

PRESS RELEASE

**IN THE BATTLE AGAINST COVID-19, AID GROUPS ARE
ACHIEVING RESULTS FOR VULNERABLE COMMUNITIES**

**Non-governmental organizations, UN agencies and the Red Cross and Red Crescent are scaling up
and delivering vital assistance to millions of people despite challenges**

(Geneva, 24 April 2020) – From building global supply chains and air bridges delivering masks and medical equipment, to communicating life-saving health messages from loudspeakers mounted on cars and bicycles, aid groups large and small are supporting the world’s most vulnerable people in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic.

Humanitarian organizations have mobilized to reach people most in need, both with specific COVID-19 assistance but also to continue their life-saving work for some 117 million women, men and children caught in conflict, poverty and climate-related emergencies. COVID-19 is present in virtually every country in the world, with more than 2.5 million confirmed cases and over 175,000 deaths.

Lockdowns, curfews and restrictions on movements of personnel and cargo – part of the strategy to slow down transmission of the virus – are impacting the humanitarian response, but aid workers are determined to continue their life-saving work.

In countries with complex emergencies, responding to COVID-19 is particularly challenging. An appeal for a global ceasefire by United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres has been endorsed by a growing number of countries and parties to conflict. The UN has also initiated a communications campaign to counter harmful health advice, conspiracy theories, stigmatization of people online and other misinformation, and the World Health Organization (WHO) has established a strategic response for managing the infodemic - the over-abundance of information flooding the world in the wake of COVID-19.

To support the humanitarian response by all, the UN is urging access by fast-tracking of health and aid workers and supplies at borders and in country.

UN humanitarian chief Mark Lowcock said:

“The UN, non-governmental organizations and the Red Cross and Crescent family are doing an enormous amount already under extremely difficult circumstances. Donors are generously funding this, doing the right thing and the smart thing by helping to prevent COVID-19 from circling back to their communities.

“Aid workers are installing handwashing stations, delivering clean drinking water and food, launching public information campaigns, and ensuring that aid supplies and personnel continue reaching the most vulnerable communities. These essential steps to fight the coronavirus pandemic are all happening while the humanitarian system continues to respond to pre-existing humanitarian crises.”

The humanitarian system urgently needs funding to continue to fight COVID-19 while maintaining critical pre-existing programmes. Donors are urged to continue providing generous funding for both. The COVID-19 Global Humanitarian Response Plan, coordinated by OCHA, was launched by the Secretary-General a month ago, requesting \$2 billion. More than \$625 million has generously been made available so far. This includes \$95 million from the UN Central Emergency Response Fund.

The international humanitarian community responding to COVID-19 comprises a vast number of international and local organizations. Their achievements include:

- The World Food Programme (WFP) is setting up a hub-and-spoke system of global and regional air bridges to dispatch essential medical cargo and aid, providing passenger air and medical evacuation services for frontline workers and where necessary, contracting charter vessels for sea transport of relief items. In mid-April, a second series of flights coordinated by WFP took off from Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, delivering face shields, gloves, goggles, gowns, masks, medical aprons and thermometers, as well as ventilators, on behalf of WHO and other partners to countries across Africa. The WFP-managed UN Humanitarian Response Depot has also dispatched more than \$2 million worth of medical and humanitarian supplies to 86 countries on behalf of partners in response to COVID-19.
- More than 130 shipments of personal protective equipment (PPE) and laboratory supplies have been shipped across the world by WHO. In April, health supplies were delivered to Afghanistan, Iraq, Nicaragua, South Sudan, Syria and other countries.
- CARE has reached more than 2 million people worldwide with hygiene messages, delivered hygiene kits for more than 350,000 people, and set up or repaired nearly 23,000 handwashing stations. In Somalia, CARE works with mobile network providers to deliver COVID-19 messages to more than 270,000 families to help mitigate risks. In Haiti, in addition to radio campaigns, people with loudspeakers in cars and on bicycles are used to spread health messages.
- Save the Children is raising awareness via text messages, reaching 3.5 million people in fragile settings or with weakened health systems. In Rohingya refugee camps in Bangladesh, Save the Children is improving sanitation, setting up handwashing points and repurposing a primary health-care centre, adding at least 15 beds to isolate suspected COVID-19 patients. In north-west Syria, work is ongoing with partners to develop creative ways to ensure the continued education of children, including distributing mobile SIM cards so families have access to learning materials on the Internet. In Sudan, vehicles with loudspeakers are deploying to communities to share virus prevention advice.

