

Southern Africa

29 May 2020

Highlights

14,478 refugees and asylum-seekers reached in **Zimbabwe** through a mass COVID-19 awareness campaign that included a live broadcast on local radio, listened to by both refugee and host community members.

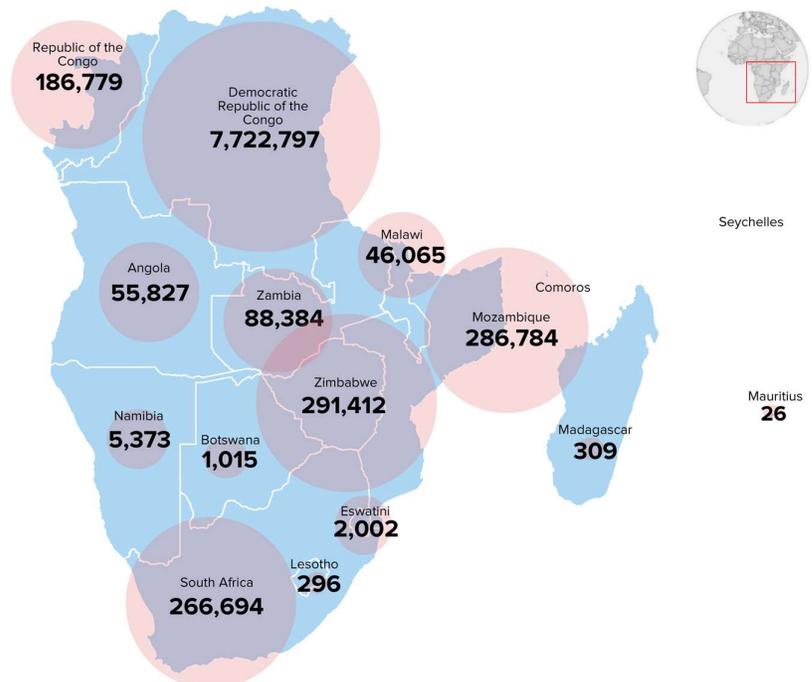
121,501 refugees, IDPs and host community members reached in the **Democratic Republic of the Congo** with awareness-raising messages on COVID-19 since the beginning of the response.

3,097 calls received on UNHCR's Helpline in **South Africa** since the beginning of the COVID-19 lockdown, mostly from refugees and asylum-seekers requesting assistance with food and rent.



A woman receives a bucket and soap for handwashing as part of COVID-19 prevention in Sofala Province, Mozambique ©UNHCR/D. Souza

Persons of Concern to UNHCR in Southern Africa



Population Figures

8,953,763 persons of concern to UNHCR in Southern Africa, including



767,884 refugees and 311,838 asylum-seekers



5,600,781 internally displaced persons (IDPs)



2,157,597 returnees

(as of 26 May 2020)

Operational Context

As of 25 May 2020, there are a reported 29,149 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the 16 countries covered by UNHCR's Regional Bureau for Southern Africa, with South Africa reporting the highest number of confirmed cases on the continent. Across the region, national efforts to contain COVID-19 include varying restrictions on movement, limits on social gatherings, prohibition of public events, suspension of commercial flights, closure of borders, and nation-wide lockdowns. Exceptions are often made for goods and cargo, as well as returning citizens and legal residents to move across borders. While some countries have extended their lockdowns and states of emergency, many are beginning phased approaches to ease COVID-19 restrictions.

UNHCR is working with governments, WHO and other UN agencies and NGOs to secure the inclusion of persons of concern – refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs), stateless people and other marginalized communities – in preparedness and response measures for COVID-19. UNHCR has also been expanding its outreach efforts in the region with the support of partners and community volunteers to better engage persons of concern and their host communities with information about COVID-19 prevention and services.

In order to continue monitoring affected communities' perception of COVID-19, UNHCR and partners are carrying out remote surveys to understand the needs, fears and threats expressed by the population. To encourage social distancing, UNHCR has been promoting the use of hotlines to report protection issues, such as sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) as well as general assistance needs.

UNHCR Response



Health and WASH

UNHCR continued its health and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) activities across the region, to prevent and respond to COVID-19. In the **Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)** 2,145 handwashing stations have been installed across the country since the beginning of the response. UNHCR has also been reinforcing the capacity of local hospitals and health centres across the country, benefitting local and refugee communities. In Kinshasa, UNHCR began work to upgrade the Saint Joseph hospital and the Vijana health center – both of which service local communities and urban refugees – according to COVID-19 standards. In Aba, Haut Uele Province, UNHCR installed six refugee housing units to serve as isolation and quarantine areas at the Nyalanya health centre for potential COVID-19 cases. The health centre serves the local community as well as South Sudanese refugees living in Meri refugee settlement.

