

South Sudan

COVID-19 Update #6

21 May – 05 June 2020



The finalists of a children's COVID-19 awareness drawing contest in Malakal POC. The contest was developed to encourage engagement with the messaging. The drawings will be used during awareness raising activities.

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Key Developments

- There are 1,317 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in South Sudan, and 6 recoveries and 14 deaths. The majority of cases are linked to local transmissions.
- On 03 June, the chair of the National COVID-19 Task Force, VP Hussein Abdelbagi Akol, issued a statement on the reorganization and restructure of the Task Force during the transitional process from the High-Level Task Force. [\[LINK\]](#) In addition, the Ministry of Health has suspended the issuance of COVID-19 negative certificates until further notice.
- On May 26, the National COVID-19 Taskforce instructed the National laboratory to immediately suspend the collection and testing of COVID-19 samples from individuals seeking testing on a voluntary basis and those for travel clearance, for one week. This is in an effort to enable the national laboratory to clear the backlog.
- The increase of incidents of inter-communal violence, cattle raiding, revenge killings and armed violence throughout the country has had a negative impact on the protection of civilians with threats to life, abductions, GBV and displacement. The ability for those newly

displaced to access health and WASH facilities are limited and observing physical distancing is difficult. This has also hindered humanitarian interventions and COVID-19 preparedness and response.

- Conflict along the border of the Central African Republic and Democratic Republic of the Congo has prompted new arrivals of people seeking asylum in South Sudan. Working with the Commission for Refugee Affairs, access to asylum has been maintained with COVID-19 precautionary measures taken.

COVID-19 Coordination

- UNHCR is participating in the National COVID-19 Steering Committee and its various technical working groups, headed by the Ministry of Health (MoH) and the World Health Organization (WHO). Recent discussions on the review of the South Sudan National COVID-19 Response Plan have been centered around laboratory testing (delays, availability, inconsistencies of test results, back-log), infection prevention and control, provision of food for COVID-19 cases and points of entry. Among the challenges discussed are rumors and misinformation, and shortage of personal protective equipment (PPE).
- In support to national preparedness and response efforts, UNHCR and partners are implementing their contextualized COVID-19 contingency plan focused on refugee-hosting areas as well as operations continuity plans to ensure the continued delivery of critical life-saving activities and protection interventions. In refugee hosting areas, the local COVID-19 Task Forces are co-chaired by local authorities and UNHCR.
 - In Jamjang, the refugee leadership in Ajuong Thok and Pamir refugee camps have organized their own COVID-19 task force to better coordinate the response within their communities.
- UNHCR is working closely with its partners to share information, adapt and enhance the delivery of activities to refugees, IDPs, refugee returnees and host communities. UNHCR, partners, and local health authorities are adapting the national plan to the local refugee contexts which includes mass communication and community engagement (including refugee hosting communities).



Relief International's Judith Aya trains lead mothers and health promoters in Gendrassa refugee camp on how to effectively pass messages on COVID-19 onto their community and other mothers.
 © RI/Data Stanley

COVID-19 Preparedness

- UNHCR together with the State Level task forces and COVID-19 technical working groups have strengthened prevention measures to ensure refugees, internally displaced persons, spontaneous refugees returnees and service providers in refugee hosting areas are reached with COVID-19 prevention messages. Prevention activities include screening, installation of handwashing stations, and risk communication through radio messaging, use of posters and pictorials in

communities with low literacy levels and where specific needs related to hearing impairment exist.

- COVID-19 awareness messaging is being mainstreamed across UNHCR's regular programming, including protection monitoring interventions. Despite the continued efforts, compliance to physical distancing measures is low, especially in IDP sites.
- The national public health laboratory is currently the only testing facility in the country, with a large backlog of over 3,500 that has delayed movement of humanitarians and cargo. In this regard, the Ministry of Health and WHO have procured cartridges to modify GeneXpert machines to test COVID-19 samples, to increase and decentralize testing capabilities. Two machines in the refugee hosting areas are currently included in the plan (Bunj hospital and Pamir primary health centre). Makpandu refugee camp primary health centre, Pariang State hospital and Yei Civil hospital will receive a modification cartridge after their GeneXpert machine has been installed.
- In Pariang, the Ministry of Health and the WHO organized a training for 14 health workers from the State and refugee operation. A six-member rapid response team (RRT) was established. The RRT was trained on sample collection and how referrals to Juba will work.
- Rehabilitation of health facilities and preparation of additional in-patient capacity in refugee camps and referral hospitals have been ongoing. So far, the bed capacity in South Sudan refugee operation increased from 135 bed at the beginning of May to 222 beds at the beginning of June.
- Despite the Government's launch of school radio programs to continue education, the majority of refugee and IDP households do not own radios. In refugee hosting areas, UNHCR, partners and teachers in Maban and Yei are working to create at home learning packets for students including for those in the host community.
- UNHCR and partner CARE International, distributed 1,030 boxes of soap to 55,282 host community members at seventeen distribution locations and 565 boxes of soap to 42,171 refugees in Yida settlement.
- In Gorom refugee settlement, 1,971 refugees benefited from a general non-food item distribution. Items distributed included: blankets, kitchen sets, sleeping mats, jerry-cans, buckets and mosquito nets.

