

# With you

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Worsening hostilities in Idlib province are putting close to a million people in danger, adding to the prolonged crisis in Syria



United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi meets with Rohingya refugee children in Kutupalong Camp, Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. © UNHCR / Will Swanson

Dear valued donor,

We are living in very uncertain times.

The Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak has now been declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO), and the coming weeks will test our resolve and ability to tackle this global challenge with solidarity.

One thing is clear: The COVID-19 does not discriminate. Everyone is susceptible, including and especially those who have been forced to flee their homes and currently live in conditions of displacement where there is limited access to water, sanitation and hygiene facilities.

The good news is there is time to reverse the course of this disease. Together with competent government authorities, our sister UN agencies, and donors like you, we are doing everything that we can.

In the past, your generosity has made it possible for us to respond to global emergencies like the 9-year Syria crisis, and equip the most vulnerable communities in preparing for natural disasters. In the same way, your committed support is now making sure that we are able to boost preparedness, prevention, and response activities to address the immediate public health needs of displaced families in affected countries, including the Philippines.

Even as we face this global pandemic, because of you, there is hope.

**We will get through this together.**

Wishing you good health,  
Your UNHCR Philippines family

**“If our response to coronavirus is grounded in the principles of public trust, transparency, respect and empathy for the most vulnerable, we will not only uphold the intrinsic rights of every human being.**

**We will be using and building the most effective tools to ensure we can ride out this crisis and learn lessons for the future.”**

*- Filippo Grandi  
UN High Commissioner for Refugees*

# Responding to the Pandemic: Preparedness and Prevention

The Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic is a global challenge that must be addressed through cooperation and international solidarity. World Health Organization (WHO) Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus has called for countries to learn from one another's success, and help protect each other against a common threat.

This the first pandemic caused by a coronavirus. **“We also believe that this is the first pandemic that is able to be controlled,”** Dr. Tedros said.

Refugees and internally displaced families are at the same risk of contracting and transmitting the virus as local populations. States can take measures to help control COVID-19, but these should not discriminate against anyone.

**“Let us all look out for each other, because we are in this together to do the right things with calm and to protect the citizens of the world,”** Dr. Tedros added.

## UNHCR's Response

UNHCR has been closely monitoring the situation and its possible effects on forcibly displaced populations. Everyone – including refugees and asylum seekers – should be able to access health facilities and services in a non-discriminatory manner.

UNHCR's COVID-19 response supports the work of other UN agencies including the WHO and covers the forcibly displaced families and their host communities. UNHCR is working with states to ensure that refugees and displaced families are included in national monitoring and response plans.

To date and based on available evidence, there have been no reports of COVID-19 infections among refugees and asylum seekers. However, the virus can affect anyone and it is our collective responsibility to ensure that the global response includes all people.

With your support, we are putting in place preparedness measures that will protect forcibly displaced families and their host communities before, during, and after this health emergency. UNHCR's current response is drawing from its experience during SARS and avian influenza outbreaks. We are closely working with our partners in order to help in calculating the medical needs and equipment of countries.

## Accessing Water and Sanitation

UNHCR works to ensure all refugees and internally-displaced families are able to access life-saving and essential water facilities and healthcare. This includes easing the access to health services which are pertinent in identifying and combating sicknesses.



UNHCR provided water and sanitation facilities in Kutupalong Camp. ©UNHCR/Areez Tanbeen Rahman

In Iran, UNHCR has partnered with the government to ensure that Afghan and Iraqi refugees in Iran are able to access healthcare through the Universal Public Health Insurance.

Ali Hasehmi is a refugee and garbage collector who was able to avail of important healthcare in order to help his eyesight. As a result, Ali and his family along with tens of thousands of other refugees across Iran have received the specialised treatment they need without having to resort to negative strategies in order to cope, such as loan-taking or pulling children out of school to work.

Lauding this exemplary government-led initiative, UNHCR Representative in Iran, Ivo Freijsen, appeals to the international community to further recognise the government's ongoing commitment to enhancing refugees' access to affordable healthcare and other basic services.

“Not only has the government – as well as Iranian communities – generously hosted such a large refugee population for four decades, Iran continues to work with UNHCR to invest in and to enhance its progressive refugee-related policies under the umbrella of the regional solutions strategy for Afghan refugees,” he said.

**In the Philippines, your support has also enabled us to provide Water, Sanitation & Hygiene facilities to the most remote forcibly displaced communities in Mindanao.**

# CORONAVIRUS (COVID -19)

## Frequently Asked Questions

\* Source: World Health Organization (WHO)

### What is COVID-19?

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses which may cause illness in animals or humans. In humans, several coronaviruses are known to cause **respiratory infections** ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). The most recently discovered coronavirus causes coronavirus disease COVID-19.

**COVID-19** is the infectious disease caused by the most recently discovered coronavirus. This new virus and disease were unknown before the outbreak began in Wuhan, China, in December 2019.

