

East and Horn of Africa, and the Great Lakes Region

3-8 April 2020

 **4.6** MILLION
REFUGEES & ASYLUM-SEEKERS

 **8.1** MILLION
INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS

 **451,000**
REFUGEE RETURNEES

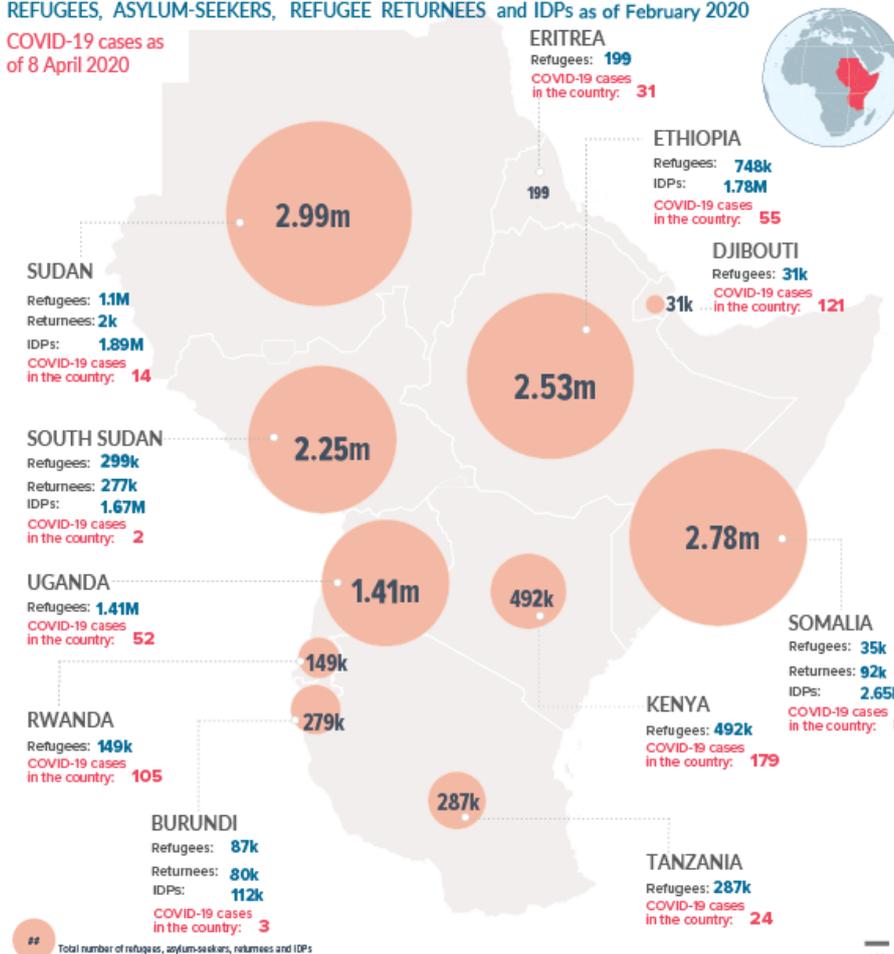
594 CONFIRMED
COVID-19 CASES
IN HOSTING COUNTRIES

Overview

The COVID-19 situation in the East and Horn of Africa, and the Great Lakes region continues to evolve rapidly, with new cases reported each day since 13 March 2020. As of 8 April, there were 594 confirmed COVID-19 cases in all countries covered by UNHCR's EHAGL Regional Bureau. On 6 April, the Government of **South Sudan** confirmed its first case. Although there have been no confirmed cases among UNHCR's population of concern so far, 4.6 million refugees and 8.1 million IDPs and their host communities remain at risk. The need for preparedness is urgent. Cases of local transmission have been reported in all countries except South Sudan. Measures by governments in the region to contain the spread of COVID-19 are evolving rapidly, with frequent changes to border/entry restrictions or limitations on internal movement. New developments this week included the declaration on 8 April of a state of emergency in **Ethiopia** in response to COVID-19 as the number of cases continue to rise. Restrictions of movements between counties in **Kenya** was announced on 6 April as well as the extensions of the suspension of all commercial international flights for another 30 days. On 3 April, **Burundi** also extended the suspension of international flights until 28 April.

REFUGEES, ASYLUM-SEEKERS, REFUGEE RETURNEES and IDPs as of February 2020

COVID-19 cases as of 8 April 2020



Key Measures Taken

- Promoting inclusion of refugees, internally displaced persons and stateless people in national preparedness and response measures
- Undertaking contingency planning and preparedness activities
- Monitoring protection impacts
- Adapting Business and Operational Continuity Plans to Stay and Deliver

COVID-19 Case information: WHO, John Hopkins University, Ministries of Health, Governments.
 Note: COVID-19 cases refer to total cases reported in the countries of asylum.

