

# East and Horn of Africa, and the Great Lakes Region (EHAGL)

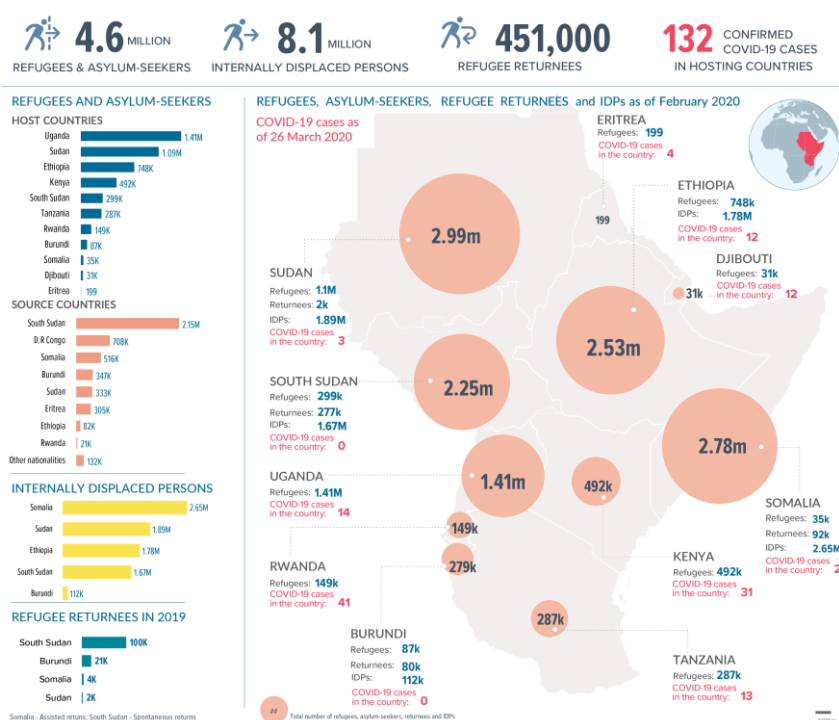
## Overview

The COVID-19 situation in the East and Horn of Africa, and the Great Lakes region is evolving rapidly, with new cases reported each day since 13 March 2020. As of 26 March, there were **132 confirmed COVID-19 cases in the 11 countries covered by UNHCR's EHAGL Regional Bureau**. Although so far there have been no confirmed cases among UNHCR's population of concern, 4.6 million refugees and 8.1 million IDPs and their host communities are at risk. Government restrictions on travel and public activities continue to change as the situation unfolds. Borders have been closed in many countries, businesses, school and other institutions have shut and national curfews introduced as a means to contain the outbreak of the virus.

UNHCR is working closely with governments, the World Health Organization (WHO) and UN Country Teams to promote the inclusion of refugees, internally displaced persons, stateless people and others of concern in national preparedness and response measures – in particular in health, hygiene and sanitation programmes. In the majority of cases, inclusive approaches are being pursued, yet fragile local health systems are at risk of being rapidly overwhelmed in an outbreak. In some instances, existing national systems and infrastructure do not extend to refugee and host community populations. Remote camp locations, overcrowding, inadequate water supply, and under-resourced health services present enormous challenges, along with the vulnerabilities created by poor nutritional status and the impact of economic restrictions on livelihoods.

Operations have reviewed their programme criticality assessments, upgraded and adapted business continuity plans, undertaken contingency planning and other preparedness measures, and have started delivering essential support. Many UNHCR offices have transitioned to alternative modes of working including teleworking arrangements, in line with WHO guidelines and host country measures to prevent and mitigate the spread of the virus. Staff remain at their duty stations and international travel has been suspended other than in exceptional circumstances.

## Overview of Population of Concern and Confirmed COVID-19 Cases in the Region



\*COVID-19 Case information: WHO (26 March 2020), Ministries of Health, Governments. Note: COVID-19 cases refer to total cases reported in the countries of asylum.

## Operational update - preparedness and response

All operations in the region, together with partners and local communities, are conducting information and awareness campaigns in refugee camps, settlements and in urban areas, informing refugees about the importance of social distancing, proper hygiene, and what to do if symptoms appear. UNHCR and partners are communicating with refugees through hotlines, emails, bulk messaging, flyers, community radios and sensitization meetings with refugee leaders. Information, Education and Communication (IEC) material such as posters and leaflets in different local languages with information on hygiene practices have been posted in refugee hosting areas across the region.

- In **Kenya**, UNHCR has activated its webpage (<https://www.unhcr.org/ke/coronavirus-covid-19-update>) and has been actively engaging the public through its social media platforms. Key messages have been translated into 10 different languages.
- In **Uganda** the COVID-19 awareness messages being sent out by MTN have been translated into local dialects, including those spoken by different refugee nationalities in the country.

General hygiene promotion activities, especially handwashing, are being maintained or reinforced in refugee hosting areas.

**Protection:** The closure of borders is having an impact on access to asylum in the region. The High Commissioner for Refugees issued a [statement](#), recalling international protection obligations and calling on government to manage borders in a way that both protects health, and allows people fleeing war and persecution to access international protection and not be forced to return to situations of danger. In the EHAGL region, **Burundi, Ethiopia, Rwanda, South Sudan, Sudan** and **Uganda**, have announced closure of their borders. UNHCR continues to advocate with governments to maintain access to asylum.

Some protection activities including Registration and Refugee Status Determination have been suspended in several countries such as **Kenya, Uganda** and **South Sudan** for an undetermined period.

