

West & Central Africa

20 May 2020

The West and Central Africa region has seen a **28% percent increase** in new confirmed COVID-19 cases **in the last week** going from 25,335 contaminations on 12 May to a total of 32,401 on 19 May 2020.

States continues to adjust their response strategies to socio-economic realities with a **gradual relaxing or complete lifting of movement restrictions** introduced to curb the spread of the virus.

In a region grappling with armed **conflict, pervasive poverty and a food insecurity**, it is crucial that the focus on Covid-19 does not cause these pre-existing crises to be neglected.

POPULATION OF CONCERN

10,000,000 total PoCs
5,600,000 IDPs
1,300,000 Refugees
1,400,000 Returnees
1,700,000 Stateless

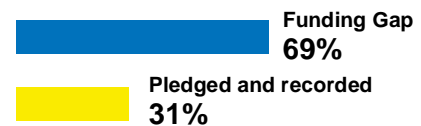
COVID-19 CASES*

32,401 total confirmed cases
19,842 still active
11,797 recovered
762 deaths

*source: WHO as of 19 May 2020.

FUNDING REQUIREMENTS

for COVID-19 Response Globally
US\$745 MILLION



A refugee woman pours liquid soap into molds at a soap factory in Hamdallaye, Niger. The soap is distributed free of charge to other refugees and the local community. © UNHCR / Jean-Sebastien Josset

Operational Context

- **Continuous increase of confirmed cases.** Since the first case of COVID-19 was declared in Nigeria on 28 February 2020, the pandemic has progressed steadily throughout West and Central Africa where it has killed 762 people. As of 19 May 2020, WHO statistics show 32,401 confirmed cases in the 21 countries covered by the Regional Bureau for West and Central Africa with 19,842 still active and 11,797 recoveries. In terms of **active cases**, **Nigeria** (4,475) has the highest number, followed by **Ghana** (4,292), **Cameroon** (1,822) and **Senegal** (1,454).
- **Preventive measures and restrictions on movement.** Governments have adopted sweeping measures to curb the spread of the virus including closing borders, imposing travel bans, prohibiting mass gatherings, shutting down schools, and closing markets. To mitigate the socio-economic impact of these measures, some countries are now relaxing or lifting some of the restrictions. In **Benin**, the airport is still open, but all arrivals are being systematically tested while passports are held for 48 hours until the results are available. At local level, authorities are preparing to lift sanitary measures and resume classes at school. In **Burkina Faso** the start of the classes with exams this year has been postponed to 1 June, while the reopening of all other classes initially planned on 25 May is postponed until further notice. In Cameroon have detained several hundred people for not wearing face masks in public, as COVID-19 cases continue to rise. In **Cote d'Ivoire**, the almost two-month curfew in the main city Abidjan has been lifted but nightclubs, cinemas and bars will remain closed to fight the coronavirus epidemic. In **Niger**, the Government is starting to loosen some preventive COVID-19 measures. The lockdown on the city of Niamey was lifted and the reopening of mosques were authorized on the condition that certain preventive measures were followed including respecting social distancing and the use of mouth masks and hydroalcoholic gel. In **Nigeria**, where the number of confirmed cases rose to over 6,000, although a gradual easing of lockdown in some cities was initiated since 4 May. The Government of Borno State has lifted the lockdown on 13 May but the total ban on movement in place in Kano (Nigeria's second-biggest city where several unexplained deaths are being investigated) was extended for another two weeks. In **Senegal**, as of 12 May, the curfew hours were shortened from 21:00PM to 05:00AM, places of worship reopened, and markets and shops forced to open only a few days a week are now to close only for one day for disinfection. Restrictions concerning the public transport have also been eased and schools are scheduled to resume on 2 June for approximately 551,000 students in exam classes.
- **Specific protection risks and challenges for forcibly displaced populations.** Refugees and IDPs are often residing in overcrowded and precarious conditions rendering impossible social distancing or basic preventive measures such as hand washing which exposes them to heightened risks of contamination as COVID-19 cases. Although only two cases of infection were reported among UNHCR's persons of concern in Cameroon in Nigeria so far, forcibly displaced populations are also at heightened risk of stigmatization in situations of pandemic. In addition to these specific

challenges, forcible displaced populations are also facing the risk of food insecurity in the region, particularly in the Sahel. There are also great concerns regarding gender-based violence which is on the rise since the beginning of the COVID crisis as a direct result of the preventive measures enforced and the economic strain these restrictions have put on many households. The significant disruption in the livelihoods of many forcibly displaced population is also increasing the risk of resorting to negative coping mechanisms, including child labour which UNHCR is monitoring closely.