Operational update - preparedness and response

Operations in the region continue to work closely with partners to share information and adapt the delivery of assistance to refugees, IDPs and host communities within the context of the various containment measures put in place by Governments in the region. In coordination with local health authorities, national preparedness plans are being applied in local refugee and IDP contexts with a strong focus on mass communication and community engagement (including refugee hosting communities).

Protection

The closure of borders is having an impact on access to asylum in the region. However, in countries like **South Sudan**, the Commission for Refugee Affairs (CRA) reaffirmed that refugees will have access to territory and asylum during the COVID-19 pandemic. UNHCR and CRA agreed on the need to identify quarantine facilities at field locations with international borders and the need to equip the facilities with required material and tools where possible. UNHCR has been working closely with IOM and WHO, offering logistics or other support to prioritize the establishment of screening and quarantine facilities at entry points used most frequently by asylum seekers.

While most repatriation activities have been suspended, voluntary repatriation of Burundian refugees from **Tanzania** has continued – with 425 Burundians returning on 2 April. Additional health screening measures and protocols have been put in place while UNHCR and partners continue to dialogue with the two governments to determine the way forward.

Within the region, UNHCR is working to build the capacity of IDP leaders on COVID-19. In **Somalia**, leaders will further educate displaced persons in IDP sites on prevention and response measures. High-risk IDP sites are being targeted for decongestion and upgrading of shelter and provision of non-food items (NFI), with plans for UNHCR to support 27,600 IDPs living in high density IDP sites subject to resources and availability of additional land.

The closure of markets due to COVID-19 has led to high demand for food items. In **Uganda**, there is an increase in price of commodities amidst the WFP food ration cut (in-kind and cash). Refugee leaders anticipate that it will lead to spontaneous returns to South Sudan in search of food.

Cash Assistance - Highlight on Emerging Field Practices

UNHCR preparedness and response to COVID-19 is comprehensive including cash assistance as an efficient means of getting assistance to people quickly, empowering families to deal with the crisis and meet their basic needs, and mitigating some of the negative socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 on communities.

In **Somalia**, UNHCR is reducing crowds in distribution sites where in some locations only 20 households are paid in the morning and 20 in the afternoon. The financial service provider (FSP) has ensured maximum hygiene is maintained at distribution, including handwashing materials and hand sanitizers in addition to the social and physical distancing protocols; and there is continuous contact between UNHCR and the FSP to adjust to the quickly evolving situation. The

11 countries have closed their borders, impacting access to asylum.

All countries in the East and Horn of Africa, and the Great Lakes region now have confirmed cases of COVID-19.

Capacity building of IDP populations and IDP leaders is ongoing to educate their communities on prevention and response measures.



Temperature check during food distribution in Kavumu refugee camp, Burundi. UNHCR/E. Manirakiza

operation is also planning to advance payments of 2-3 months to reduce crowds at cash distributions. As a priority, mobile money is being pursued and will start once agreement is reached with the FSP. Providing cash through digital means is the best option in this context as it reduces crowds, which is already being restricted by the government. Given that vulnerability assessments have been cancelled, UNHCR is using data from previous data collection exercises to define eligibility. Close market monitoring is also undertaken in collaboration with the cash working group, and grant size will be adjusted based on potential inflation of prices.

In **Rwanda**, UNHCR is in discussion with the FSP to increase the amount of point of sales (POS) devices in the camps to promote the use of digital cash, with no extra cost to the beneficiaries. Refugees now have bank accounts with cards, but they often cash out rapidly after the distribution. The operation is also exploring making the cards contactless during the pandemic to further minimize contact. Seeing the risk of COVID-19 transmission through handling physical banknotes coupled with liquidity issues in the camps, a move to digital payments is an effective response measures. A toll-free feedback mechanism through calls and SMS was also put in place in collaboration with partners. Apart from issues related to cash assistance, refugees can also report back price increases. UNHCR is also planning for a new cash grant in urban settings to mitigate the economic impact of COVID-19 on urban refugees. This population is currently relying on informal jobs and is thus heavily impacted by the movement restrictions, resulting in a range of vulnerabilities.



Digital payments in Uganda. UNHCR/A. de Valon

of the cash provided accordingly. This preparedness measure aims to prevent refugees from cash withdrawal challenges linked to restrictions, and access to the markets and sufficient goods and services. Above all, it is anticipated that cash recipients will stay at home and hence protect themselves, their families and communities from exposure to COVID-19.

