entities and community volunteers on COVID-19 messaging. The community is active in providing input and feedback on the relevance of the messages.

Zambia: UNHCR is working with role models such as local musicians to produce COVID-19 prevention radio and social media messages. UNHCR is also organizing local radio messaging in all refugee hosting areas in addition to sending bulk SMS messages on COVID-19 and GBV-prevention. UNHCR donated 10 RHUs to the Ministry of Health.

Across West and Central Africa: communication with communities is being enhanced to provide refugees, IDPs and host communities with relevant, accessible, simplified, easy-to-understand information on COVID-19 and prevention measures to be adopted. As part of this regional effort, the UNHCR Regional Bureau in Dakar and IOM partnered within the framework of the regional Covid-19 Response Risk Communication and Community Engagement working group to launch a [new website](#) in English, French and local languages to support community engagement on the coronavirus. This “no logo” interagency website (which content is validated by WHO, and involving 5 UN agencies, 12 NGOs) is searchable, interactive and provides compiled, categorized graphic, audio, video files adapted to very different audiences that will support community engagement activities around COVID-19.

In the Americas...

Argentina: UNHCR has established 12 support spaces in border areas. Counselling and legal aid continue remotely, and shelter is provided in emergency cases. Of special attention is the work done by the support space in Desaguadero, Bolivia, where UNHCR’s partner and the

Ombudsperson have played a key protection role in events of xenophobia, detentions and irregular border crossings.

Colombia: the Regional Safe Space Network along the Venezuelan provided services to survivors of gender-based violence over the phone and in person in safe shelters.

Ecuador: UNHCR launched HELP ACNUR, a WhatsApp information line. Since its launch on 17 March, some 3,700 cases have been assisted (nearly 80% of whom have been Venezuelans), nearly 6,300 people had registered, and more than 294,000 messages had been sent. Most messages requested information on access to food and food cards. Supported by UNHCR, the Public Defender's Office facilitated remote legal advice on international protection and alternative visas in Sucumbíos province.

In Asia and the Pacific...

Afghanistan: the UNHCR-led protection cluster is supporting the Government at border points with the Islamic Republics of Iran and Pakistan to strengthen registration and monitoring, conduct health briefings, manage large crowds, and ensure proper physical distancing. Although voluntary repatriation of Afghan refugees from the two neighbouring countries has been suspended since 4 March, mass returns driven by destitution are a real possibility.

Bangladesh: following successful testing, UNHCR Bangladesh has shifted to an iris-only (no fingerprint) registration and assistance management strategy.

Malaysia: a local partner has established a mental health support helpline operated by clinical psychologists, and offers 45-minute sessions in Burmese, English, Malay, Persian, Rohingya, and Urdu.

Across Europe...

UNHCR developed [practical recommendations and good practices to address protection concerns in the context of COVID-19 in Europe](#), building on the many existing good practices. Operations strengthened linguistically and culturally appropriate engagement and communications with refugees and asylum-seekers on information on hygiene and other essential measures

Italy: as part of its "ParticipAzione" programme, UNHCR and INTERSOS launched a digital capacity-building innovation platform for refugee-led organizations on topics such as project management, communication, advocacy and international protection during the health crisis. With the ARCI national network, UNHCR runs a toll-free hotline number in 36 languages and a multi-lingual information portal, ensuring refugees and asylum seekers have information on COVID-19, health advisories, regulations and movement restrictions, administrative procedures and available services.

Ukraine: to continue safely delivering services to older persons living in the conflict-affected areas of the east, UNHCR mobilized community networks to provide home-based services and negotiated with a mobile network to provide free phone credits so people can maintain critical contacts.

In the Middle East and North Africa...

Jordan: the latest [Multi-sectoral Rapid Needs Assessment](#) revealed most survey respondents had less than 50 Jordanian dinars left, and only 35% of refugees expected to resume their previous work after the curfew is lifted.