UNHCR Response

UNHCR Operations are taking steps to ensure continuity of assistance and basic protection services despite movement restrictions through teleworking and remote protection and assistance. UNHCR operations are also stepping up their engagement and advocacy with Governments, the UN country teams and other Inter-Agency platforms to contribute to a coordinated response to the COVID-19 crisis and to ensure that persons of concern are included in all relevant response plans.



Strengthen and support primary and secondary health care and selected WASH services

- UNHCR Operations are increasing their direct support to national health systems to strengthen their infection prevention and healthcare responses, including through the provision of medical equipment and supplies and training of health personnel. Operations are also reinforcing the WASH systems and services in the main refugee and IDP hosting areas, including by distributing soap and increasing access to water to allow for the implementation of basic preventive hygiene measures such as frequent handwashing.
- In **CAR**, in Bouar, UNHCR accompanied the Minister of Humanitarian Action to the Beloko Transit Centre on 16 May 2020. The purpose of this visit was to assess the living conditions of the 71 people confined in this facility after being exposed to a risk of infection. After the visit, UNHCR granted one hundred beds, two bales of blankets, two bales of impregnated mosquito nets, and 100kg of sugar to the center to improve the confinement conditions.
- In **Ghana**, to support the national health systems while enhancing refugee inclusion in the government's response to COVID-19, UNHCR donated personal protective equipment and hygiene products to some 10 selected health facilities in refugee-hosting areas of Accra as well as Ghana Health Service facilities in all the 3 districts hosting the four refugee camps in Ghana. The items included surgical masks, examination gloves, hand sanitizers with automatic dispensers, thermometer guns, disposable bedsheets, disinfectants, veronica buckets and disposable hand towels amongst others.



Activities organized by UNHCR and INTERSOS in Agadez to sensitize refugee children on hygiene and prevention measures (c) INTERSOS / Alessandra Caputo

- In **Niger**, in Agadez, UNHCR and partner INTERSOS organized recreational activities for children while respecting preventive measures for COVID-19. Throughout the rest of the countries, the production of hygiene products is being scaled up. In Hamdallaye, 132 new refugees and asylum seekers have participated in several trainings, such as production of masks, soap and bleach or marketing. Other persons already trained have continued to participate to the production activities. Refugees and local communities have produced together and only last week 443 litres of bleach, 382 litres of liquid soap, 3,397 of antiseptic soap, 1,000 of moringa soap and 480 masks. UNHCR is currently coordinating the distribution of the products among vulnerable households in Niamey and to the public hospitals of the areas affected by COVID-19.



Strengthen risk communication and community engagement, and critical protection case management, including protection monitoring and registration

- UNHCR Operations are working to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on persons of concern by increasing communication with communities and introducing innovative approaches to address access limitations including social distancing in protection activities, remote case management via telephone, preventive measure in registration processes, while continuing advocacy to maintain avenues for asylum seekers to access international protection and safeguarding the principle of non-refoulement. To ensure adequate assistance to survivors of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV), consultation methods are being adapted to allow for remote assistance including through online/phone consultations and by integrating cash assistance interventions for women at risk and SGBV survivors into assistance.

- In **CAR**, in Lobaye prefecture UNHCR distributed 33 megaphones and 600 batteries were made available to local authorities, partners and UNHCR to strengthen mass awareness of compliance with barrier measures against Covid19. To date 4,415 people have benefited from the awareness raising on barrier measures. In addition, UNHCR installed 40 hand washing kits consisting of 40 buckets, 30 basins, 25,800 liters of disinfectants and 750 kg of chlorine.