Operations are adapting protection monitoring interventions especially with regards to admission into countries, critical case management, assistance to most vulnerable persons at risk of being infected and resources needed to improve communication and community engagement. In some countries, individual counselling and information dissemination to persons of concern are conducted through telephone hotlines covering Child Protection, Sexual and Gender Based Violence, Persons with Special Needs, Resettlement cases, and Voluntary Repatriation. Most group activities and interventions requiring community participation are suspended.

Repatriation activities have also been affected, including the suspension of repatriation of **Somali refugees** from both Yemen and Kenya, repatriation of **Ethiopian refugees** from Djibouti and Kenya, and of **Congolese refugees** from Rwanda. Assisted repatriation of **Burundian refugees** from Tanzania has continued with additional screening measures and protocols in place while UNHCR and partners are in dialogue with the two governments to determine the way forward.

Resettlement departures have been placed on hold in line with global advisories. Resettlement programme activities have been suspended in some operations and are being adapted with the use of remote technology in others.

**Education:** A total of nine countries in the region have closed schools as a result of COVID-19 (**Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Sudan, South Sudan, Somalia, Tanzania** and **Uganda**). Thousands of refugee children and youth face interruption in learning in pre-primary, primary and secondary schools. Certain country operations (**Ethiopia, Kenya** and **Tanzania**) are already working through Cluster coordination mechanism and other education coordination mechanisms to develop alternative learning modalities as the duration of school closures is unknown. This approach is being encouraged across the region.

**WASH:** The sector is heavily engaged in preventive measures, such as promoting the washing of hands. Water availability, storage and supply of sufficient soap are essential at household levels. UNHCR and its partners are engaged in the regular distribution of core relief items in the region including soap and sanitary materials packages. In **Tanzania**, UNHCR and partners provided double quantities during a soap distribution this week. Several of



A child washes his hands following campaigns carried out in Kakuma, Kenya. UNHCR/K. Ismail.

our operations in the region have made requests for additional hygiene and sanitation materials, including soap and masks.

**Health:** Major challenges are the immediate availability of trained personnel, protective materials for health personnel, equipment necessary to test, detect and treat complicated cases, medication and adequate facilities for isolation. Ministries of Health across the region have convened meetings with their partners, including UN Agencies to discuss the preparedness and response plans to combat COVID-19. Operations like **Somalia** have provided the government with shelters to use as quarantine and treatment centres and in **Burundi** training and education has been conducted for community health workers on the risks, prevention and infection control.

**Food Assistance:** The situation is exacerbated by ration cuts already in place in several refugee operations in the region (**Ethiopia** 16% cut, **Kenya** 30% cut, **Djibouti** 50% cut in cash portion, **South Sudan** 30% cut in food basket) and will be introduced next month in **Uganda** (30% cut) due to funding shortfalls. UNHCR and WFP have agreed on the distribution of two-month food rations to certain refugee camps in the region, including **Ethiopia** and **South Sudan**. Distributions will be carried out with attention to social distancing guidelines.

**Livelihoods:** With the restrictions being put in place by governments, livelihood activities for refugees and host communities have been affected. In **Kenya**, for example, due to the measures put in place on social distancing and banning of large gatherings, refugees in urban areas cannot continue with their business activities and many are now requesting for financial support.

### Inter-agency coordination

Country operations are working closely with UN Country Teams, Resident Coordinators and the World Health Organization on crisis management, personnel and business continuity arrangements, programme criticality, preparedness, and response planning. Existing refugee response coordination structures continue to function, through virtual communication where relevant.

At the regional level UNHCR is engaged with the Regional Humanitarian Partners Team to map the impact on humanitarian operations and coordinate on advocacy messaging, as well as with many sectoral groups including health, nutrition, education, and child protection which have been developing context specific inter-agency guidance on programming during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### Funding needs

UNHCR issued an initial global emergency appeal for COVID-19 related needs on 10 March for US\$33 million, covering a period of two months. Since then contributions have been received from Japan and Canada with a number of other donors expressing interest. Unearmarked and flexible funds previously received from donors are also being used for the initial response in the region.

On 25 March, the UN launched an inter-agency Global Humanitarian Response Plan seeking US\$2.01 billion, which includes US\$255 million for UNHCR's operations in affected countries until the end of the year. Monthly updates to the appeal are expected, including the addition of additional partner requirements. UNHCR will shortly provide a document with more details on its resource requirements and planned responses as included in the inter-agency appeal.

While seeking funds to carry out COVID-19 preventative measures and response activities, UNHCR stresses the need for support to be additional to the existing critical funding requirements laid out in UNHCR's regular Global Appeal for 2020. It is vital that funding for ongoing and planned programmes is also provided as soon as possible to sustain support for millions of refugees and internally displaced people already living a precarious existence, for whom already limited self-reliance opportunities are likely to shrink further as a result of the economic impact of the crisis.

## Media links

**Web story, UNHCR seeks US\$255 million to respond to COVID-19 outbreak, 25 March:**

<https://www.unhcr.org/news/stories/2020/3/5e7b57e90/unhcr-seeks-us255-million-respond-covid-19-outbreak.html>

**Ethiopia: Statement by UNHCR Ethiopia on the COVID-19 crisis, 25 March:**

<https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/74767>

**Rwanda: Rwanda takes coronavirus fight to refugee camps (The New Times, March 19, 2020):** The Ministry of Emergency Management on Thursday, March 19, has issued guidelines for refugee camps as the country steps up efforts to contain the spread of coronavirus. [Read the full article here.](#)

**Uganda: Uganda suspends refugee arrivals as coronavirus cases rise (The New Humanitarian):**

<https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/africa/east-africa/uganda>

## Contacts

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