

Weekly Operational Update 10 April 2020

COVID-19 preparedness in full swing: In light of the rapid evolution of the COVID-19 situation in Ethiopia, UNHCR is scaling up efforts to increase capacity to prevent and limit the potential spread of the corona virus among the nearly 760,000 refugees in the country. As of 9 April 2020, Ethiopia reported 56 confirmed cases, two deaths and four recoveries. Prioritized areas of preparedness include the provision of soap and ensuring adequate water supplies in the areas hosting refugees and host communities. The procurement of medicines and medical supplies, and activities aimed at enhancing community awareness are ongoing. No cases of COVID-19 have been reported amongst the refugee population.

In collaboration with ARRA, partners, local communities, refugee outreach workers and volunteers, UNHCR is stepping up information campaigns in refugee camps and urban areas about the importance of social/physical distancing, proper hygiene, and what to do if symptoms appear. Hotlines, flyers, posters, loudspeakers and small group sensitization meetings with refugee leaders are some of the methodologies in place for information sharing. Volunteers and refugee social workers have been deployed to disseminate the messages to the refugees, including through house-to-house communication about the risks of infection and how to prevent it. In Barahle Camp, UNHCR staff extended the awareness campaign to the nearby host communities, by demonstrating physical distancing and regular handwashing practices. In Gambella and other locations, hundreds of refugees and humanitarian staff have been deployed to all the camps to sensitize the communities about preventive strategies. In most camps, particularly in those under Sub-Office Shire, bars, restaurants, cinema houses and indoor game zones have been closed to avoid crowd-creating situations, in line with the procedures put in place by the Tigray Regional Government. The business owners, however, mentioned that these measures have resulted in the loss of livelihoods and inability to repay their debts.

Thousands of handwashing stations have been installed in communal facilities and refugee households across the camps to encourage regular handwashing. The supply of soap has been doubled at most sites, with water trucking in place in camps where there is inadequate water supply.

In the Assosa camps, food distribution is ongoing, with the distribution centres fumigated daily. Refugees queue up 1.5 meters apart from each other and wash their hands with soap before entering the distribution centres. Arrangements are being made for distributions to take place once every two months in all refugee camps instead of the current monthly cycle to reduce risks of exposure to COVID-19.

In Jijiga, UNHCR donated two ambulances and an additional field vehicle to the Kebribeyah City Council Health Bureau and Aw-Barre Town Health Center in support of the COVID-19 response, and to serve the long-term health needs of nationals and refugees.

In Addis Ababa, UNHCR temporarily closed the Refugee Reception Centre and established a Helpline to be able to continue providing services to refugees. In a week, 22 calls were received and referred immediately to the concerned units in UNHCR for assistance.

In Bule-Hora (covering Gedeo and West Guji) and Nekemte (covering Wollega), UNHCR is part of the wider inter-agency effort to prevent and respond to COVID-19 for IDPs and returnees.

The current shortage of personal protection equipment (PPE) across the refugee and IDP operations is one of the over-arching challenges that need to be addressed.

Donation to quarantine center in Moyale: As part of the national inter-agency COVID-19 response, UNHCR donated essential aid items to a quarantine center that has been set up in Moyale. Here, Ethiopian migrants returning from Kenya are required to pass through the mandatory 14-day quarantine period. The items which include blankets, kitchen sets and soap were distributed through IOM to 500 persons. As of 4 April, 122 Ethiopians had returned through the Moyale border, including three pregnant and nine lactating women.

Shelter construction for returnees in Gedeo and West-Guji 93% completed: Of the planned 850 shelters under construction in the Gedeo Zone of SNNPs (300) and the West-Guji Zone of Oromia (550), 792 have been completed. Meant for returnees, these represent 93 per cent of the shelter plan. UNHCR's shelter partner, Action for the Needy in Ethiopia

(ANE), is completing the last phase of construction of the remaining 58 shelters before all are officially handed over to the local authorities.

Livelihoods and Energy: In Melkadida, UNHCR continues to provide support to the farm cooperatives in the development of their business plans and related farming activities. Meanwhile, the cooperative in Hilaweyn I has taken the initiative to rehabilitate 700m of canal to facilitate the irrigation of their farmland. At present, 580 hectares of land has been ploughed with the necessary agricultural inputs provided by UNHCR.

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