

UNHCR Niger

## Staying and delivering for refugees amid the COVID-19 crisis

There are confirmed COVID-19 cases in Niger. **Refugees are at the same risk of contracting and transmitting the COVID-19 virus as local populations.** To date and based on available evidence, there have been no reports of COVID-19 infections among refugees and asylum-seekers in Niger. However, there is no reason to believe that this won't change.

UNHCR's top priority in the COVID-19 crisis is to ensure that **people we serve are included in the Government's response plan** and are properly informed, while we supplement Government's preparedness and capacities to tackle the crisis.

Therefore, UNHCR has taken a series of measures in its field operations to help respond to the COVID-19 public health emergency and prevent further spread, thus contributing to the overall national needs for a total amount of 2,077,027 USD.

First of all, **coordination** is key. All UNHCR field representations are actively taking place in regional and subregional committees set up by the Government. They coordinate with other regional stakeholders, divide intervention areas and share information on capacities.

Secondly, **prevention** is paramount to get the virus under control. In all regions where UNHCR is operating, UNHCR has reinforced washing facilities and has distributed soap.

**Refugees are actively engaged as actors of prevention.** Based on existing practices in Sayam Forage camp (Diffa region) and the transit center for persons evacuated from Libya in Hamdallaye, persons under UNHCR's mandate are supported to scale up the local production of antiseptic soap, liquid soap and bleach in refugee hosting areas throughout the country (Niamey, Ouallam, Abala, Agadez, Maradi) to contribute to the prevention of COVID-19. Next to improving the hygienic and health conditions in the camp, this activity generates an income for refugee households and stimulates the local economy. This will contribute to mitigate the negative socio-economic impact of COVID-19.



*In 2019, UNHCR, in partnership with the NGO Forge Arts, has trained and equipped more than 286 women to produce and commercialize liquid soap, bleach and water containers. Since March 2020, an additional number of 25 women has been trained to produce soap and bleach.*

*To prevent the COVID 19 outbreak, they started distributing freely soap and bleach to more than 60 persons living in the mental health center and will pursue these distributions among the people under UNHCR's mandate living in the transit center.*

Furthermore, UNHCR offers **guidance and fact-based information on prevention measures** through printing and distributing the standard information leaflets of WHO and using educational videos. UNHCR has engaged in mass communication campaigns through the use of public criers, theatre, communication caravans, ...

For an initial period of three months, UNHCR will **support the government through the provision of medical equipment and supplies, as well as additional staffing**. Regarding staffing, the following profiles will reinforce the health teams for a period of 3 months: 4 medical doctors (Ayerou, Intikane, Sayam Forage, Hamdallaye), 11 additional WASH staff (Tillabery, Maradi, Diffa, Hamdallaye, Agadez), 12 psychosocial support staff (Tillabery, Maradi, Diffa, Hamdallaye) and 20 additional community sensitization agents (Tahoua). Moreover, UNHCR will organize 2 trainings of health staff in all regions with a total number of 50 persons per training.

In all regions, **protection, hygiene and disinfectant equipment** is purchased and distributed: 3540 hydroalcolic gels of 500 ml, 605 hand washing basins, 1452 units of liquified chlorine, 19990 soap boxes with 30 tablets each, 3540 liquid soap units of 500 ml each, 3540 bleach units, 750 emergency kits for infections, 1400 boxes with 50 protection masks each, 50 megaphones, 140 laser thermometers, 1370 boxes with each 100 protective gloves, 120 pedal bins and 6200 plastic bags.

As authorities have a limited capacity to **set up isolation cells** to separate potential COVID-19 cases, UNHCR has undertaken a needs analysis with the Regional Directorates of Health and will put at their disposal 120 Refugee Housing Units with A/C and 240 beds throughout the country, hence a capacity of 2 patients per RHU. If requested by the Government, UNHCR will examine the possibility to construct additional health infrastructure.

Finally, UNHCR continues to **enhance monitoring and interventions to ensure the rights of forcibly displaced people are respected**. The Government has decided to close all international airports and border entry points as of 19 March 2020 for a renewable period of two months. UNHCR continues to plea for access of refugees and asylum seekers coming from conflict affected neighboring countries such as Mali, Nigeria, Chad and Burkina Faso and continues to give assistance to those expelled from Algeria and Libya, in close cooperation with IOM.

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