- In **Ghana**, on 17 may, the 'mask for refugees project' was launched in Ghana during a virtual COVID-19 concert which was broadcasted live on national television and social media. This project is an initiative of UNHCR PSP Africa to help raising funds to support forcibly displaced families and sensitive the public on their specific vulnerabilities in times of pandemic.



Every little support goes a long way
#mask4refugees
#VGMAcovid19concert



- In **Guinea-Bissau**, UNHCR in collaboration with UNICEF and UNDP, as well as in coordination with the UNCT, is currently running a project to help the Red Cross in the awareness-raising activities against COVID-19 in the Cacheu Region.

- In **Nigeria**, UNHCR reinitiated registration activities in the Ikyogen settlement on the Cameroon border on 18th May 2020 after introducing preventive sanitary measures and social distancing mechanisms on site. Similar arrangements are being put in place in Adagom settlement and in Ogoja Sub-Office where registration activities are to restart next week.



Ramp up cash assistance, reinforce shelters, and provide core relief items in congested urban and camps settings

- In many parts of the region, refugees and IDPs are residing in heavily overcrowded camps and sites exposing them to heightened risks of contamination as COVID-19 cases may soon affect most of the most of major hosting areas. To address this issue, UNHCR Operations are implementing targeted shelter interventions and distributing core relief items while decongesting the most overcrowded sites to allow for the implementation of the most basic prevention measures. UNHCR Operations is also increasing their focus on strengthening community-based protection mechanism and enhancing the capacity and self-reliance of refugee and IDP communities including through the ramping up of cash assistance.
- In **CAR**, UNHCR distributed hygiene kits, soap and hydro-alcoholic gel in markets, government offices, returnee neighborhoods and health districts in Bouar and distributed NFI and sanitary kits to 207 households' of 1242 people for returned refugees in the neighboring town of Baoro.
- In **Guinea-Bissau**, UNHCR together with its partners, CNRD and Manitese, started to distribute food packages as well as hygiene and awareness materials to refugees living in 95 villages in the Cacheu region.
- In **Niger**, with the support of EU Trust Fund and CERF, UNHCR has started the organization of cash distributions in the Tillabery and Tahoua regions. Each household will receive a cash grant of FCFA 15,000 for four consecutive months. These grants will mitigate the negative socio-economic impact of both the security situation and the COVID-19 impact.



Support education systems

- **Impact of school closures.** Over 140 million children have been impacted by school closures across the region, including displaced children who are integrated in national education systems in all the countries. To ensure the continuity of learning in a protective environment and to prepare for the reopening of schools, UNHCR works with education partners to support Ministries of education in the establishment of distance education programs (radio, telephone, television, digital), distributing teaching

materials adapted to distance education and aligned with national programs, and providing hygiene kits to students. Strategies also aim to adjust education service delivery in response to massive school closures decided by governments to combat the spread of COVID-19.

- In **Liberia**, the Ministry of Education started broadcasting classes via radio for the entire country with the technical support of UNICEF. UNHCR is planning to distribute radios and batteries to ensure refugee students in the camps can benefit from this government initiative.

Country Highlights

LIBERIA - AGRICULTURE AS AN OPPORTUNITY AMID COVID-19 PANDEMIC

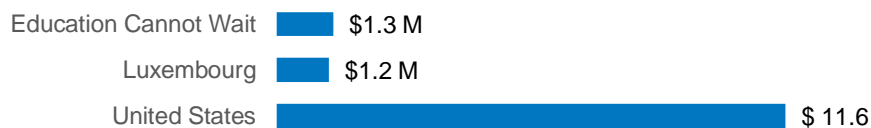
- In **Liberia**, UNHCR adapted its livelihoods intervention to the new context characterized by limited mobility, closure of businesses and markets, limited supply of food and non-food items. Farming being one of the activities less affected by the regulations put in place by the Government, an increasing number of refugees decided to quickly get involved in farming activities after experiencing the deterioration of their regular business. To guide and inform UNHCR's response, a rapid appraisal was conducted by the implementing partner to identify those refugees who were suffering business erosion and were interested in farming. Based on the findings, UNHCR procured additional agricultural inputs (increasing its planned target 2020 by 50%) and advocated with the government to allocate additional land for refugees to farm. To compensate the immediate lack of incomes from businesses, UNHCR also decided to support refugees through in-kind livelihoods and food provision during the first months.