### How does it spread?

People can catch COVID-19 from others who have the virus. The disease can spread from person to person through small droplets from the nose or mouth which are spread when a person with COVID-19 coughs or exhales.



These droplets land on objects and surfaces around the person. Other people then catch COVID-19 by touching these objects or surfaces, then touching their eyes, nose or mouth.



### What are the symptoms?



Dry Cough



Fever



Tiredness

Some patients **may have aches and pains, nasal congestion, runny nose, sore throat or diarrhea**. These symptoms are usually mild and begin gradually. Some people become infected but don't develop any symptoms and don't feel unwell. Most people (about 80%) recover from the disease without needing special treatment.

### Who is at risk?

While the World Health Organization (WHO) is still learning about how COVID-2019 affects people, **older persons** and **persons with pre-existing medical conditions** (such as high blood pressure, heart disease, lung disease, cancer or diabetes) appear to develop serious illness more often than others.

## How can you protect yourself and others?

### Be SAFE



Regularly and thoroughly clean your hands with an alcohol-based hand rub or wash with soap and water.



Maintain at least 1 meter between yourself and one who is coughing or sneezing.



Avoid touching eyes, nose, and mouth.



Follow good respiratory hygiene. Cover your mouth and nose.



Stay home if you feel unwell.



Seek medical attention if you have a fever, cough, or difficulty breathing.

### Be SMART



Follow accurate public health advice from WHO & your local health authority.



Follow the news on latest coronavirus updates.



Always check the source you are getting information from.

Stay informed through credible sources:

\* World Health Organization (WHO): <https://who.int/covid-19>

\* Department of Health (DOH): <https://ncovtracker.doh.gov.ph>

### Be KIND



Show empathy with those affected.



Learn about the disease to assess the risks.



Adopt practical measures to stay safe.

## What preparedness measures have UNHCR taken so far?

### COMMUNICATION

We have communicated with our personnel on several occasions to ensure colleagues are fully informed about the outbreak and advised them to undertake preparedness measures in line with national ministries of health.

### ADVOCACY

UNHCR is advocating for the inclusion of refugees and persons of concerns in the national preparedness and response plans, the calculation of stockpile needs of medicines, vaccines (when it becomes available), personal protective equipment, ancillary pharmaceuticals and supplies, and lab diagnostics.

### COORDINATION

We are also closely coordinating with UN partners at HQ and in the field to ensure a coordinated response and to ensure the needs of refugees and displaced people are fully taken into account in prevention and response activities.

### ASSESSMENT

Our operations have also received specific guidance to ensure they continue assessing the needs at country level and closely coordinate prevention and response measures with other UN agencies and national authorities.

# UNHCR and BARMM: Preparing for emergencies together



In Mindanao, communities are affected by recurrent displacement due to ongoing armed conflict, clan feuds, and natural disasters that perennially impact over a million people. Families who are forced to flee because of conflict become even more vulnerable with the occurrence of natural disasters, like the October 2019 earthquakes. Many are repeatedly displaced and have no regular access to basic social services, physical and legal protection, and natural disasters only put more lives at risk.

To ensure that vulnerable families are given the assistance and protection that they need, part of UNHCR's work involves empowering the partners we work with in humanitarian response. **In 2019, we conducted various capacity building workshops across Mindanao for a total of 711 participants, covering key topics like Emergency Preparedness. You have made this possible.**



## Empowering partners in emergency response

One of the key workshops held is the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) Emergency Preparedness and Response Workshop. Organized with the help of the UNHCR Regional Centre for Emergency Preparedness (eCentre), this was attended

by government representatives from Lanao del Sur and Maguindanao – areas that experience recurring disasters and conflict. Currently, BARMM hosts the biggest number of displaced persons in Mindanao at 60% of the total population.

As highlighted by e-Centre Coordinator Peter Kozelets, “Asia-Pacific is the home of 80% of the population that is forcibly displaced by natural disasters”. The Philippines being prone to calamities, this workshop is paramount in providing support to the BARMM key authorities in integrating protection into its emergency preparedness plan and response.

Participants shared and learned experiences from one another. The workshop helped strengthen networking, coordination, and give a deeper understanding about the centrality of protection. Emergency response is not just about evacuation, search and rescue, and the delivery of material assistance. More importantly, there is a need to protect the affected population, especially the most vulnerable during emergencies: women, children, the elderly, pregnant women, lactating mothers, and persons with disabilities.

## Empowering communities to prepare

UNHCR Philippines also held several capacity building workshops at the barangay level, with the Barangay Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Councils of South Upi (Maguindanao), Maasim (Sarangani), Pigcawayan (North Cotabato), Guindulungan (Maguindanao), and Palimbang (Sultan Kudarat).

Several quick impact projects were also implemented around Mindanao to ensure that even the most remote communities in Mindanao are prepared for disasters.

