

West & Central Africa

06 May 2020

The West and Central Africa region has seen a **260 percent increase in new confirmed COVID-19 cases in the past two and a half weeks** going from 6,921 contaminations on 20 April to a total of 18,180 on 06 May 2020.

Although very few cases have been reported so far among the close persons of concern the region, the **risks of transmission are high** due to weak healthcare systems and precarious living conditions in most hosting areas.

UNHCR operations are **supporting governments to address the crisis** in displacement areas with particular attention given to women, girls and persons with specific needs.

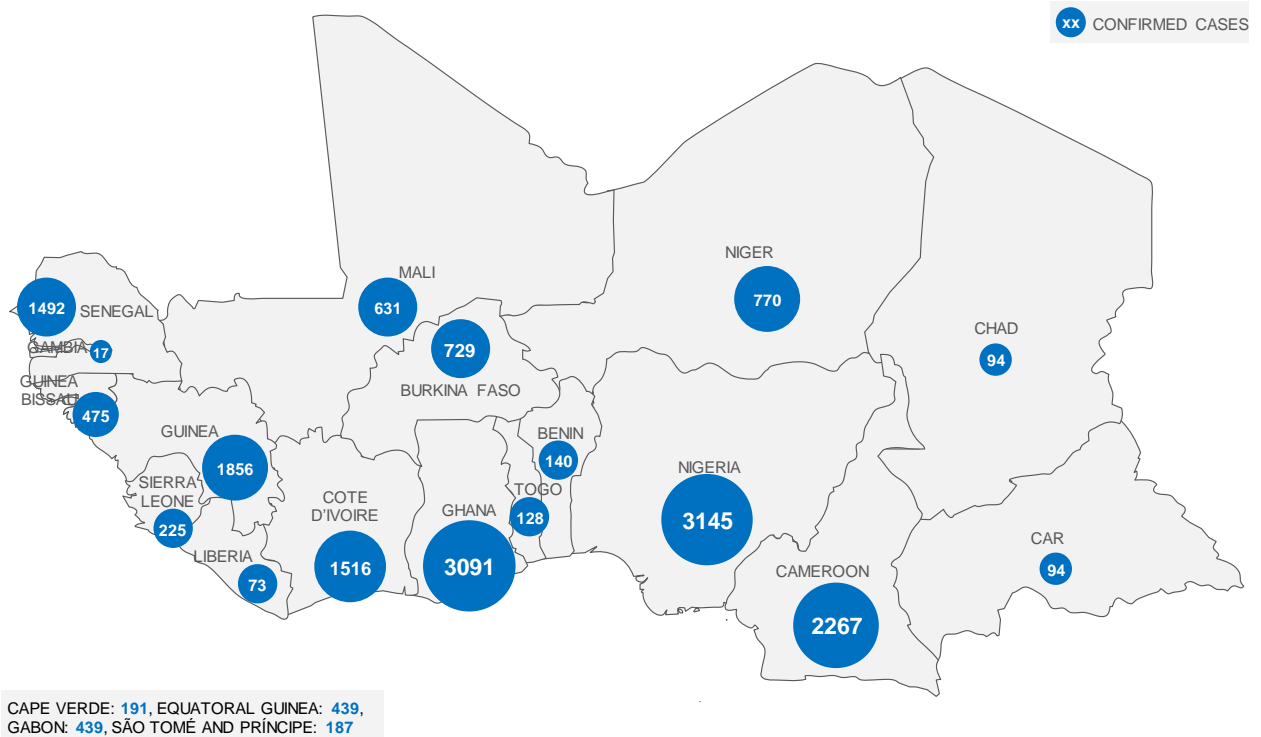
POPULATION OF CONCERN

9,950,000 total PoCs
5,600,000 IDPs
1,300,000 Refugees
1,400,000 Returnees
1,650,000 Stateless