NIGERIA - ALTERNATIVE LIVELIHOOD FOR REFUGEES DURING COVID-19

- In **Nigeria**, to address the socioeconomic impact of the restriction imposed on movement, UNHCR has supported Cameroonian refugees and their Nigerian hosts in the Southeast of the country to shift their livelihood efforts towards activities that could be carried out within the neighborhood and at household level. The focus was put on agricultural activities to ensure that refugees and their hosts maintain their access to sufficient food while coping with government measures across the entire nation. To enable this scale up in backyard gardening and other agricultural activities, UNHCR Ogoja Sub Office, in partnership with Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), distributed agricultural inputs at the end of April 2020 in the refugee settlements and host communities not only in Ogoja but also in Boki, Obanliku and Etung areas. Prior to the covid-19 challenge, a total of 322 households have been supported on micro-gardening activities. This initiative helps refugees to stay at home and stay safe while cultivating different micro-gardening crops that can be harvested within 3-4 weeks after planting and ensuring food security as well as promoting nutrition among the refugees.

Financial Requirements

US\$745 million requested for UNHCR's COVID-19 response globally through December 2020. Total funding received by UNHCR against its COVID-19 appeal: **US\$230 million**. Earmarked contributions for the Coronavirus Emergency Situation in **West and Central Africa** amount to some **US\$ 14.1 million**.



Special thanks to the following donors providing:

EARMARKED CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE COVID-19 APPEAL | USD

United States of America 64 million | Germany 38 million | European Union 31.8 million | United Kingdom 24.8 million | Japan 23.9 million | Denmark 14.6 million | CERF 6.9 million | Canada 6.4 million | Private Donors 3.7 million | Ireland 3.3 million | Sony Corporation 3 million | Sweden 3 million | Luxembourg 2.7 million | Finland 2.4 million | Education Cannot Wait 1.8 million | Norway 1.5 million | Qatar Charity 1.5 million | Australia 0.8 million | Monaco 0.2 million | Estonia 0.1 million | Iceland 0.1 million | Liechtenstein 0.1 million | Portugal 0.1 million | Slovakia 0.05 million | Spain 0.03

OTHER SOFTLY EARMARKED CONTRIBUTIONS | USD

United States of America 197.3 million | Canada 45.2 million | Japan 18.5 million | Norway 16.8 million | Switzerland 12.8 million | Sweden 7.3 million | United Kingdom 7.1 million | Denmark 5 million | Netherlands 4.1 million | Republic of Korea 3.2 million | Private donors Australia 3 million | Finland 2.2 million

UNEARMARKED CONTRIBUTIONS | USD

Sweden 76.4 million | Norway 41.4 million | Netherlands 36.1 million | Denmark 34.6 million | United Kingdom 31.7 million | Private donors Spain 26.6 million | Germany 25.9 million | Switzerland 16.4 million | Private donors Republic of Korea 13.9 million

Notwithstanding UNHCR's COVID-19 appeal, the continuation of regular programmes in West and Central Africa remains critical. Many of these activities will also help people of concern to cope with COVID-19 and its subsequent protection and economic impact, even if not included in the prioritized appeal.

Communication and Advocacy

- [Self-help project in Niger churns out hygiene products in fight against coronavirus](#) (UNHCR Broadcast, 18 May 2020)

CONTACTS

Regional Bureau for West & Central Africa

Romain Desclous, Senior Communication Officer: desclous@unhcr.org, Tel: +221 78 639 6385

Antoine Sfeir, Regional Reporting Officer: sfeira@unhcr.org, Tel: +221 77 332 58 57

Twitter : [@UNHCRWestAfrica](#) – Facebook : [UNHCR West & Central Africa](#)