

## Weekly Operational Update

15 May 2020

### Update on COVID-19

As of 14 May 2020, Ethiopia tested 45,278 people and reported 272 confirmed COVID-19 cases, five deaths and 108 recoveries. The situation continues to evolve rapidly as the Government's testing capacity increases. Six of the country's nine Regional States as well as Dire Dawa and Addis Ababa City Administrations have reported COVID-19 cases. These are regions and cities hosting a considerable number of refugees and/or IDPs and returnees.

The refugee camps have so far been spared from the infections, but UNHCR and partners continue to intensify efforts to prevent and limit the potential spread of the corona virus among over 761,000 refugees in the country.

The joint Ethiopia Refugee Preparedness and Response Plan (ERPRP) for COVID-19 which was developed by ARRA, UNHCR and WFP was officially released. The Plan provides a guide to drive multi-sectoral and inter-agency humanitarian actions in response to the transmission and impact of the COVID-19 in the Ethiopia refugee operation.



*Refugees in Aysaita camp practicing social/ physical distancing during food distribution as part of the effort to prevent COVID-19*

**Prevention and response:** UNHCR and other humanitarian agencies continue delivering protection and life-saving assistance and services to refugees, while scaling up COVID-19 prevention and response activities. Together with other humanitarian agencies and local and regional authorities, UNHCR is actively engaged to prevent and respond to COVID-19 in IDP affected communities.

Campaigning to inform refugees to keep apart from each other and to wash their hands as often as possible is being intensified together with efforts to increase water supplies to at least 17 litres per person per day. A total of **948 communal and 27,664 household handwashing stations** have been established in the camps. With this and the doubling of the provision of soap from 250g to 500g, there are now some discernible improvements in handwashing habits.

The prevention and response effort is well coordinated with the regional Governments and local administrations where the refugee camps are located. Refugees have been included in regional preparedness and response plans, and are already benefiting from the quarantine centres, case investigation, testing, isolation and case management services set up by the regional health bureaus.

Temporary isolation sites have been set up in each camp to isolate suspected cases of COVID-19. The sites will serve to temporarily accommodate potential suspected cases until they are transferred to the Government designated isolation and treatment centers, in keeping with the national policy. UNHCR, ARRA and other partners, are developing additional isolation and treatment facilities in the camps to treat mild to moderate cases - as part of worst-case scenario if/when the government facilities are overwhelmed. Medicine and medical supplies are being purchased for all refugee camps with some urgently needed items being procured locally within the regions. However, owing to the global supply shortfalls, the sourcing and procurement process is taking longer than usual. A first shipment of masks has arrived in Addis Ababa.

Some 71% (392) of the targeted health personnel and community health volunteers have been trained in all camps except in the Afar Region and the Jijiga camps where sessions have been delayed. The training covers surveillance, Infection Prevention and Control (IPC), case management, safe transport, and Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE). Following the nation-wide closure of schools as part of the fight against COVID-19, over 200,000 refugee students in Ethiopia are currently out of school. UNHCR and partners are advocating with the Ministry of Education and Regional Education Bureaus for the inclusion of refugee students in the Government's distance education programmes. However, there are several practical challenges to implement the programme, including limited radio wave coverage in the camps, insufficient number of radio sets in the refugee camps and the need to translate the radio lessons into languages spoken by the refugees. Over 60,000 solar powered radio sets are needed to receive the daily broadcasted education programmes.

### South Sudanese refugees in Gambella

**Reopening of Pagak:** Weeks after the closure of the Pamdong Reception Centre in Gambella, the Agency for Refugees and Returnees Affairs (ARRA) has reopened the Pagak entry point (Reception Centre) where basic humanitarian assistance will be provided for new arrivals from South Sudan and screening and Level 1 registration will be conducted. UNHCR and ARRA have conducted protection screening for 370 new arrivals. ARRA and the Regional Health Bureau (RHB) with support from UNICEF are providing health care services, while Plan International in collaboration with UNHCR is putting up hand washing facilities and raising awareness on COVID-19 to both refugees and host communities around the centre. OXFAM is providing water trucking until the renovations of the water systems are done.



Refugees in Gambella campaigning to inform refugees to keep apart from each other to prevent awareness on COVID-19 to both

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While expanding services at the centre, UNHCR is currently in discussions with ARRA and the Regional authorities to determine the next step in terms of longer-term accommodation options for the new arrivals. This is an urgent request as the rainy season has started in

Gambella, which is traditionally a flood-prone area, and the existing facilities are already congested and overcrowded.

**Distribution of worksheets and reference materials:** UNHCR’s partner DICAC, distributed worksheets and reference materials for secondary school students in the Refugee Camps in Gambella who are at home due to the closure of schools due to COVID-19. The agency also created a telegram account for students to be able to access these and additional materials in soft copies.

### Refugees in Addis Ababa

**Communication with community:** UNHCR helped establish WhatsApp umbrella groups for refugee volunteers and representatives in Addis Ababa to help disseminate messages related to COVID-19 and for information on regular UNHCR assistance. The refugee leaders and volunteers were provided with phone credit to be able to disseminate the key messages to the refugee community in the city. Health messages received from WHO and the Government of Ethiopia were translated into seven languages that refugees speak in Addis Ababa, and disseminated in text and audio formats. Talented refugees including painters and singers are also using art to spread the word.

**Helpline:** The Helpline that UNHCR established following the temporary closure of the Refugee Reception Centre in Addis Ababa continues to receive calls from refugees. It is open during weekdays, with three phone lines available for refugees to make calls. Supported by interpreters, operators receive the callers’ messages and relay them to the relevant UNHCR Units for follow up. So far, a total of 119 refugees have called the Helpline.

**Special support to vulnerable refugees to cope with COVID-19 situation:** UNHCR distributed ETB 300 each to the most vulnerable urban refugees in Addis Ababa, to cover the costs for hygiene items they may need to help prevent COVID-19. This is in addition to their monthly subsistence allowance which was disbursed for April and May.

**Support to vulnerable refugee children:** The Embassy of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in Addis Ababa today donated 100 food packages to 100 vulnerable refugee children from Eritrea. Each of the food packages contained 10kg of flour, 5kg rice, 5 litres of cooking oil and 1kg of dates. A symbolic distribution of the food items was done in the presence of representatives from the ARRA, UNHCR, the UAE Embassy and JRS. Nearly 11,000 of the over 27,000 refugees in Addis Ababa are children, many of whom require additional support during the COVID-19 pandemic.



*A UNHCR registration expert uses a special mobile phone application to ensure the assistance goes to those who need it most. UNHCR/Adelina Gomez*

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