

Regional Bureau for Southern Africa 27 March 2020

Key figures

USD 255.2 million

Requested for UNHCR's COVID-19 response globally over the next nine months

COVID-19 confirmed active cases in the Southern Africa region

County	Cases	Deaths
Angola	4	0
Botswana	0	0
Comoros	0	0
DRC	51	3
Eswatini	6	0
Lesotho	0	0
Madagascar	23	0
Malawi	0	0
Mauritius	81	2
Mozambique	7	0
Namibia	8	0
ROC	4	0
Seychelles	7	2
South Africa	927	0
Zambia	16	0
Zimbabwe	5	1
TOTAL	1,139	8

Source: WHO, Government CDC and John Hopkins as of 26 March

Regional Developments

The COVID-19 situation in the Southern Africa region is developing fast. Several countries have already declared a state of national disaster/emergency; restricted international travel particularly from high risk countries; limited entry at land and sea border crossings; implemented self-quarantine for travellers returning from high risk countries; closed schools/universities; restricted public events/gatherings as well as restricted domestic travel. Angola, Mauritius, Republic of the Congo (ROC) and Zimbabwe have temporarily closed borders, and South Africa has closed most of its land and sea border crossings. On 23 March, the President of South Africa announced a nationwide lockdown commencing at midnight on 26 March and continuing until 16 April.

While the scale and scope of the COVID-19 emergency is unprecedented, UNHCR is drawing on its extensive experience in the region responding to emergencies and working in difficult situations where movements are restricted. Operations are adapting and sustaining existing programmes, while also stepping up support to governments to meet emerging challenges.

All states must manage their borders in the context of this unique crisis as they see fit, but these measures should not result in the closure of avenues to asylum, or in forcing people to return to situations of danger. UNHCR is advocating with government to find solutions. Where health risks are identified, screening arrangements can be put in place, together with testing, quarantine and other measures in line with the WHO and national protocols. These measures will enable authorities to manage the arrival of anyone crossing borders, including asylum-seekers and refugees in a safe manner, while respecting international refugee protection standards designed to save lives.

Impact on operations

A large number of people, in the region, including refugees, asylum-seekers, internally displaced persons (IDPs), and stateless persons could contract COVID-19 if governments do not intervene to prevent and contain transmissions. In the Southern Africa region, most refugees are accommodated in densely populated settlements or crowded urban areas, or are in areas where it is difficult to obtain hygiene items or medical support. Furthermore, there is a high prevalence of HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis in the region, increasing people's vulnerability to COVID-19 transmissions, with a risk health services quickly becoming overburdened. UNHCR is carefully monitoring the situation with governments and partners.

Update on preparedness and response

Restrictions on movements of people could slow down local production and the import of relief items to countries in the region. Despite the challenges, UNHCR is pursuing innovative and creative measures to respond and reach out to persons of concern. In many countries in the region the United Nations has already entered into a teleworking mode as a precautionary measure to reduce the spread of COVID-19. Some partners are also working remotely or have reduced their presence in refugee- and IDP- hosting

areas. Responses are focused on the most critical and urgent interventions. Some important activities have been cancelled or postponed including voluntary repatriation from Angola and ROC to DRC as well as from ROC to Central African Republic, resettlement travel, education activities due to school closures, programme implementation involving large groups (outreach, social cohesion, training, workshops and meetings not related to COVID-19 communications, surveillance or response), and relocation of refugees to settlements (Zambia).

On 25 March, UNHCR activated a global level 2 emergency for the COVID-19 situation to give additional operational authorities to country operations to ensure protection, assistance and delivery of essential services to people of concern.

Inter-agency coordination

UNHCR Regional Bureau and country operations in Southern Africa region are supporting government efforts and coordinating their response with a range of stakeholders, including UN agencies, NGO partners, humanitarian and development organizations, civil society and the private sector.

UNHCR is working with partners and supporting government efforts to flatten the curve of COVID-19 transmission, advocating that all persons of concern should be included in national COVID-19 surveillance and response planning and activities. Everyone – including refugees, IDPs and stateless persons – should be able to access health facilities and services in a non-discriminatory manner. Currently, persons of concern have been included in national response plans in Angola, DRC, Malawi, Namibia, ROC, and Zimbabwe.

In close coordination with government and partners, UNHCR is establishing communications, community-based surveillance, protection monitoring and reporting networks in refugee camps/settlements and urban areas to mitigate potential protection risks for persons of concern. This includes producing information materials in local languages as well as in languages spoken by refugees and host communities to be shared through its extended network of partners. UNHCR is also increasing the provision of primary and secondary health care, infection prevention in health facilities, clean water and soap, and expanding community outreach on hygiene best practices among partners, persons of concern and host communities.

Financial requirements

On 27 March, UNHCR launched a revised [Coronavirus Emergency Appeal](#) seeking USD 255.2 million to boost preparedness, prevention and response activities to address the immediate public health needs of refugees and host communities prompted by the spread of COVID-19. This amount is fully coordinated with and included in the [COVID-19 Global Humanitarian Response Plan](#) launched on 25 March. This also includes the USD 33 million in UNHCR's initial appeal, launched on 10 March.

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