Syria: despite the closure of some 130 community centres, nearly 3,000 outreach volunteers have conducted COVID-19 awareness-raising campaigns reaching more than 97,000 people.

Yemen: UNHCR has gone door to door with refugees and IDPs across the country to raise awareness about COVID-19, and distributed translated informational leaflets.

Gender-based violence and violence against children

Bangladesh: The operation has developed COVID-19-specific materials on GBV prevention and response targeting men and boys, highlighting positive male role models, collaborative responsibilities at home, stress-reduction, and non-violent behavior promotion.

DRC: UNHCR and partners supported community-based protection structures working on GBV awareness and organized solidarity initiatives for IDPs and nationals affected by COVID-19. UNHCR and partners have conducted 20 radio talk-shows on the theme of “sexual and gender-based violence and the COVID-19 pandemic” over community radio in Tanganyika Province.

Uganda: Restriction on movements have increased the level of GBV, with UNHCR and partners introducing mitigating measures. For example, the interagency Feedback, Referral and Resolution Mechanism helpline is operated with agents speaking 15 different languages. It has a network of partners and UNHCR focal points who receive referrals from the system and respond to queries or requests received. Since mid-March 2020, the helpline has seen an upward trend in the number of calls and queries received, which was anticipated, and measures have been put in place to respond adequately.

Ecuador: Hotlines have been activated by UNHCR partners to support people at risk or survivors of GBV. Humanitarian assistance is also being expanded to ensure women meet their basic needs while also aiming to help diminish tensions within the household.

Mexico: An information campaign on GBV risks has been developed for instant messaging (WhatsApp), online and print.

Greece: UNHCR also supported refugees in a GBV prevention WhatsApp group who serve as focal points for referrals during the lockdown.

Ramp up cash assistance, reinforcing shelters, and provide core relief items in congested collective settings, including urban contexts

Under this priority, UNHCR has provided core relief items and cash-assistance, including through use of digital and innovative solutions. To reduce density and overcrowded living conditions, it has improved shelter and settlement conditions, and improved health infrastructure especially in high-density living conditions most at risk from a spread of COVID-19. UNHCR has also coordinated interventions in camps and camp-like settings ensuring provision of services and assistance. Some notable success include:

Across Africa...

Ghana: UNHCR provided three months' worth of cash assistance, and stocked supplies to cover six months of supplementary feeding for those suffering from malnutrition. Maintaining a stock is essential considering the risk of price hikes and scarcity as a result of movement restrictions in the region.

Niger: UNHCR and partners have been identifying overcrowded sites and initiated site planning respecting necessary distancing between shelters. In Sayam Forage camp, an additional transit center is being established. Support is also being provided to authorities to set up isolation cells.

Nigeria: UNHCR continues efforts to decongest overcrowded camps and settlements, working with UNDP to help with the expansion of camps in Banki, Ngala and Bama. In Banki, UNHCR and UNDP launched the construction of 500 new shelters and a waiting area for new arrivals.

In the Americas...

Mexico: UNHCR is distributing hygiene kits and expanding multipurpose cash assistance by delivering targeted assistance for persons of concern facing protection risks. UNHCR expanded the targeted population to 80% of eligible asylum-seekers. Assistance is being determined through processes now managed remotely. Cash assistance is accessed through a debit card to which UNHCR transfers funds. In locations without UNHCR presence, remote delivery options are implemented.

Guatemala: three months-worth of multipurpose cash assistance has been extended to persons of concern found to be extremely vulnerable to the coronavirus. Distribution of entitlement cards, allowing people of concern to access to the cash assistance at national bank branches, will be carried out following strict physical distancing protocols. The sectors covered will include food, hygiene and, according to vulnerability profile, accommodation needs.

In Asia and the Pacific...

Islamic Republic of Iran: UNHCR is providing one-off cash assistance to 1,000 refugee households with a family member who contracted COVID-19, is at risk (with underlying conditions, older persons) and has suffered immediate income loss combined with having specific protection vulnerabilities, to help them cover basic needs for up to three months.

