

## East and Horn of Africa, and the Great Lakes Region

27 March-2 April 2020

 **4.6** MILLION  
 REFUGEES & ASYLUM-SEEKERS

 **8.1** MILLION  
 INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS

 **451,000**  
 REFUGEE RETURNEES

**351** CONFIRMED  
 COVID-19 CASES  
 IN HOSTING COUNTRIES

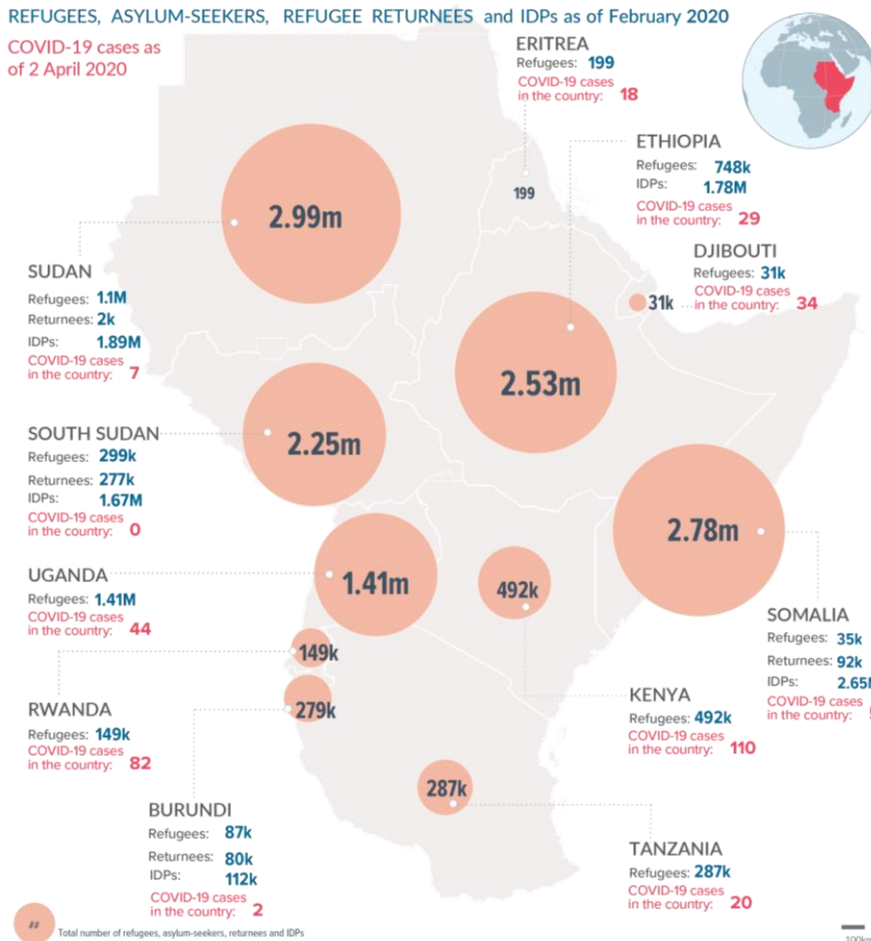
### Overview

The COVID-19 situation in the East and Horn of Africa, and the Great Lakes region continues to evolve rapidly, with new cases reported each day since 13 March 2020. As of 2 April, there were 351 confirmed COVID-19 cases in 10 of the 11 countries covered by UNHCR's EHAGL Regional Bureau. Although there have been no confirmed cases among UNHCR's population of concern so far, 4.6 million refugees and 8.1 million IDPs and their host communities are at risk. Cases of local transmission have been reported in Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda. Measures by governments in the region to contain the spread of COVID-19 are evolving rapidly, with frequent changes to border/entry restrictions or limitations on internal movement. All UNHCR operations in the EHAGL region have adopted teleworking measures to varying degrees.

