

South Sudan

COVID-19 Update 7

June 2020



© UNHCR / Hathaimat Purnananda, Pamir, Jamjang county

Key Developments

- There are 2,021 active confirmed cases of COVID-19 in South Sudan, with 333 recoveries and 38 deaths. The majority of cases are linked to local transmissions.
- Following the June 1 declaration of the 11th Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) outbreak in Mbandaka – in the northwest region of the Democratic Republic of Congo-DRC, UNHCR and partners are strengthening monitoring in border areas. In addition to COVID-19, preparedness and response to EVD will be carry on in the Yambio and Yei refugee hosting areas, bordering DRC.
- On June 19, the Ministry of Health (MoH) and partners commissioned a mobile laboratory in Nimule, a border town in Eastern Equatoria, to boost coronavirus testing. The Mobile Laboratory Equipment was donated by the German Government to the East African Community Member Countries. The project includes training of trainers.

- South Sudan COVID-19 National Steering Committee (NSC) requested for a review of the lab testing strategy and discharge criteria for COVID-19 patients. Consequently, the national public health laboratory plans to control current stocks and prevent future stock outs. Similarly, the NSC Leadership team and Case Management Technical Working Group have updated case management discharge criteria for COVID-19 patients.

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).
- In June 2020, the Humanitarian Coordinator launched the COVID-19 Addendum to the 2020 Humanitarian Response plan, requesting USD 387 million including USD 19.8 million for the Refugee Response and USD 12 million for the Protection Cluster. UNHCR also contributed to the update of the government-led South Sudan National Response Plan, to ensure needs as well as financial requirements for refugee-hosting areas are included across its pillars.
- 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 refugee locations, the refugee leadership in the 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 risk communication and community engagement (including refugee hosting communities).

COVID-19 Preparedness

- UNHCR and partners continue to actively participate in weekly public health coordination meetings and regularly review challenges, good practices and adaptations needed in interventions to strengthen COVID-19 preparedness and response.
- UNHCR is working closely with MoH to ensure testing capacity is available in refugee hosting areas. As a result, a GeneXpert machine was installed in Makpandu refugee camp health care center, Western Equatoria, and the installation of additional machines in other refugee hosting areas is planned in the coming weeks. With the newly installed software, the device will enable the diagnosis of COVID-19 once cartridges are available – in addition to TB, HIV/AIDS, and EVD. Eight health staff were trained on the use of the machine. UNHCR is also procuring relevant items for the centre, i.e. printer, CPU, air conditioner for the room and a fridge to store the cartridges – the procurement of which will be supported mostly by the National Health System, in line with the integrated response to the COVID-19 pandemic. UNHCR will also acquire an initial amount of the cartridges, as one-off action's support.
- To support COVID-19 response, in the occasion of the General Food Distribution in Ajoung Thok and Pamir camps, 14-l capacity buckets were distributed to 13,405 refugee

households and a total of 70,162 refugees were provided with 500 grams of soap per person per month.

- Risk communication and community engagement (RCCE) continued in refugee and internally displaced persons sites. Of relevance, the knowledge, attitude and practices (KAP) survey was conducted by UNHCR and UNICEF together with the county health department in Maban. This exercise, conducted under the Risk Communication and Community Engagement Working group, has targeted both the refugee and the host communities.



- Among the achieved results in the reported period:

Plastic buckets and soap have been distributed to refugees during the GFD in Jamjang and Pamir. © UNHCR

- COVID-19 messaging reached a total of 103,517 individuals in all refugee hosting areas (i.e. Maban, Jamjang, Yambio, and Yei);
- Rehabilitation, installation, and expansion of isolation units were set up in Lasu, Jamjang, and Maban refugee camps. As a result, 75 extra bed capacity were added;
- 370 latrines were built in refugee hosting areas (327 in Maban and 43 in Jamjang);
- Installation/provision of 188 handwashing facilities in refugee locations.

