

Weekly Operational Update

17 June 2020

Update on COVID-19

In a race against time, UNHCR and its partners are supporting refugees and IDPs to protect themselves against COVID-19 infection as Ethiopia continues to experience rapid increases in the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases. As of 17 June 2020, the country reported a total standing at 3,759 coronavirus patients. The number of fatalities has also shown a sharp increase over the last two weeks, reaching 63 from only seven. The official records show that 849 patients have recovered thus far. Overall, Ethiopia has conducted 197,361 laboratory tests throughout the country, with all regions now reporting positive cases. Many of the confirmed cases have not had any interaction with infected individuals, nor recent travel histories, indicating that transmissions are now in the communities.

Prevention and response: While there has been no large-scale outbreak amongst refugees in Ethiopia, ARRA, UNHCR, the Regional Health Bureaus and partners continue all efforts to mitigate transmission of the virus in the country's 26 refugee camps and surrounding host community locations. UNHCR imported and distributed 140,000 masks to healthcare workers and other frontline responders, but there remains a huge gap in the supply of personal protective equipment, medicines and medical supplies.

UNHCR is supporting local and regional authorities in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic in parts of the country that have been affected by conflict-induced displacement. Refugees and IDPs often live in overcrowded conditions where physical distancing is practically impossible; large gatherings have been suspended and refugees are required to maintain physical distancing during food distributions and other activities.

Refugee representatives, Refugee Outreach Volunteers (ROVs), women, youth and child committees and other community structures have been actively engaged in outreach activities and messaging on COVID-19 to ensure that basic preventive measures are observed in the communities. Communication on risks continues to be scaled up to promote stronger community engagement in efforts to prevent the spread of the virus in the refugee camps and the urban settings.

In addition to the distribution of awareness-raising materials, innovative channels of communication with communities on the prevention of COVID-19 are being employed. These include telephone helplines, the use of WhatsApp and Telegram groups, using loudspeakers and local radio, as well as child-friendly information materials which are developed by refugee artists and distributed among the communities. UNHCR, at the same time, has intensified its social media engagement to share key messages while undertaking a mapping of the use of social media among refugee groups. The aim is to continue engagement with them post COVID-19.

UNHCR, ARRA and partners are improving the camp-based temporary isolation centres to meet the required standards and are also extending support to Government quarantine and treatment facilities by helping to furnish the facilities and offer training to healthcare workers. Construction of improved camp-based isolation facilities is currently underway in Hilaweyn, Melkadida, Awbarre and Sheder Refugee Camps which could also serve as treatment facilities given the limited capacities of the Government-designated centres.

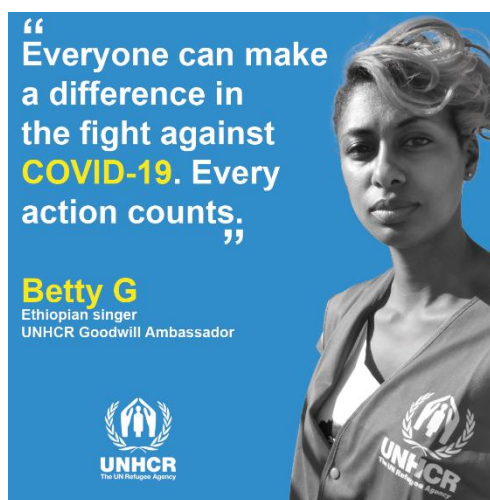
In the Benishangul-Gumuz Region, 54 refugees were quarantined for 14 days and thereof tested negative for the corona virus before they were released to the different camps. There are 43 others who are still in quarantine in the Melkadida camps, Somali Region.

Challenges: UNHCR has, so far, received USD3.4 million out of its financial requirements of USD 34.7 million for the COVID-19 response. The funding shortfall coupled with delayed delivery of international procurement orders for PPEs, medicines and medical supplies are among the key challenges hampering the response efforts. Increases in the prices of basic and essential items for refugees, loss of income as a result of the general economic downturn and disruptions in educational activities are some of the challenges negatively affecting refugees. The extended closure of schools has the potential to adversely affect the development, safety, and well-being of children especially in the camps where schools play an important role in child protection and promoting peaceful coexistence. Management of the porous borders with neighboring countries and informal entry points present real challenges in monitoring the movements of persons of concern.

Other operational updates

World Refugee Day Preparations: World Refugee Day 2020 will be taking place against the backdrop of the global COVID-19 pandemic. This year, the celebration of refugees’ resilience will take a turn from large gatherings, to marking the day “virtually”.

The theme for this year’s World Refugee Day is, **“Everyone Can make a Difference, Every Action Counts”**. The COVID-19 crisis has revealed how interconnected and interdependent the world is. In our shared vulnerability, we have realised that our strength as a human community lies in our solidarity. As the virus and its broader impact spreads rapidly around the world, people and communities everywhere are coming together in an exceptional show of human solidarity and kindness.



Some of the activities planned include: releasing World Refugee Day greetings from refugees all over Ethiopia on UNHCR social media platforms; statements by the leadership of UNHCR and ARRA as well as TV interviews, and a special performance by our Goodwill Ambassador Betty G on her and UNHCR’s social media channels. Follow UNHCR on Twitter: @UNHCREthiopia, and on Facebook: @UNHCREthiopia to join the virtual World Refugee Day celebrations.

World Environment Day: World Environment Day 2020 was marked in all refugee camps across the country on 5 June 2020 under the global theme: **“Biodiversity”**. Tree planting was the main highlight of the celebration this year, as other crowd-creating activities could not be planned due to the COVID-19 situation. Some camps organized an art contest among refugees and presented UNHCR awards to ‘environmental heroes’.



SGBV Safety Audit Tool through mobile app: IRC, UNHCR's partner working on Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) has developed a mobile application for conducting safety audits to map SGBV risks remotely and on a regular basis. Known as Kobo, the application enables humanitarian workers to conduct regular assessments using mobile tablets. IRC offered training in camps in the Benishangul-Gumuz Region to Response Officers to familiarize themselves with the use of new application. Initially, the assessment will be conducted on a bi-weekly basis, with a possibility to move to weekly where the COVID-19 pandemic may require the imposition of a complete lockdown of the camps.

Inter-agency assessment in West-Wollega: UNHCR participated in the inter-agency multi-sectoral assessment organized in West Wollega (Gimbi, Lalo Asabi, Borji Dermenji, Nejo, Leta Sibu, Kiltu Kara and Mene Sibu woredas) from 8-12 June. The assessment focused on the condition of IDPs and secondary returnees from Kamashi zone and the border areas of Oromia hosted in West Wollega. The preliminary findings indicate that around 25,000 individuals (IDP returnees) are currently living in dire conditions without assistance. In addition, insecurity in the zone presents a risk to their psychological and physical well-being exacerbated by limited essential services.



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