In **Namibia**, UNHCR has provided personal protective equipment, medical and sanitation supplies to the clinic and isolation unit in Osire refugee camp. The 3,579 refugees and asylum-seekers in the camp and 1,106 outside of the camp received food, household and hygiene items as part of the COVID-19 response. In **Zimbabwe**, over the last two weeks UNHCR's health partner procured an additional 500 units of hand sanitizer and 600 theatre caps, among other items and delivered to the Tongogara Clinic and Isolation Centre as part of COVID-19 prevention and response. In addition, 50 units of 85-litre foot operated hand washing stations were procured and delivered, to establish safer handwashing facilities across the camp.

In **Zambia**, an inter-agency and multi-sectoral team was established in Mantapala refugee settlement to oversee more than 300 trained community workers to enhance health surveillance in the settlement. The community workers will also be involved in distributing 3,000 information, education and communication materials to refugees and the host community. They will also support distributions of hand soap for public buildings and at boreholes to encourage people to wash their hands, and will ensure that handwashing facilities and screening procedures are in place at the three entrance gates to the settlement.

In the **Republic of the Congo (ROC)**, construction started on 20 refugee housing units in Bouemba site for asylum-seekers, which will serve as isolation areas for suspected cases of COVID-19. These facilities are being equipped with beds, water supply systems, latrines and other necessary infrastructure. While no cases of COVID-19 have been confirmed among persons of concern in ROC to date, UNHCR acknowledges the importance of preparedness with adequate capacity to isolate possible suspected cases among refugees and asylum-seekers.



Protection, Communication and Community Engagement

UNHCR continued awareness-raising and risk communications across the region, focusing on reducing spread and mitigating the impact of COVID-19 and related protection issues, such as sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). A variety of approaches are being used, including focus groups and door-to-door outreach following social distancing principles, as well as distribution of flyers and broadcasting messages over radio stations. In **Zimbabwe**, UNHCR along with government and NGO partners hosted a mass COVID-19 awareness campaign that included a live broadcast on local radio, reaching residents of Tongogara refugee camp and the host community. Vehicles were mounted with speakers, and travelled through all sections of Tongogara camp, reaching over 14,478 refugees and asylum-seekers.

In the **DRC**, 121,501 persons have been reached with awareness-raising messages against COVID-19 since the beginning of the response. Over the past week, UNHCR conducted eight awareness-raising sessions in Kalemie, Tanganyika Province, through focus group discussions and door-to-door outreach, providing 101 people with key messages. In Boyabu and Bili refugee camps, which host refugees from Central African Republic (CAR), awareness-raising continued about the risks of SGBV during lockdown, with 139 persons reached in a one-week period. COVID-19 awareness-raising campaigns also continued in Ituri by community-based protection groups reaching 447 persons. UNHCR and partners have also been using flyers to get the word out about COVID-19 mitigation. In areas hosting refugees from CAR, 11,300 flyers on COVID-19 were distributed in the past week in Nord Ubangi, Sud Ubangi and Bas Uele provinces. In Lusenda camp and Mulongwe settlement, 10,000 flyers were printed for distribution during awareness-raising sessions for Burundian refugees, with a special focus on vulnerable individuals such as the elderly, pregnant women, and those with chronic illnesses. Awareness-raising initiatives have also focused on targeted information for particularly vulnerable individuals, for example in Kinshasa, 15 persons with specific needs were informed individually on prevention measures for COVID-19, while in **ROC**, UNHCR's partner in Brazzaville conducted targeted awareness-raising for 10 households of persons with specific needs, on the topics of social distancing and government preventive measures against COVID-19.

In **Malawi**, UNHCR and its protection partner disseminated child-friendly COVID-19 materials, which include referral pathway information, to partners working in Dzaleka refugee camp for distribution in the community. 499 child friendly materials, as well as 152 referral pathway posters were distributed in different languages. At the same time, there has been an increase the use of the remote registration helpline set up by UNHCR, which has been attributed to an awareness campaign conducted to educate persons of concern about the importance of remote registration amidst COVID-19.



Assistance

In **South Africa**, UNHCR's Helpline recorded 3,097 calls between the start of lockdown on 26 March and 20 May. The number of callers is gradually decreasing, after having peaked in the last week of April. The majority of calls (92 per cent) continue to be requests for social assistance, especially food and rental support. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 response in South Africa on 26 March, UNHCR has reached 18,909 refugees and asylum-seekers with emergency assistance, among them 13,897 received cash assistance.