In Europe...

Ukraine: UNHCR is providing emergency cash assistance to refugees and asylum-seekers who have lost their jobs on informal markets and have no access to social safety nets. With NGO partners, UNHCR provided cash for protection to people with specific needs including those stranded due to the closure of the checkpoints in eastern Ukraine.

In the South Caucasus: needs assessments were undertaken to detect emerging vulnerabilities as a result of containment measures. UNHCR, and has distributed emergency cash assistance, including to newly identified vulnerable households with no access to the state-introduced support schemes.

In the Middle East and North Africa...

Across the region, in operations such as **Algeria, Egypt, Mauritania, Morocco, Tunisia, Libya, Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, Iraq, Syria, Israel** and the **Gulf**, extensive investments have been made to keep in touch with people of concern by remote, while identifying the most vulnerable, and delivering cash or remote protection services. Some particular highlights include:

Egypt: early disbursement of the May multi-purpose cash assistance to 40,449 people was supplemented by an additional 50 Egyptian Pounds per person for hygiene items.

Jordan and Lebanon: tens of thousands of families were provided cash assistance. In **Jordan**, according to the latest [Multi-sectoral Rapid Needs Assessment](#) jointly conducted by WFP, UNICEF, and UNHCR, most survey respondents have less than 50 Jordanian dinars of savings left, and only 35% of refugees responded they expect to resume their previous work after the curfew is lifted.

Morocco: in April, nearly 3,000 most vulnerable families were provided with cash assistance in 50 locations. In coordination with the World Bank, UNHCR has entered into a partnership with the High Commissioner for Planning (HCP), to conduct a household survey on the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 on refugees.

Yemen: UNHCR has also distributed hygiene kits and increased its cash assistance in April to refugees and IDPs to mitigate the risk of job losses and allow beneficiaries to reduce daily movements.

Support education systems

Under this priority, UNHCR has supported schools remain open where health conditions permit, mitigating the risk of COVID-19 spreading through increased access to WASH and health services and information campaigns. It has also expanded investments in online and offline distance education, or alternative solutions. Some notable success include:

In collaboration with the Vodafone Foundation, UNHCR is offering mobile learning through laptops and tablets in **Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania** and **South Sudan**, and in several countries including **Kenya, Malawi** and **Rwanda**, UNHCR and partners are broadcasting lessons to children over the radio.

In **West and Central Africa**, to ensure continuity of learning in a protective environment and to prepare for the reopening of schools throughout the region, UNHCR is working with education

partners to support ministries of education to establish distance education programmes (radio, telephone, television, digital), distribute teaching materials adapted to distance education and align with national programmes, and provide hygiene kits to students. Strategies also aim to adjust education service delivery in response to school closures.

Egypt: UNHCR Egypt Education Unit undertook a phone survey targeting 3,000 refugee families who were receiving education grants to facilitate their children's enrolment in education. Many reported that they were unable to afford the costs of data connectivity to access online learning resources and online examinations at the end of the academic year. In order to address this, UNHCR Egypt's Education Unit agreed with the partner Catholic Relief Services that existing funds allocated for transportation allowances to enable refugee children to attend remedial, extracurricular activities and language classes would be repurposed and paid to families to enable them to purchase the required internet data packages from their internet service provider to support access to online learning and examination activities.

Indonesia: most of the learning centers established by UNHCR Indonesia and its education partners have moved to distance learning modalities using instant messaging and video-conferencing applications such as WhatsApp, Zoom and YouTube. At present, WhatsApp is the most widely used application by both students and teachers. Students access online learning materials with the support of volunteer teachers who prepare and share learning materials in different forms (voice notes, videos, student worksheets) via WhatsApp study groups. These groups are formed by students and volunteer teachers who daily report on student attendance and study activities conducted. Partner staff are also part of the WhatsApp groups to monitor the activities and provide assistance where needed.