The African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, on 26 March, issued guidance on responding to COVID-19 and expressed its concern about the vulnerability of people in IDP camps, refugees, asylum seekers and migrants and the possible devastating consequences. On 30 March, in an extraordinary virtual summit of the Inter-governmental Authority for Development (IGAD), Heads of State agreed to develop a comprehensive regional response strategy and an action plan together with an emergency fund to address the pandemic in the IGAD region – taking into account vulnerable groups of people, specifically including refugees.

REFUGEES, ASYLUM-SEEKERS, REFUGEE RETURNEES and IDPs as of February 2020

COVID-19 cases as of 2 April 2020



### Key Measures Taken

- Promoting inclusion of refugees, internally displaced persons and stateless people in national preparedness and response measures
- Undertaking contingency planning and preparedness activities
- Upgrading and adapting Business and Operational Continuity Plans
- Transitioning to teleworking and suspension of travel

\*COVID-19 Case information: WHO (2 April 2020), Ministries of Health, Governments. Note: COVID-19 cases refer to total cases reported in the countries of asylum.

## Operational update - preparedness and response

Operations in the region continue to work closely with partners to share information and adapt and enhance the delivery of activities to refugees, IDPs and host communities within the context of the various containment measures put in place by Governments in the region. In coordination with local health authorities, national preparedness plans are being adapted to local refugee and IDP contexts with a strong focus on mass communication and community engagement (including refugee hosting communities).

### Protection

The closure of borders is having an impact on access to asylum in the region. All 11 countries in the EHAGL region have effectively closed their borders with some further prohibiting travel within the country. New developments this week included a national lockdown initiated in Eritrea, with all citizens compelled to stay at home for a period of 21 days, while Rwanda extended the country's lockdown to 19 April. In Uganda, a national curfew was imposed on 31 March and restrictions have been put on the use of public and private transport, with closure of all non-essential businesses and gatherings of more than five persons banned for an initial period of 14 days.

In order to comply with the physical distancing measures issued by the WHO, several operations have worked to decongest shelters and/or relocate refugees. In Djibouti, 570 families (4,556 individuals) were identified as living in overcrowded shelters and a decision taken to decongest their shelters in Ali Addeh and Holl-Holl villages by providing additional structures. In Ethiopia, poor hygiene conditions and lack of space in Pamdong reception centre presented a risk to effective mitigation against the spread of COVID-19 leading the Government and UNHCR to undertake the relocation of 2,190 individuals to the nearby camp of Nguenyiyel in Gambella.

While most repatriation activities have been suspended, voluntary repatriation of Burundian refugees from Tanzania has continued – with 506 Burundians returning on 26 March. Additional health screening measures and protocols have been put in place while UNHCR and partners continue to dialogue with the two governments to determine the way forward.

### Education

**1 million** refugee children out of school as result of COVID-19

Schools have closed as a result of COVID-19 in all 11 countries of the region. Some 1 million refugee students in the region are currently at home and UNHCR and partners are keen to ensure that their education continues. UNHCR already supports digital learning programmes in Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and South Sudan in collaboration with Vodafone Foundation that offers mobile learning through use of laptops and tablets. The viability of including refugees in large scale distance learning programmes is being explored, noting significant challenges with respect to limited ICT infrastructure and internet connectivity, and lack of television and radio ownership.

**11** countries have closed their borders, impacting access to asylum

Refugee families relocated in Djibouti and Ethiopia to decongest shelters and a reception centre

Populations affected by the suspension of repatriation activities:

- Somali refugees
- Ethiopian refugees
- Congolese refugees

### Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH)

**260,000** refugees, IDPs and host community members received soap in Sudan

The sector is heavily engaged in preventive measures, promoting correct hand washing and other hygiene measures. UNHCR and its partners are engaged in the regular distribution of core relief items (CRIs) in the region including soap and sanitary material packages. In Kenya, a two months distribution of soap, sanitary materials and hygiene kits was conducted. In South Sudan, a two-month soap distribution along with food distribution began on 30 March. More preparedness and prevention activities are required to boost WASH interventions and mass messaging.