**With your help, we can ensure that the most vulnerable communities and local partners are empowered to prepare and respond when emergencies occur.**

# 9 Years of the Syria Crisis

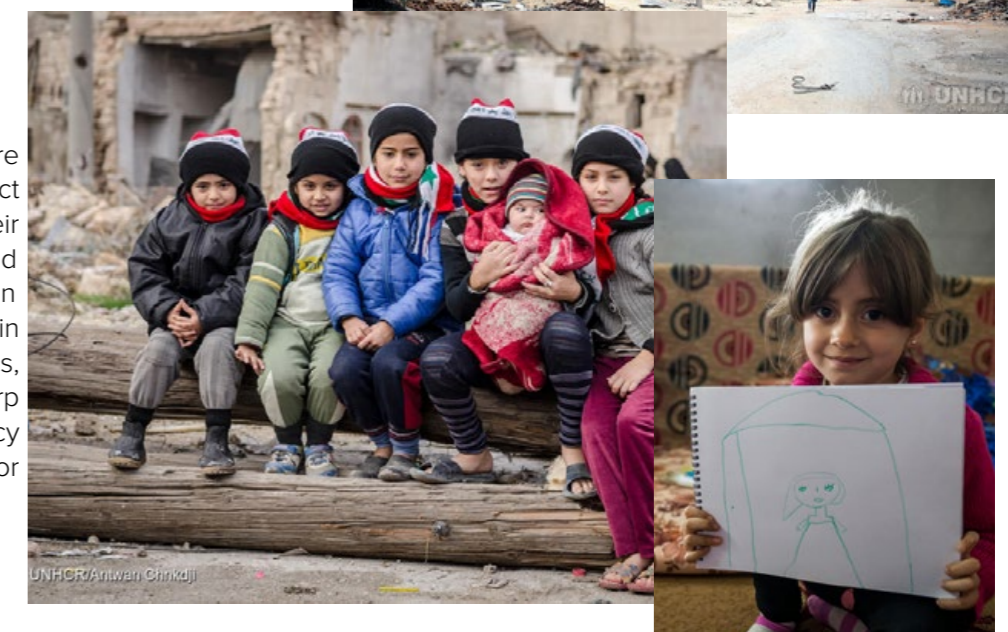
*After 9 years of tragedy, resilience and solidarity, the world must not forget displaced Syrians*

Throughout nine years of crisis, the humanitarian needs of Syrian refugees have risen to staggering scale, severity and complexity. More than 12 million Syrians are living in displacement. Some 6.7 million have found asylum in 127 countries around the world, with the vast majority staying in the region, welcomed by communities in Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Turkey. Another 6.1 million Syrians had to leave their houses, belongings, jobs and loved ones behind to save their lives, but remained within their homeland.

challenge. In recent weeks, a number of humanitarian actors have been killed or injured in attacks. The intensity and scale of displacement has outstripped capacity and more resources and funding are urgently needed.



But in the last couple of months, escalating violence in northwest Syria has forced close to a million people to flee their homes or shelters amidst freezing conditions, compounding the already disastrous humanitarian situation there.



Newly displaced civilians are trapped in the ongoing conflict and desperately fleeing for their lives amidst snow, flooding, and sub-zero temperatures. Women and children are sleeping in unsafe buildings, mosques, and schools. Even the sharp devaluation of their currency has made it more difficult for families to purchase basic commodities.

## A call for safety

UNHCR and other humanitarian partners are providing aid and protection services to those who were forced to flee from their home in northwest Syria. Field staff delivered non-food items (NFIs) and emergency shelter. UNHCR continues to recalibrate their response as more and more people are displaced.

Aid agencies are seeking safe humanitarian access and the safety of field staff. UNHCR aims to reach 275,000 people with emergency aid and support another 84,000 with shelter. In 2019 alone, UNHCR delivered core-relief items such as blankets, mattresses, and tarpaulins and emergency shelter to more than 350,000 people. UNHCR was also able to provide protection services such as counselling and psychosocial support for more than 153,000 people who fled from their homes.

UNHCR and other humanitarian organisations are trying to reach people by all means possible. But given shifting front lines, access to those forced to flee remains a key

*“As this crisis moves into its tenth year, I urge the world not to forget those who remain displaced in Syria, and those who have been forced to flee abroad. We must recognize and support the generosity of the neighbouring countries – one of the greatest acts of solidarity in decades. However, we must stay the course. More is needed.”*

- Filippo Grandi, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees



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The COVID-19 outbreak has now been declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization.

UNHCR is committed to preventing and responding to this international health emergency affecting over 100 countries, including the Philippines.

Due to the fast-changing nature of this crisis, we need to step up our COVID-19 preparedness, prevention, and response measures.


We can't do this without your support.

**Please help today to ensure we are prepared and can do all we can to contain this emergency.**


[donate.unhcr.ph/emergency](https://donate.unhcr.ph/emergency)

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