COVID-19 CASES IN THE REGION*

18,180 total confirmed cases
12,116 still active
5,592 recovered
472 deaths

**source: WHO as of 06 May 2020.*



Operational Context

- **Rapid increase in COVID 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 472 people. As of 06 May 2020, WHO statistics show 18,180 confirmed cases in the 21 countries covered by the Regional Bureau for West and Central Africa with 12,116 still active and 5,592 recoveries. Most cases are reported in Nigeria (3,145), followed by Ghana (3,091), Cameroon (2,267) Guinea (1,856), Côte d'Ivoire (1,516), Senegal (1,492), Niger (770), and Burkina Faso (729). So far, two persons of concern have been tested positive, one urban refugee in Cameroon on 17 April 2020 and an IDP in Northeast Nigeria on 05 May 2020.
- **Movement restrictions.** To prevent the spread of the pandemic, countries in West and Central Africa have imposed various levels of restriction on international and domestic movements, from complete to partial border closures and mandatory self-quarantine on travellers arriving in-country. Although no COVID-related restrictions specifically target refugees or asylum seekers, the closure of official borders may push refugees and asylum seekers to risk crossing clandestinely exposing themselves to potential sanctions. In some countries, governments are starting to relax some these measures as in **Burkina Faso** where quarantine was lifted over 15 major localities and inter-city transport was reinitiated. In Ouagadougou the main public markets were also reopened last week, and the government is exploring the progressive reopening of mosques and schools and other public administrations in the country.
- **Delivery of assistance and business continuity.** In addition to the precarious security in the Sahel and the Lake Chad Basin, the restrictions on movement triggered by COVID-19 are already hindering UNHCR's ability to implement some key activities. UNHCR Operations are taking steps to ensure business continuity despite movement restrictions introduced by the governments of the region by establishing systems for teleworking and remote protection and assistance.
- **Risk of contamination in congested hosting areas with weak public health system.** Refugees and IDPs are often residing in heavily overcrowded sites and host communities in precarious conditions rendering impossible social distancing or basic preventive measures such as hand washing. This exposes them to heightened risks of contamination as COVID-19 cases are rising all over the region and may soon affect the main hosting areas where major health gaps exists, including limited numbers of trained health personnel and inadequate treatment units (Burkina Faso, Cameroon, CAR, Chad, Mali or Niger).

- **Risk of stigmatization of forcibly displaced populations and impact on vulnerable categories.** Although only two cases of infection were reported among UNHCR's persons of concern in Cameroon in Nigeria so far, forcibly displaced populations are at heightened risk of stigmatization in situations of pandemic. Feelings of distrust and instances of discrimination exacerbated by fake news, misinformation and the politicization of the issue could emerge should refugee or IDP population be heavily affected. Facing a higher degree of socio-economic marginalization with more limited access to effective early-warning systems and health services in traditionally underserved hosting areas, it is also feared that forcibly displaced populations, and among them women, girls and persons with disabilities, will be disproportionately affected by COVID-19, as with previous epidemics.

- **Socio-economic impact of the crisis.** The restriction on movement, the slowdown or even the halt in economic activity will likely have a greater impact on refugees and IDPs. Most of them are involved in the informal sector which usually is the most affected during public health outbreaks due to increase government controls. This predictable loss of income which is already being felt in urban areas among refugees involved in the informal trade will increase their vulnerabilities, food insecurity and dependency on humanitarian support.

- **Impact of school closures.** Over 140 million children have been impact by school closures across the region, including displaced children who are integrated in national education systems in all the countries. The negative outcomes of prolonged school closures are likely to disproportionately impact displaced children, who not only see their education interrupted but also lose the safety offered by a school and get exposed to a higher risk of abuse, neglect, violence and exploitation.

- **Food insecurity.** COVID-19 is likely to contribute to food insecurity in the region, particularly in the Sahel. Adding to the combined effects of conflict and displacement, the recent increase in climatic shocks such as recurring droughts and crop pests (locust outbreaks) has dramatically disrupted the crop and livestock production. With humanitarian relief efforts hindered by COVID-19, parts of the region are at high risk of sliding into famine within the next few months. According to WFP's 2020 edition of [The Global Report on Food Crises](#), some 5.5 million people will face food insecurity in the Sahel by June, up from over 2.4 million at the same time last year representing a 128% increased (2.1 million people Burkina Faso, 2 million people in Niger and 1.3 million people in Mali).

UNHCR Response

UNHCR Operations are taking steps to ensure continuity of assistance and basic protection services and are 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.



Extra handwashing facilities to fight the spread of COVID-19 at Egyeikrom camp in Ghana. ©UNHCR



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 to inform in an accessible manner on the virus and the preventive measures needed and by taking steps to

ensure continuity of assistance and basic protection services despite movement restrictions introduced by the governments of the region.

- Throughout the region, communication with communities continues to be enhanced through the [Regional COVID-19 Information Platform](#) in partnership with IOM to provide persons of concern and host communities with relevant, accessible, simplified, easy-to-understand information on COVID-19 and prevention measures to be adopted.
- UNHCR Operations have also introduced innovative approaches to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and address access limitations linked to restrictions on movements introduced in the region. These include 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.
- In West and Central Africa, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) is a priority for UNHCR and all operations are ensuring that women, girls and other groups at heightened risk of SGBV are systematically consulted to inform our plans, including our COVID-19 response. Consultation methods are being adapted to include online, phone consultations to align with the recommended distancing measures to mitigate the contamination risks. Field teams are also adapting their intervention modalities for SGBV case management introducing remote assistance and integrating cash assistance interventions for women at risk and SGBV survivors into assistance.



