UNHCR Niger - Covid-19 :

Strengthening testing and intake capacities in Niger

In just a few weeks, our way of life has radically changed. Since the WHO has decalred the coronavirus a pandemic, all countries in the world are facing health challenges that have not been seen for a century. These challenges are bigger for underdeveloped countries with fragile health infrastructures and/or in the grip of a security crisis.

In Niger, UNHCR, in coordination with the United Nations System (SNU), is working to fight the pandemic within the framework of the Government of Niger's New Coronavirus Preparedness and Response Plan (COVID-19). This Plan has six main action points: **1.** coordination; **2.** epidemiological surveillance; **3.** prevention and control of infection; and **4.** Risk communication and socio-community involvement; **5.** Capacity of health services; **6.** Establishment of isolation sites.

With needs estimated at **102,839,078,927 FCFA**.

To respond to axis 6 of this Response Plan, UNHCR has deployed 58 Refugee Housing Units (RHU) in the General Seyni Kountché Stadium in Niamey. These are usually set up in UNHCR refugee camps when an emergency arises. Today, they are used to increase the reception, screening and isolation capacities for Covid-19 infected patients in the capital of Niger.

These units offer a sturdy steel structure, solid walls, a lockable door, electricity and other functions necessary for quality care. Each unit has a size of 17.5 m2, is equipped with air conditioning and has the capacity to accommodate 2 beds. This represents a total capacity of 100 places.

"The Urgent Medical Aid Services have set up a green line. All callers with symptoms of COVID-19 will be redirected to the center, examined and tested. If the diagnosis is positive, they will be placed under observation. In case of complications, patients will be evacuated to the main health center in the capital" explains Dr. Harouna, UNHCR's Health Specialist.

A COUNTRY-WIDE SUPPORT

UNHCR has carried out a needs analysis with the authorities in Niamey, as well as with the regional health directorates in the whole country. The agency will provide a total number of 350 equipped RHUs throughout the country, representing a capacity of 700 patients. As of 26 April, a new facility will be deployed in the Tahoua Region.

And, at the request of the Government, UNHCR will examine the possibility of building additional health facilities. In the region of Diffa, an isolation area will be set up at Sayam Forage camp for cases with symptoms of COVID-19 while they wait for their transfer to the regional health center.

ANTICIPATION, PREVENTION, SOLIDARITY

Since the beginning of the crisis, UNHCR Niger has worked on prevention and accompanied the government in its response while coordinating with other UN agencies, **in order to save lives**.

An objective that can only be achieved by adopting a global vision on health challenges posed by the pandemic. An isolation mechanism cannot be effective without addressing effective screening practices. Similarly, the mechanism will be set up in other parts of the country where the needs remain high.

In addition, UNHCR is also scaling up existing refugee activities that are useful to prevent and fight the virus. Refugees in Niger produce soap and bleach, and sew washable mouth masks. This makes people under UNHCR's mandate full-fledged actors in the national response.

"This center has a strong symbolic value, it reminds us that inclusion is the best response to tackle this crisis. The shelter solutions provided by UNHCR for refugees, some of the most fragile people, are now useful for all citizens in Niger. It is a strong symbol that reminds us that anticipation, prevention and solidarity are the building blocks to contain the epidemic," said Alessandra Morelli, UNHCR Representative for Niger, on Friday 17 April in Niamey at the inauguration of the system in the presence of Niger's Prime Minister.

Read more on UNHCR Niger's COVID-19 response on:
data2.unhcr.org/Niger