

## Weekly Operational Update

24 April 2020

### **Update on COVID-19 preparedness and response**

As of 23 April 2020, Ethiopia reported 116 confirmed COVID-19 cases, three deaths and 21 recoveries. No cases of COVID-19 have been reported amongst the refugee population and their host communities thus far, but UNHCR continues to intensify efforts to prevent and limit the potential spread of the corona virus among the nearly 760,000 refugees in the country.

The Representation presented an update to the South Sudan Regional Refugee Response Plan (RRRP) which incorporates UNHCR and its partners' needs to respond to preparedness for the COVID-19 pandemic. UNHCR's advocacy with the Government has resulted in refugees being included in the national and regional COVID-19 response plans. Ethiopia's USD 1.6 billion COVID-19 Multi-Sectoral Preparedness and Response Plan also includes provision of key services to refugees and displaced persons. In the Regional States where most of the refugees are hosted, UNHCR is part of the response efforts led by the Regional Health Bureaus. They provide for refugees' having access to Government-designated quarantine, testing and treatment facilities in the regions. Refugees were also included in a recent COVID-19 screening exercise conducted in the Tigray Region, which also assessed the availability of soap and handwashing facilities. In line with established procedures, 107 refugees who had travelled outside the Region and returned to the camps are in self-isolation in their homes under close monitoring by the Regional Health Bureau.

Intensive awareness raising efforts led by UNHCR, ARRA and partners, in collaboration with community representatives, continue to target refugees and nearby host communities. Messages focus on handwashing and social distancing until a significant change of behavior is observed. Expansion of handwashing facilities, increasing water supply and provision of soap continue in an effort to maintain the required level of personal hygiene. In the Melkadida camps, handwashing facilities have been installed in 100 communal structures and 6,023 households. In the Shire camps, the recently concluded region-wide COVID-19 screening exercise established that 71% of the refugee households in the region have access to handwashing facilities. In Sheder camp, near Jijiga, every household has a handwashing station, enough water and three months' supply of soap. In the Gambella Region, five of the seven camps have access to adequate water. UNHCR and partners are trucking water to Tierkidi and Nguenyiel camps to meet the required needs.

While meetings and other crowd-creating situations and facilities have been suspended, innovative food distribution modalities are being adopted. Fewer refugees are issued with food rations at the same time - to allow for social distancing.

Training of health personnel is ongoing focusing on strengthening surveillance, coordination and leadership, case management, case identification, reporting, referral systems and crisis communication. Temporary isolation sites have been prepared in each camp to isolate potential suspected cases of COVID-19 pending their transfer to Government-designated isolation and treatment centers. Most of the Government-designated quarantine and treatment centers are, however, not adequately equipped, and UNHCR is finding ways to support them. In East Wollega Zone, Oromia Region, where UNHCR is supporting the Government in the response to Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and returnees, UNHCR donated 10,000 pieces of soap, 200 sleeping mats and 200 blankets to three isolation centres. Six such facilities in West Wollega Zone have requested similar support, and an ambulance.

Crowded living conditions, under-resourced and understaffed medical facilities, lack of personal protection equipment (PPE) and shortage of water in some camps are some of the challenges which UNHCR and its partners are working towards addressing. Pending the delivery of PPEs through international procurement processes, UNHCR is covering immediate needs through local purchase of protective items such as facemasks, gloves and sanitizers.

In Mai Aini camp in the Tigray Region, UNHCR's partner, JRS, has come up with an innovative approach to address the limited availability of facemasks in and outside the camp. Refugee women, who were trained on how to produce facemasks, are engaged in the trial production of the PPE for sale at affordable prices.

### **UNHCR support to the health office and vulnerable individuals in the Wollegas**

UNHCR donated essential aid items consisting of 5,000 pieces of soap, 650 sleeping mats, 500 mosquito nets, 22 buckets, 650 blankets, 14 kitchen sets, and 22 jerrycans to the West Wollega Zonal health office, and to 12 vulnerable internally displaced families, comprised of 41 individuals. In addition, UNHCR distributed 658 pieces of soap, 283 sleeping mats, 88 mosquito nets, 51 buckets, 220 blankets, 65 kitchen sets and 51 jerrycans to 55 vulnerable families composed of 255 individuals in Lalisa Bareeda Kebele, Sasiga Woreda in East Wollega. Similar consignments were delivered to Belojeganfoy Woreda, Digidiga Kebele of Kamashi Zone for distribution to vulnerable households.



*UNHCR distributes aid items in Gimbi, West Wollega Zone of Oromia Region*

### **Support to quarantine center for returnees**

As part of its inter-agency commitments to the COVID-19 situation, UNHCR is in the process of donating 1,000 blankets, 2,000 pieces of soap and 200 kitchen sets valued at approximately USD 8,000 to the quarantine facilities in Addis Ababa. The items will be channeled through IOM in support of Ethiopian deportees who are required to remain in mandatory 14-day quarantine at the centers. This is in addition to similar contribution which was extended to the quarantine center housing Ethiopian returnees in Moyale.

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