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 exploring, in coordination with the national and local authorities, ways to decongest the most overcrowded sites to allow for the implementation of the most basic prevention measures such as social distancing and handwashing.
- UNHCR Operations are increasing their focus on strengthening community-based protection mechanism and enhancing the capacity and self-reliance of refugee and IDP communities should the COVID-19 crisis intensify and limit UNHCR's operational

access for a prolonged period. Across the region, UNHCR is expanding the use of cash for protection, shelter and health intervention and is preparing to distribute “prepayments” to beneficiaries for 2-3 months instead of the usual monthly allowances.



Support education systems

- 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 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.
- UNHCR actively participates in the development of COVID-19 education response strategies under the aegis of Ministries of Education, alongside other education stakeholders such as Education Clusters and Local Education Groups. These strategies aim to adjust education service delivery in response to massive school closures decided by governments to combat the spread of COVID-19.
- In the Region, the Global Partnership for Education will provide accelerated funding to support national education systems respond to the COVID-19 situation in 13 countries in the region (Burkina Faso, Cameroon, CAR, Chad, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierre Leone). UNHCR actively advocates with the Ministries of Education and education partners at country level to ensure that the educational needs of refugees will be included in the country submissions.

Country Highlights

BURKINA FASO

- In **Burkina Faso**, on 28 April, UNHCR made an in-kind donation worth 329 million FCFA to the Region of the Sahel for the fight and prevention to the COVID-19 outbreak. It included some 2,000 wash kits, 50 hand washing devices, jerry cans for the transport and stock of water, soaps, 35,000 masks made by refugees, 20 refugee housing units for triage/isolation, pharmaceutical products and an ambulance. The donation also included the constructions of classes, latrines and administrative blocks for four

schools in Dori. In addition, UNHCR installed 4 reservoirs of 5,000 liters each complemented with a water trucking system to provide drinkable water to the Petit Pari and Nyarala areas of Dori. In the Nord Region, UNHCR has contributed to the Government response plan to COVID, by donating to the local health authorities, some 30,000 information leaflets and medication, for a total value of over USD 16,000. UNHCR's partners, Intersos and Plan International, continue their sensitization and awareness raising efforts on COVID-19 and prevention measures amongst IDPs, asylum seekers and host communities. In the Haut Bassins Region, as of 30 April, 142 communal and over 1,300 familial hand-washing devices as well as over 11,000 soaps were distributed to some 9,700 IDPs living in the area. In addition, 136 refugee families have received hand washing devices, while almost 100 host community family received 100 of these devices. In regions heavily affected by forced displacement and conflict, these interventions not only aim at addressing the needs of affected populations but also to preserve the peaceful coexistence between IDP, refugee and host communities.

COTE D'IVOIRE

- In **Côte d'Ivoire**, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and UNHCR chaired a donation ceremony held at the Direction d'Aide et d'Assistance aux Réfugiés et Apatrides (DAARA) on 30th April. The government included refugees and asylum seekers in the national plan for the prevention and response to the situation of COVID-19 through a budget allocation of FCFA 20 million (USD 37,000). Over 800 households (over 2000 persons) of refugees living in Côte d'Ivoire benefited from food and sanitary equipment. Prior to this donation, UNHCR, in partnership with DAARA, provided to hundreds of refugees, the most in need, with hydro alcoholic gels and masks. Furthermore, UNHCR is planning to provide cash transfer assistance to vulnerable refugees to reinforce their resilience in these difficult times.



Ms. Angele Djohossou, UNHCR Representative in Cote d'Ivoire and members of the DAARA during the donation ceremony in Abidjan on 30 April 2020. ©UNHCR

CHAD

- In **Chad**, UNHCR has launched the construction of 20 isolation points in the refugee reception centers as part of its COVID emergency preparedness and response plan. All the 15 health centers serving the refugee areas in the South have also been provided with personal protective equipment (masks, gloves, hydroalcoholic gel, soap) to help prevent the spread of the virus in case of an outbreak in the area. UNHCR is also pursuing its awareness-raising efforts through community outreach in the main refugee hosting areas using megaphones in camps, radio broadcasting (Amdjarass) and motorized audio in surrounding camps and villages to respect distancing measures. The Maro and Belom camps have been entirely covered and UNHCR reached 11,961 people, including refugees, in hosting areas near the camps and at the Haraze and Maro health centers. Similar information campaigns are organized in Eastern Chad.