- The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), with 192 National Societies and 13 million volunteers, is providing critical information and health and social services, while ensuring that communities participate in the response. More than 6 million items of PPE have been procured for front-line volunteers, including masks, goggles, face shields, gloves and surgical gowns. Red Cross and Red Crescent volunteers are installing water distribution points and providing hygiene kits, food and shelter to protect vulnerable people.
- The Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) is distributing information on the prevention of coronavirus and providing hygiene kits, clean water and adequate toilets in Iran, Afghanistan, Yemen, and across Latin America and Africa. In the Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya, NRC is installing handwashing points and ensuring running water.
- The Danish Refugee Council is responding with cash-based interventions in Colombia, awareness-raising in Turkey, and water, sanitation and hygiene interventions in Ethiopia, Nigeria and Yemen.
- Oxfam International is scaling up its global COVID-19 response in more than 45 countries, working with partners to deliver clean water, soap and other hygiene supplies and spreading prevention messages through community outreach, trainings, radio, social media and more. Oxfam is addressing ongoing urgent needs for those facing food insecurity and displacement through cash, voucher and food distributions.
- The International Rescue Committee has launched COVID-19 preparedness and response programmes in over 40 countries including Syria, Kenya and Yemen. Programmes include a public health awareness and psychosocial support campaign, training of health care workers in refugee camps, and providing reproductive and maternal healthcare and medicine to migrants and vulnerable communities.
- The UN Population Fund (UNFPA) is prioritizing the needs of women and girls, as the pandemic is disrupting access to life-saving health services and increasing the risk of gender-based violence. UNFPA is delivering protective supplies to health workers, providing services and setting up hotlines for survivors of gender-based violence, supporting midwives and other health workers to provide sexual and reproductive health services for women, and providing training in psychosocial support.
- The International Organization for Migration (IOM) is supporting authorities to establish isolation centres and conduct COVID-19 case management for displaced and migrant populations. Teams have installed thousands of handwashing stations and continue to provide life-saving aid in accordance with physical distancing to displaced persons in camps, stranded migrants or returnees, among others. IOM is conducting information campaigns on transmission prevention and operating hotlines for migrants and displaced persons. Training, PPE,

disinfectants and thermometers are also being provided to health workers and border officials at points of entry and other locations.

- The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) has launched information campaigns across its operations to give refugees access to factual information on prevention measures, and distributed shelter material and cash assistance in some locations. In Bangladesh, training has begun for more than 2,000 health staff in camps hosting some 850,000 refugees, and in Jordan, temperature screenings are taking place at the entrance of the Zaatari and Azraq refugee camps. In Gambella refugee camp in Ethiopia, thousands of handwashing stations have been set up. In Sudan, more than 320,000 refugees, internally displaced persons and host communities have received soap and other hygiene items.
- The UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) has shipped more than 4 million gloves, 500,000 surgical masks, 100,000 N95 respirators, 156,000 gowns and 13,000 goggles to support vulnerable countries. The agency has also shipped oxygen concentrators, basic surgery equipment, stethoscopes, medication and nutrition to the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In Iran and Venezuela, UNICEF has delivered PPE to hospitals and health workers, and in Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh, a 50-bed COVID-19 isolation and treatment unit is operational with the agency’s support.
- WFP is committed to maintaining its food assistance to nearly 100 million people worldwide while adapting its operations to protect those most at risk. In South Sudan, WFP is distributing double rations of food to 1.2 million people in need, and food and vouchers to migrants in Colombia, as well as helping the Government in Bhutan pre-position food for half the country’s population. In Cambodia, WFP delivered take-home rations to 100,000 schoolchildren prior to school closures at the end of March. In Syria, more food distribution points are opening, with more frequent deliveries to reduce congestion and enable physical distancing.
- While the pandemic has slowed the supply of sprayers and pesticides, the UN’s Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) is continuing its efforts to contain the desert locust upsurge in East Africa, where almost 20 million people are already experiencing acute food insecurity. Almost 270,000 hectares have so far been treated in the region and more than 400,000 people are starting to receive livelihoods support to maintain food production. FAO is also scaling up its support to Sudan and Yemen, and with the number of locusts likely to increase 20 times during the upcoming rainy season and the risk of infestations in the Near East and beyond, control operations remain critical to avert potential food crises.

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