
Secretary-General Guterres stated, “COVID-19 is the greatest test” since World War II; “it is more than a health crisis. It is a human crisis.” The UN chief released a plan to counter COVID-19, which emphasizes the need for countries to act in concert and outlines ways to suppress transmission of the virus, safeguard people’s lives and their livelihoods, and learn from the crisis to build back.

Provided below is a snapshot of UN efforts overseas to combat COVID-19. This week’s edition includes information on a dramatic increase in the number of coronavirus cases in Rohingya refugee camps in Cox’s Bazar, the full operationalization of all eight WFP Humanitarian Response Hubs, and OHCHR’s work in Tanzania translating COVID-19 prevention and response materials into braille.

This reference document is by no means comprehensive of all the UN's work; it is meant to illustrate the various ways the “UN Family” confronts a global pandemic, based on both its past actions and new methods. This document will be updated regularly but please reach out if you have any questions. For further background, the United Nations has also developed a resource to monitor the latest updates.

UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR)

- The number of COVID-19 cases in Bangladesh has increased dramatically over the past two weeks, to more than 60,000 cases. There are now some 29 confirmed cases among Rohingya refugees in Kutupalong camp, and more than 650 among the Bangladeshi host community in Cox’s Bazar. Sadly, the first COVID-related refugee death was reported on June 2, when an elderly Rohingya man succumbed to the virus. Some 160 refugees are in quarantine, while contact tracing and testing are ongoing.

- To respond to the additional health needs arising from the spread of the virus, UNHCR recently opened two isolation and treatment facilities with a total of 200 beds. The total capacity provided by humanitarian actors for the COVID-19 response will reach 1,100 beds by mid-June, contributing towards the goal of a minimum 1,900 beds in Cox’s Bazar. Modelling projections, however, indicate that as many as 10,000 hospital beds could be needed at the virus’ peak, given the cramped living conditions and severe overcrowding in the refugee camps. Community health care has been strengthened through the recruitment of additional community health workers who will support home-based care of mild to moderate COVID-19 cases should the health facilities become overwhelmed.

Photo: UNHCR. More vital medical equipment has arrived in Cox’s Bazar to aid the response to COVID-19, including oxygen concentrators, syringe pumps, and suction machines.
UN Development Programme (UNDP)

- In Afghanistan, UNDP is working with partners to procure personal protective equipment (PPE) and other health supplies and establish 22 fixed health centers and 10 mobile health teams—which will significantly expand prevention, diagnosis, and management of COVID-19. With financial support from the Global Fund, UNDP has helped strengthen Afghanistan’s laboratory and diagnosis capacity nationally and provided technical assistance to train 25 regional and provincial laboratory staff in the use of high-tech equipment. The country’s central public laboratory can now process 200 to 300 samples every 24 hours, while laboratories can process 150 daily in Herat, 100 in Balkh, 100 to 150 in Nangarhar, and 120 to 150 in Kandahar province.

- In partnership with Ministry of Interior Affairs, UNDP is also operationalizing five new hospital facilities to quarantine, isolate, and treat infected Afghan National Police personnel. These hospitals will receive health equipment and medical supplies and comprise some 300 beds, with quarantine facilities and intensive care units, across five provinces.

World Food Programme (WFP)

- All eight Humanitarian Response Hubs that WFP has planned to support the COVID-19 response are now fully operational. Over 60 flights have taken place as of June 2, transporting 1,788 cubic metres of critical COVID-19 supplies to 46 destinations throughout Africa, Latin America and the Middle East. WFP Executive Director David Beasley recently saw the cargo flights in operation in Addis Ababa last week and had this to say.

- WFP has completed the set-up of field hospital sites in Accra and Addis Ababa, which will shortly be handed over to WHO and health partners for management and staffing.

UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA)

- In Syria, UNRWA has begun its second round of cash distributions covering three months. All registered beneficiaries will receive USD $10 per person as additional assistance during the COVID-19 crisis.

- In Gaza, UNRWA’s second food distribution cycle for 2020, with a caseload of over one million refugees, started on May 17 and is scheduled for completion on July 25.

- In Lebanon, UNRWA continues to provide essential primary health care services including time-sensitive emergency health interventions; vaccination services; reproductive health services; distribution of medications and supplies for chronic and mental health illnesses; and services to prevent the spread of communicable diseases.

- In the West Bank, UNRWA’s Protection and Neutrality team is working to identify ways to reach unserved refugees living in ‘Seam Zone’ locations with no access to health services between the West Bank Barrier and the Green Line.

Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)

- Departmental authorities in La Guajira, Colombia, adopted a protocol on handling of bodies of indigenous people who died of COVID-19, taking into account OHCHR recommendations, including on culturally appropriate measures. In Tanzania, OHCHR supported materials being translated into braille and distributed, enabling persons with visual impairments to have direct access to information on prevention and response to COVID-19.
• In the **Central African Republic**, OHCHR advocacy led the authorities to take preventive measures to protect detainees. The letter of the High Commissioner to the Government of Thailand has been followed by further prisoner releases. In **Somaliland, Somalia**, Advocacy by the Human Rights and Protection Group of UNSOM and the UN Task Force on COVID-19 contributed to a Presidential pardon of 365 prisoners convicted of minor crimes. Advocacy contributed to the release prisoners in **Mali** and **South Sudan**. In **Chile**, the Attorney-General urged prosecutors to consider alternatives to pre-trial detention, unless in exceptional cases, following advocacy by the Regional Office for South America.

**International Organization for Migration (IOM)**

• As part of its COVID-19 response in the **Dominican Republic**, IOM distributed 1,900 food kits to Venezuelan and Haitian migrant organizations in Santo Domingo.

• In **Turkey**, the COVID-19 epidemic has hit migrant and refugee communities in the larger cities such as Istanbul, Izmir and Gaziantep particularly hard. To respond, IOM has expanded its cash assistance program to reach more than 10,000 vulnerable migrant and refugee families.

• In **Yemen**, IOM had a short information video highlighting the key COVID preventive measures play during one of the country’s most watched TV shows. Coverage reached approximately 4,000,000 people each day, for a six day period.

• IOM **Ethiopia** has designed and published an educational COVID-19 coloring book for children, available in English, Amharic and Oromiffa. The coloring book contains easy to understand information about the virus as well as key hygiene and prevention messages. **Since April 1, IOM has reached 840,000 individuals with hygiene awareness promotion through door to door sensitizations, mass mobilization, sensitization during distributions, radio spots and leaflet distributions.**

**UNICEF**

• UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta H. Fore warned that, with COVID-19 spreading across the country, Yemen is now facing a triple catastrophe of conflict, coronavirus, and a cratering economy. **UNICEF is working to confront a crisis on top of a crisis by reaching 16 million people with health and safety messages through TV, radio, and social media, while also supporting health facilities, providing clear water and hygiene kits, and working around the clock to deliver essential supplies.** Executive Director Fore renewed UNICEF’s call for a comprehensive peace settlement and for all parties to put the wellbeing of Yemen's children first.

• UNICEF, together with Save the Children, released new estimates that reveal the economic fallout caused by COVID-19 and the impact this will have on household poverty levels. The analysis highlights that—without urgent action—the number of children living below the national poverty line in low- and middle-income countries could reach 672 million by year-end (a 15% increase).