## Health

**Major health challenges include the immediate availability of trained personal, protective materials for health personnel, equipment necessary to detect, test and treat complicated cases, medication and adequate facilities for isolation.**

UNHCR remains actively involved across the region with Ministries of Health on the inclusion of refugees in national preparedness and response plans to combat COVID-19. Securing medical supplies and personal protective equipment has proven challenging as several countries have put strict export restrictions on the number of products but initial procurement is underway. In some operations like Uganda, isolation facilities have been identified in camps and refugee hosting areas, however, in other countries such as Tanzania, challenges remain in identifying, establishing and refurbishing isolation facilities for suspected cases in refugee camps.

**60%** of refugees in the region are already experiencing food ration cuts, including in Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, South Sudan and Uganda

## Food Security

UNHCR and WFP have agreed on the distribution of two-month food rations to certain refugee camps in the region, including in Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya and South Sudan where distributions took place this week with due attention to social distancing protocols. UNHCR is working with WFP on the prepositioning of food rations and adequate supplies of food commodities for nutrition programmes, and with UNICEF for prepositioning of supplies for therapeutic treatment of severe acute malnutrition in refugee sites in the region.

## Livelihoods

The pandemic will have major impacts on the socio-economic well-being of refugees, IDPs and hosting communities in the region. Movement restrictions and other necessary containment measures are curtailing the ability to work, produce and sell goods to earn an income. Many urban refugees are daily workers or run small business which are closed. In Rwanda, Uganda and Kenya, UNHCR is exploring options to provide one-off cash assistance for urban refugees to meet basic needs, while also pursuing opportunities to include refugees in emergency social protection schemes Governments may introduce.

**3-8%** cuts in Africa's GDP growth are anticipated by analysts

*Refugees in Tanzania's Nduta camp learning about COVID-19 and how to stay safe.*

*UNHCR / W. Itaeli*



## Inter-agency Coordination

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

On 25 March, the UN launched an inter-agency [Global Humanitarian Response Plan](#) seeking US\$2.01 billion, which includes US\$255 million for initial, prioritized requirements in UNHCR's operations in affected countries. Monthly updates to the appeal are expected, including the addition of increased partner requirements.

**USD 255 million requested by UNHCR in the inter-agency Global Humanitarian Response Plan on 25 March**

On 27 March, UNHCR issued an [Emergency Appeal](#) providing more details on the initial \$255 million requirements in the GHRP, including a country and sectoral breakdown. Within the appeal, \$15 million has been requested for eight countries in the East and Horn and Great Lakes Region.

**USD 15 million requested for 8 countries the East and Horn of Africa and Great Lakes region on 27 March**

Activities covered by the appeal – and already underway – include life-saving interventions across a number of sectors: procurement of medical supplies and personal protective equipment; establishing shelter and other quarantine arrangements; upgrading water, sanitation and hygiene; and health services; emergency shelter; communications with communities; and adapting registration, refugee status determination and other protection programmes to the changing circumstances.

## Press releases

**UNHCR: Staying and delivering for refugees amid COVID-19 crisis:**

<https://www.unhcr.org/news/press/2020/3/5e8202a64/unhcr-staying-delivering-refugees-amid-covid-19-crisis.html>

**OHCHR, IOM, UNHCR and WHO: The rights and health of refugees, migrants and stateless must be protected in COVID-19 response:** <https://www.unhcr.org/news/press/2020/3/5e836f164/rights-health-refugees-migrants-stateless-must-protected-covid-19-response.html>

**Live blog - Refugees in the COVID-19 crisis:** <https://www.unhcr.org/afr/news/stories/2020/4/5e85708a4/live-blog-refugees-in-the-covid-19-crisis.html#>

**Footage for media outlets of operations putting in place preparedness measures:**

<https://media.unhcr.org/CS.aspx?VP3=SearchResult&VBID=2CZ7RB9PAGWR>

Click [here](#) to access a [live dashboard](#) providing information on COVID-19 cases in the region, as well as travel restrictions and movement and border controls put in place by Governments.

## Contacts

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