Protection

- To date there have been no restrictions on access to asylum. The observation of COVID-19 precautionary measures are ensuring during relocation of newly arrived refugees as well as in assistance provision to refugees, spontaneous refugee returnees, internally displaced persons as well as asylum seekers.
 - Close to 170 newly arrived refugees from the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Central African Republic to Western Equatoria, have been successfully relocated to Makpandu refugee camp, after having completed a mandatory quarantine – which is required to all nationals and internationals entering South Sudan. Similarly, 64 Sudanese refugees completed a quarantine before being relocated from the Yida settlement to Jamjang camps. Measures were taken to mitigate risks during relocation and upon arrival.
- UNHCR and protection partners continue to strengthen support for persons with specific needs (PSN) including through collaboration with local FM radio stations. In Pamir, Internews will distribute 26 radios to support 26 refugees with visual impairments. Beneficiaries have been identified and referred by COVID-19 community-led Task Force. This will ensure PSN access to broadcasted information on COVID-19.
- UNHCR and protection partner Lutheran World Federation (LWF) provided Child Friendly Space training to 269 parents and caretakers (199 women, 70 men) to create safe learning and playing environment through local games with their children who are currently not able to attend activities at the Child Friendly Space Centers in Ajoung Thok and Pamir. Additionally, support to the production of two radio shows was provided to the Child

Rights Clubs and Youth Ambassador groups, in close collaboration with Internews. The shows aimed to clarify myths related to COVID 19 in the refugee hosting area. Among the broadcasted messaging, the role and responsibilities of parents and caretakers towards their children were also included.

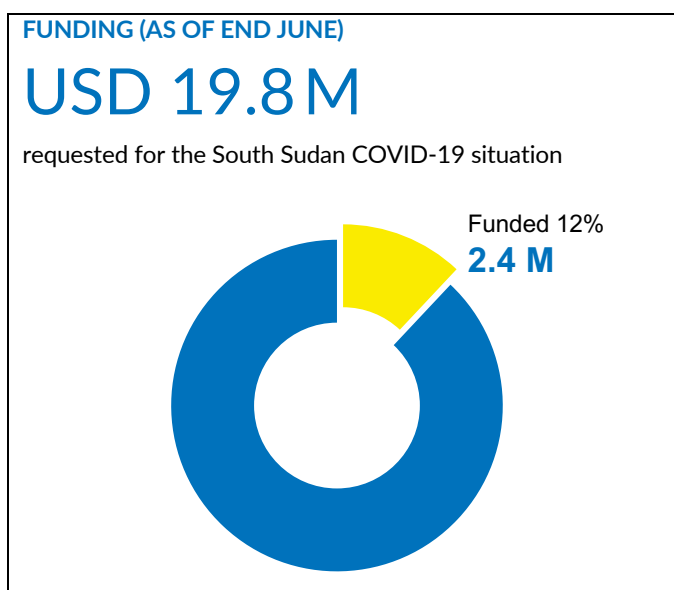
Challenges

- Despite the launch of mobile laboratories and the installation of GeneXpert machines, testing capacity remains low with testing still centralized mostly at Juba level.
- Owing to resource limitations, limited quantities of PPEs are available for front line health workers and community workers. Gaps exist in medical equipment/supplies and PPEs for frontline workers. Protecting health workers from contracting COVID-19 is especially essential because many healthcare centres are already operating with insufficient staff. Further reductions would interfere with service delivery.
- Stigma surrounding COVID-19 cases in suspected or confirmed positive cases is impacting health seeking behaviour of refugees, internally displaced persons as well as hosting communities. This is likely to have a negative impact on quality of health care as affected persons are shying away from health facilities and opting for alternatives which could heighten health risks. To this end, UNHCR is working closely with community health volunteers, hygiene promoters, WHO and Ministry of Health at state level in refugee hosting areas as well as in areas hosting Internally Displaced Persons to ensure appropriate sensitization to curb stigma

Business and Operations Continuity Plan

UNHCR is staying and delivering for refugees, asylum seekers, refugee returnees, IDPs and those at risk of statelessness amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

- 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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