In **Burundi**, following a recent mobile money pilot, UNHCR and partners tested a new model for Post Distribution Monitoring (PDM), conducting remote PDM interviews by telephone. UNHCR ensured that enumerators were provided with the appropriate tools: telephones, headphones, laptops/tablets, and organized calling lists. With UNHCR's corporate PDM tool as a basis, UNHCR adapted the Kobo forms and trained the enumerators. Interviews were conducted with 30% of the beneficiaries having received a phone and a cash transfer during the pilot. Pursuing remote PDMs proved to save time, reduce costs and cut fuel and other logistics. Now under the tightening Business Continuity Plan, this innovation provided a practical means to continue monitoring while reducing transmission risk of COVID-19. As physical access to persons of concern reduces across the world, remote PDMs may provide a viable option for many operations.

UNHCR **Ethiopia** is adjusting its cash assistance to refugees in urban settings. The transfer value is being increased to cover additional soap, sanitizer and water. The transfer will include a two-month advance payment with a top-up coupled with information campaigns to ensure that refugee cash recipients are aware of the COVID-related impacts and plan the use

Livelihoods

With the continuation of containment measures in place across the EHAGL region, operations are working closely with INGOs, development and private sector partners to identify best ways to adapt existing livelihoods projects.

Particular attention is placed on the protection of existing livelihoods assets, to prevent negative coping strategies such as the sale of productive assets that would have long term devastating effects on the wellbeing of families.

Another key topic is the increased production of food given the disruptions of national and global supply chains. Operations such as **Kenya** are responding to this crisis in other innovative ways, producing liquid soap and medically approved face masks by refugee artisans, responding thereby to national shortages and ensuring a continuation of income streams.

Photo: Medical masks samples with cloth material being made at the MADE51 Business Centre in Kalobeyei, Kenya. AAHI/E.Ekure



Financial Inclusion

Covid-19 has affected refugee clients of Financial Services Providers, including microfinance institutions (MFIs), which have developed measures to adapt to clients' circumstances. In **Kenya**, one of the MFIs that started to extend loans to refugees last year is restructuring loan repayment and allowing flexible payments, whereby clients pay what/when they can after catering for their essential needs. Refugee business clients have also benefited from the MFI making the deliberate choice to continue issuing loans to those who have successfully repaid in the past. In **Uganda**, MFIs serving refugees as part of the SIDA, Grameen Crédit Agricole Foundation and UNHCR partnership have also taken specific measures including pausing the on-boarding of new clients, careful loan disbursements, and putting on hold both loan disbursements and collection for some clients until further notice.

Inter-agency Coordination

Operations are working closely with UN Country Teams, Resident Coordinators and the World Health Organization on crisis management, personnel and business continuity arrangements, programme criticality, preparedness, and response planning. Existing refugee response coordination structures continue to function, through virtual communication where relevant.

At the regional level UNHCR is engaged with the Regional Humanitarian Partners Team to map the impact on humanitarian operations and coordinate on advocacy messaging, as well as with many sectoral groups including health, nutrition, education, and child protection which have been developing context specific inter-agency guidance on programming during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Funding needs

On 25 March, the UN launched an inter-agency [Global Humanitarian Response Plan](#) seeking US\$2.01 billion, which includes US\$255 million for initial, prioritized requirements in UNHCR's operations in affected countries. Monthly updates to the appeal are expected, including the addition of increased partner requirements.

USD 255 million requested by UNHCR in the inter-agency Global Humanitarian Response Plan on 25 March

On 27 March, UNHCR issued an [Emergency Appeal](#) providing more details on the initial \$255 million requirements in the GHRP, including a country and sectoral breakdown. Within the appeal, \$15 million has been requested for eight countries in the East and Horn and Great Lakes Region.

USD 15 million requested for 8 countries the East and Horn of Africa and Great Lakes region on 27 March

Activities covered by the appeal – and already underway – include life-saving interventions across a number of sectors: procurement of medical supplies and personal protective equipment; establishing shelter and other quarantine arrangements; upgrading water, sanitation and hygiene; and health services; emergency shelter; communications with communities; and adapting registration, refugee status determination and other protection programmes to the changing circumstances.

UNHCR Briefing Note: [UNHCR stepping up coronavirus prevention measures for displaced across East, Horn and Great Lakes region of Africa](#)

[Live blog](#) - Refugees in the COVID-19 crisis.

[Relevant broadcast-quality footage](#) is available for download on UNHCR's content platform Refugees Media.

Click [here](#) to access a **live dashboard** providing information on COVID-19 cases in the region, as well as travel restrictions and movement and border controls put in place by Governments.

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