The seven members of the Nigerien hip-hop collective "Poings Levés" raising awareness on COVID-19 as part of the UNESCO's #DontGoViral campaign. ©Olivier Girard

NIGER

- In **Niger**, UNHCR partnered with "Raised Fists", an artist collective of seven committed singers gathered around rapper Danny Lee, to raise awareness on the COVID-19 pandemic in Niger and the prevention measures to adopt. The result of this collaboration is the song *Protect your Life*, with lyrics in Djerma, Haoussa, Tamashek and French in order to reach the whole population within West & Central Africa. This UNHCR initiative is part of the national response plan for Infection prevention and control and Risk communication and socio-community involvement. Broadcasted on 3 national televisions and radios and widely shared on social networks, the song has been integrated in UNESCO's [#DontGoViral campaign](#), launched with the "Innovation for Policy" (i4Policy) Foundation to fight against the spread of the virus and the misinformation that accompanied the pandemic. The [video clip](#) accompanying this powerful song features several refugees living in Niamey who are contributing to prevention through the production of soap and bleach to be distributed among Niger's most vulnerable communities, with the support of UNHCR and its partners.

Working in Partnership

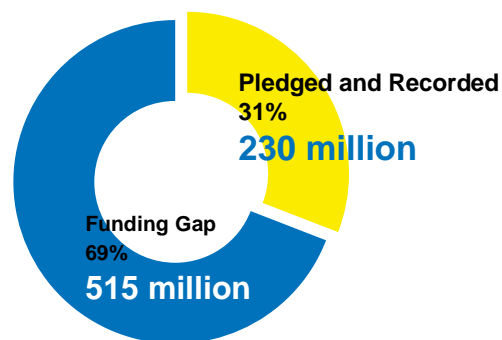
UNHCR Operations are stepping up their engagement and advocacy with Governments, the UN country teams and other Inter-Agency platforms to contribute to a coordinated response to the COVID-19 crisis and to ensure that persons of concern are included in all relevant response plans.

- The **Regional Office in Dakar** is coordinating UNHCR's contribution to the May Global Humanitarian Response Plan (GHRP) revision across the region. UNHCR is working on reprioritized and additional needs to be included in the Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Cameroon, Chad, Nigeria and CAR HRP updates as well as contributing to the country appeals for Benin, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Togo, countries which have been recently added to the appeal. Meanwhile, the Nigeria Regional Refugee Response Plan (RRRP) is also being revised in light of the COVID situation and will be published in June featuring a COVID-19 specific chapter.

Financial Requirements

US\$745 million requested for UNHCR's COVID-19 response globally through December 2020.

Total contributed or pledged to the UNHCR COVID-19 Appeal: **US\$230 million**



UNHCR is grateful to those donors that have provided flexible contributions to the COVID-19 appeal which allows UNHCR to respond rapidly where needs are greatest in this fast-moving situation. The following donors provided situation level funding to the COVID appeal:

Australia 0.8M | Canada 6.4M | CERF 6.9M | Denmark 14.6M | Education Cannot Wait 1.8M | European Union 31.8M | Finland 2.4M | Germany 38.0M | Iceland 0.1M | Ireland

3.3M | Japan 23.9M | Liechtenstein 0.1M | Monaco 0.2M | Portugal 0.1M | Private Donors 1.7M | Qatar Charity 1.5M | Slovakia 0.1M | Sony Corporation 3.0M | Sweden 3.0M | United Kingdom 24.8M | United States of America 64.0M

UNHCR is also grateful to the following donors that have provided unearmarked support that contributes towards addressing needs in the region:

Sweden 76.4M | Norway 41.4M | Netherlands 36.1M | Denmark 34.6M | United Kingdom 31.7M | Germany 25.9M | Private donors in Spain 20M | Switzerland 16.4M | Private donors in Republic of Korea 10.5M

Notwithstanding UNHCR's COVID-19 appeal, the continuation of regular programmes in West and Central Africa remains critical. Many of these activities – not least protection responses by remote and regular provision of cash assistance – will also help people of concern to cope with COVID-19 and the subsequent protection and poverty crisis, even if not included in the prioritized appeal.

Communication and Advocacy

RECOMMENDED LINKS:

- [In Niger, Malian refugees make masks to help fight coronavirus spread.](#) (UNHCR Broadcast, 30 April 2020)
- [Malian refugees in Niger make face covers to prevent the coronavirus spread](#) (UNHCR Broadcast, 01 May 2020)
- [When hip-hop saves lives: UNESCO, i4Policy, UNHCR join forces in #DontGoViral campaign to fight infodemic around COVID-19](#) (UNESCO Broadcast, 07 May 2020)
- [#DontGoViral campaign \(official\)](#)
- [Regional information platform on COVID-19 and tools for engagement and communication with communities in West Africa](#)

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](#)