Protection

- To date there have been no restrictions on access to asylum. The observation of COVID-19 precautionary measures in assistance has been provided to refugees, spontaneous refugee returnees, internally displaced persons as well as asylum seekers.
- Planning for the resumption of relocation of new arrivals and Yida residual caseload has been agreed to by the government and partners. National guidelines provided by the COVID-19 Steering Committee are adhered to at the transit center in Yida as well as upon arrival in refugee camps in Jamjang. In Yambio, similar measures have been put in place for asylum seekers who recently arrived from CAR and DRC.
- Protection monitoring and response has been strengthened due to increasing protection risks reported in refugee hosting areas and IDP sites. With closure of schools including children centers; an increase in child labor and child marriages in refugee sites in Jamjang has been reported.

- Access to justice and adjudication of cases in local courts have greatly reduced due to COVID-19 restrictions. UNHCR stepped up engagement with local authorities including requesting enhanced police patrols in Jamjang to address the challenge. In IDP-hosting area in Wau, support was provided to state prisons to facilitate continued court hearings and fast case processing while observing relevant COVID-19 prevention measures.
- Continuation of renewal and replacement of refugee documentation as well as remote newborn registration has begun to ensure access to assistance is not hindered.
- Pamir and Ajuong Thok Refugee Camp Taskforces have identified focal points for coordinating child protection and SGBV concerns with humanitarian staff. In addition, 22 refugees with visual impairments and 26 refugees with serious hearing impairments were identified by the Pamir Refugee Camp Taskforce and assisted with tailored COVID-19 information.



UNHCR demonstrates how to use the handwashing stations during a donation of COVID preparedness items to one of the Wau prisons.

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Challenges

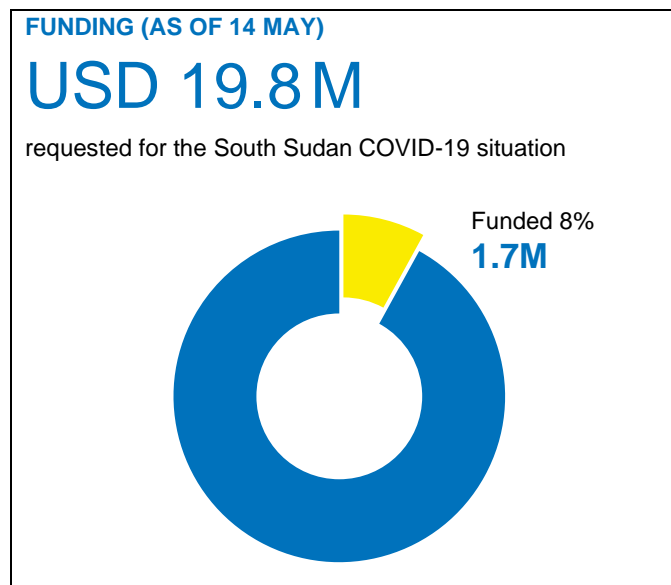
- Ongoing insecurity due to intercommunal violence, clashes and cattle rustling is limiting COVID-19 and humanitarian response to those areas. Populations will have limited access to water, sanitation and hygiene and health services.
- There is a lack of COVID-19 related items available in-country, most urgently PPEs to ensure the safety of health workers in UNHCR-supported facilities and other frontline workers and staff. The disruption of the regional and global supply chain is posing significant challenges and impacting the prepositioning of PPEs, medical supplies and WASH items. The first consignment of 100,000 masks has arrived in Juba and was delivered to staff and partners in field locations.
- With the onset of the rainy season, several locations anticipate flooding to occur. Major roads are now cut-off and all prepositioning of COVID-19-related items, as well as regular programme, will have to be done by air, increasing the costs of COVID-19 preparedness and response exponentially.
- Movement of humanitarian personnel, both in-country and internationally, has been a challenge with pre and post-travel quarantining as well as testing requirements, the latter having been recently lifted.

Business and Operations Continuity Plan

UNHCR will be staying and delivering for refugees, asylum seekers, refugee returnees, IDPs and those at risk of statelessness during COVID-19.

- UNHCR, through essential movements and continued coordination with partners and community-based networks, is ensuring lifesaving and protection assistance to its persons of concern continues with the necessary COVID-19 precautionary measures in place.
- Following the first confirmed cases of COVID-19 in South Sudan, UNHCR's offices are implementing their Business Continuity Plans. Implementation is tailored to local

conditions and situations taking into account staff safety, health and security as well as operations continuity. In locations where national staff live outside UNHCR guesthouses, the unreliability of internet data and power sources remain a challenge.



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LINKS

[UNHCR South Sudan Portal](#) | [UNHCR South Sudan FB page](#) | [UNHCR South Sudan Situation Portal](#)