

## Weekly Operational Update

29 May 2020

### Update on COVID-19

During the past week, Ethiopia has seen a spike in the number of confirmed COVID-19 case with 539 new infections reported- bringing the cumulative total to 968 cases. Overall, 197 patients have recovered while there have been eight fatalities reported. So far, Ethiopia has tested a total of 101,581 individuals for the coronavirus. All regions, except Gambella have reported positive cases.

As of today, there are no confirmed coronavirus infections in the camps and other locations sheltering refugees and asylum seekers. The Agency for Refugees and Returnees Affairs (ARRA), UNHCR and partners continue to intensify efforts to prevent and limit the virus from spreading to the Refugee Camps hosting most of the over 761,000 refugees in the country. UNHCR is also supporting local and regional authorities in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic in parts of the country that have been affected by conflict-induced displacement situations.

**Prevention and response:** Humanitarian agencies led by ARRA and UNHCR continue to



*Refugees in camps in the Benishangul-Gumuz Region lining up for food distribution, keeping a reasonable distance from each other. UNHCR*

build on the early actions to prevent the spread of coronavirus in the Refugee Camps while ensuring unhindered delivery of regular protection and life-saving assistance to persons of concern. Community sensitization about the disease continues in the camps as well as in the urban locations where refugees and asylum seekers are hosted. Supply of soap and water have been enhanced and services continue to be delivered in a manner that considers the physical distancing requirements. Hygiene promotion is a day-to-day activity in the camps facilitated by the expansion of handwashing facilities. For example, 108 communal and 10,639 household handwashing facilities have been set up in the Melkadida camps while those in Gambella have 306 communal and 13,286 household handwashing stations. Thousands of handwashing stations have been installed in camps in the other regions as well to instill handwashing behavior as a way to prevent COVID-19 and other communicable diseases.

Water supplies are being constantly improved including through water trucking to mitigate shortages. In Tierkidi and Nguenyiel camps in Gambella, UNHCR, in collaboration with UNICEF and Oxfam, is trucking an average of 540,000 litres of water per day from an emergency water treatment plant in Itang along the Baro river. In Jijiga, additional water tanks have been installed in all three camps to meet the growing demand for water.

**Isolation and quarantine centers:**

Temporary facilities have been designated in each camp to isolate suspected cases of COVID-19, pending their transfer to the Government designated isolation and treatment centers. As most of these spaces are within existing structures, UNHCR, ARRA and other partners have started construction of semi-permanent structures that meet the required standards. Construction of such facilities is currently underway in Hilaweyn, Melkadida, Awbarre and Sheder Refugee Camps which will also serve as



*Ongoing construction work for the new isolation areas in Melkadida refugee camp. UNHCR/Giulia Naboni*

treatment facilities given the limited capacities of the Government-designated centres. Post COVID-19, the new structures can be used as additional treatment rooms or training centres. UNHCR is working with ARRA to furnish the three quarantine centres in the Melkadida camps that were established to isolate individuals arriving from outside the region.

In camps in the Tigray Region, UNHCR and ARRA are working to upgrade the capacities of the camp-based isolation and quarantine facilities to accommodate 100 beds each. The plan also foresees reinforcement of Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) services across these facilities through construction of additional latrines and showers as well as installation of hand washing facilities and water tanks.

Humanitarian agencies continue to support the provision of WASH services to the main isolation centre at Gambella University. During the week, they have helped produce 44,000 liters of water from the emergency surface water treatment plant at the University for use in the isolation center. Temporary shower heads have been installed and gender-segregated latrine and shower stances constructed. The agencies are providing WASH supplies to the centre including soap, sanitizers, chemicals, hygiene kits, water tanks, buckets and jerricans.

**Training:** Refugee leaders, community outreach agents, healthcare, WASH and nutrition personnel in the Refugee Camps have all been provided with orientation and training on COVID -19, and what their respective roles and responsibilities would be in the event of a reported case. Healthcare personnel were trained on inter alia surveillance, contact tracing and active case finding.

**Challenges:** Delays in the delivery of medicines and medical supplies from the international market and lack of adequate personal protective equipment (PPEs) for health care workers and first responders are among the key challenges in managing the risks associated with the spread of Coronavirus. Moreover, refugees in many of the camps indicate that the pandemic has negatively affected their food and economic security, with some mentioning that opportunities for maintaining their self-reliance through income earned by working as daily laborers are now limited due to COVID-19. Others who run small-scale businesses have also reported significant reductions in business opportunities for them. Management of the porous borders with neighboring countries and informal entry points also present a real challenge.

**Other operational updates**

**UNHCR donates two ambulances:** UNHCR donated two ambulances to the West Guji Zonal Administration and the East Wollega Disaster Risk Management Office to support their effort



*Deputy Head of West Guji Administration poses for photo with the UNHCR Representative in Ethiopia, with the ambulance on the background. UNHCR/Adelina Gomez*

to prevent and respond to COVID-19. UNHCR has offices in Bule-Hora and Nekemte, coordinating the agency's work to protect and assist conflict-affected displaced and returned communities in Gedeo, in SNNP, and West Guji and Wollega in Oromia Regions. The Agency has been and continues to work closely with the authorities to curtail the spread of coronavirus in these areas.

Ms. Ann Encontre, the UNHCR Representative in Ethiopia, presented the keys to one of the ambulances to the Deputy Head of the West Guji Zonal Administration during a handover ceremony in Addis Ababa. Ms. Encontre stated that the donation was given as a goodwill gesture from UNHCR to support the Government's effort to prevent coronavirus from infecting the displaced and other sections of the communities. The Deputy Head of the Guji Zonal Administration, Mr. Hotesa Galgalo, thanked UNHCR for the donation which he said will go a long way in supporting the Zonal Administration's ongoing effort to curb the spread of the virus. He expressed his appreciation to UNHCR for its continued support including the construction of an SGBV centre in Bule-Hora. The other ambulance will be dispatched to the East Wollega Disaster Risk Management Office.

**Farming activities resume after floods:** As the floods recede, farmers from the refugee and host communities in the Melkadida camps have started cleaning the canals and pump houses and replanting the damaged crop fields. Heavy downpours and floods have recently damaged most of the irrigation schemes in the area, destroying up to 80% of the cropland. UNHCR technical staff are supporting cooperatives to resume activities while also working on a proposal for sustainable solutions to mitigate the impact of flooding in the semi-arid area.

**Partners scale up services at Pagak entry point:** Humanitarian partners have scaled up key services at the Pagak entry point where over 3,500 new arrivals from South Sudan are temporarily sheltered. Oxfam is trucking 40,000 litres of water per day from Itang while working to rehabilitate a nearby shallow well which will eventually eliminate the need for water trucking. GOAL Ethiopia is providing emergency food services, distributing high-energy biscuits and providing hot meals to the new arrivals. Other agencies are also ramping up efforts to expand hygiene and sanitation facilities.

**Distance education in Gambella:** UNHCR's education partner DICAC, continued its pilot distance learning activity in Gambella, reaching 600 grade 12 students in Kule, Tierkidi and Pugnido camps. Given the nation-wide closure of schools, UNHCR recommends that such initiatives are gradually scaled up to reach other grades, starting with Grades 9-11, while developing an effective monitoring system and documenting the lessons learned.

*For further information, please contact:*

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