Cash-based assistance continues to be an important way of reaching vulnerable refugees and asylum-seekers during the COVID-19 outbreak. In **eSwatini**, 742 urban refugees received cash-based assistance, as well as face masks, soap and hand sanitizer. In **Botswana**, 22 refugee families (approximately 88 people) in urban settings who are ordinarily self-sufficient received food and cash-based assistance in the past week to help them through the lockdown period, while in **Madagascar**, 100 refugee families received cash assistance in two disbursements in April and May.



Education and Livelihoods

UNHCR and partners are taking measures across the region to help students keep up with their studies during school closures and lockdowns. In **South Africa**, UNHCR provided 100 refugee youth with cash assistance for data bundles and electricity, so they may continue their studies online. Meanwhile, in **Malawi** UNHCR handed over 500 radios for students to continue their learning amidst COVID-19. 452 refugee and national students benefit from this initiative, which allows them to continue learning through radio instruction using Yetu Community Radio. The radios can be powered by battery cells, electricity or solar energy. Further, UNHCR's education partner facilitated training for 27 teachers on using the radios for learning continuity. The trained teachers will support the radio lesson programme currently aired through Yetu Community Radio, for two hours per day and five days per week.

Mask-making continues to grow as a livelihood activity, with benefits for the broader community. In **Mozambique**, the Government has made wearing a face mask mandatory to prevent the spread of COVID-19. To broaden access to face masks, the district health authorities in Nampula Province are hiring 30 tailors from the refugee, asylum-seeker and host communities in and around the Maratane refugee camp. Those recruited will produce 10,000 cloth masks that will be distributed by community health mobilizers to the refugees and asylum-seekers living in Maratane. Similarly, in **Zambia**, 30 tailors were equipped with new sewing machines in Meheba refugee settlement, and have been mobilized to produce 15,000 face masks to help prevent against COVID-19.

Challenges

Isolation centres and quarantine space for newly arrived refugees and asylum-seekers remain a key need across the region, as a precautionary measure to prevent the spread of COVID-19. UNHCR and partners have been working to establish and expand isolation centres in camps and settlements, however there is a need for further resources to meet standards and ensure adequate preparedness. For example, in Zambia, newly arrived refugees to Meheba refugee settlement are systematically quarantined at a school within the settlement, and there is a need to urgently set up a new quarantine facility in the settlement before schools re-open in June.

The economic impacts of COVID-19 lockdowns and related restrictions are being felt by households across the region, including persons of concern. Many refugees and IDPs work in the informal sector and are particularly vulnerable to loss of livelihoods and income as a result of restrictions on movement and economic activity. The number of persons of concern seeking emergency assistance from UNHCR and partners is increasing. Particularly worrisome are the number of individuals who had previously been self-sufficient and not reliant on assistance who are now struggling to put food on the table, pay rent, or cover the cost of utilities. For example, in South Africa, 95 per cent of callers to UNHCR's Helpline during lockdown were previously self-sufficient. UNHCR and partners have been advocating to ensure inclusion of persons of concern into government assistance programmes and have also been providing emergency cash assistance to help the most vulnerable families. However, the demand for assistance – both from government and from humanitarian partners – far outweighs the available resources.

Financial Requirements

On 7 May 2020, the UN launched a revised inter-agency [Global Humanitarian Response Plan](#) seeking US\$6.69 billion, which includes US\$745 million for UNHCR's operations in affected countries through December 2020 and as reflected in UNHCR's [revised Coronavirus emergency appeal](#). US\$232 million has been received towards UNHCR's appeal.

In Southern Africa, US\$31.2 million is needed under the revised Coronavirus emergency appeal. As of 29 May 2020, the region has received earmarked funding totalling US\$429,017, accounting for approximately 1% of financial needs.

CONTRIBUTIONS AND PLEDGES TO THE UNHCR COVID-19 APPEAL | US\$
 USA 64M (400,000 earmarked for the DRC operation) | Germany 38M | EU 31.8M | UK 24.8M | Japan 23.9M | Denmark 14.6M | CERF 6.9M | Canada 6.4M | Ireland 3.3M | Sweden 3M | Luxembourg 2.7M | Finland 2.4M | Sony Corporation 3M | Private Donors 2.9m | Education Cannot Wait 1.8M | Qatar Charity 1.5M | Norway 1.4M | Australia 0.8m | Estonia 0.2M | Monaco 0.2M | Iceland 0.1M | Portugal 0.1M | Liechtenstein 0.1M

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

UNEARMARKED CONTRIBUTIONS | US\$

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

CONTACTS

- Joan Allison, Chief, External Engagement Section, Regional Bureau for Southern Africa, allison@unhcr.org
- Miranda Gaanderse, Reporting Officer, Regional Bureau for Southern Africa, gaanders@unhcr.org

Global Financial Requirements: UNHCR Coronavirus Emergency Appeal

