



## The United Nations & COVID-19 Global Health Emergency

Having gained a foothold in 195 countries with more than 400,000 reported cases and close to 20,000 reported deaths, COVID-19 is reaching more and more areas of the world grappling with conflict, natural disasters and climate change.

As Secretary-General Guterres stated, “COVID-19 is the greatest test” since World War II; “it is more than a health crisis. It is a human crisis.” The UN chief just [released an updated plan](#) to counter COVID-19, which emphasizes the need for countries to act in concert and outlines ways to suppress transmission of the virus, safeguard people’s lives and their livelihoods, and learn from the crisis to build back. In addition, last week, the World Health Organization (WHO) - the global coordinating authority on the UN’s response – and the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) organized a [humanitarian appeal](#) for the most vulnerable countries, bringing together existing appeals from UN partners, as well as identifying new needs.

Provided below is a snapshot of UN efforts overseas to combat COVID-19. This reference document is by no means comprehensive of all the UN’s work; it is meant to illustrate the various ways the “UN Family” confronts a global pandemic, based on both its past actions and new methods.

This document will be updated regularly but please reach out if you have any questions. For further background, the United Nations has also developed a [resource](#) to monitor the latest updates.



### U.S.-UN Partnership

- On Saturday, March 28, the United Nations, in coordination with U.S. Ambassador to the UN, Kelly Craft, donated 250,000 face masks to New York City health workers fighting the COVID-19 pandemic. Noting that the UN speaks “with one voice to express our resolute support for this great city and its proud people,” Secretary-General Guterres expressed his hope that the face masks will make a difference for New York City’s frontline workers.

### World Health Organization (WHO)

- Since the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak, WHO has shipped: 800,000 surgical masks; 54,000 N95 masks; 873,000 gloves; 15,000 goggles; 24,000 face shields. This personal protective equipment has been sent to 75 countries; they have also shipped testing kits to 126 countries.
- As the pandemic continues to accelerate, WHO Director-General Tedros Ghebreyesus has made clear the stark danger of the virus to those already affected by crisis and WHO’s efforts to help the most vulnerable e.g. in Africa.
- As of March 20, 36 of Africa’s 54 countries have [reported cases](#), and at least 12 countries have reported local transmission of COVID-19. **Though Africa accounts for 16% of the global population, it accounts for 1% of global spending on health care.** Funding for life-saving equipment — from masks/gloves to ventilators and makeshift ICUs — is limited. This means that existing health resources would need to be



directed away from other critical health challenges, like HIV, if COVID-19 persists without sustained support.

- Although it's not clear how many cases have gone unreported — and how Africa's warmer climate could potentially affect the virus — **it is clear that WHO's support in rapid preparedness and response is essential for saving lives there.**
- **Early detection** is key for preventing local transmission, a lesson West Africa learned during the devastating Ebola outbreak in 2014-2016. Health officials had to conduct rigorous "contact tracing;" now, the skills and best practices honed during that outbreak are being shared by WHO in response to COVID-19. WHO has already trained **Rapid Response Teams**, made up of local health workers and officials, in 36 African countries.
- **Communicating the risks** - On March 18, WHO announced a partnership with WhatsApp to create a COVID-19 hotline that provides its 2 billion users with timely information and news on the virus. Facebook, which owns WhatsApp, also donated \$1 million to the International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN), allowing users to directly send **suspected rumors or misinformation** to fact-checking organizations in their desired country. **Google is also using pop-up messages to direct attention to the accounts of the WHO and other credible sources.** WHO officials are also helping African health authorities craft messaging about the virus for other key outlets that reach wide swaths of the population, like TV and radio.
- **Getting essential supplies and equipment to those in need** - In early February, only two countries in sub-Saharan Africa, Senegal and South Africa, had the ability to test for COVID-19. Since then, WHO has helped the region massively scale up testing and now 43 more countries can do so. WHO has also sent essential personal protective equipment — like masks and gloves — to 24 countries in the region, and a second shipment is being prepared for countries with confirmed cases.

## UNICEF

- UNICEF is supporting national efforts to respond to, or prepare for, COVID-19 by providing **water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH)** services and supplies in health facilities/schools and working to improve interpersonal communication (IPC). UNICEF is supporting IPC in communities by ensuring continued access to WASH services for households living in affected areas, at vulnerable collective sites, and in public spaces by training health workers and teachers.
- In addition to WHO's work, UNICEF is coordinating with local authorities and partners to track and respond to COVID-19 **misinformation**, to ensure children and their families know how to protect themselves from the virus and know where to seek assistance. UNICEF is also working with adolescent and young influencers, including those on social media, to promote awareness and deliver social and behavioral change interventions.

## UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR)

- UNHCR is racing to protect millions of people in its care worldwide and prevent the further spread of COVID-19. Massive efforts are underway to distribute **basic hygiene equipment** from soap to face masks, in countries from Lebanon — which hosts around one million refugees from the civil war in Syria — to Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania, sheltering refugees from conflicts across Africa.
  - In **Sudan**, UNHCR has delivered soap to over 260,000 refugees, internally displaced people (IDP) and members of the host communities. Plus, some 15,000 text messages have been sent to urban



refugees living in Khartoum, sharing health awareness and prevention advice.

- UNHCR is working overtime to share critical COVID-19 prevention information with vulnerable populations and **training health workers** in refugee sites on case definitions, disease identification, and management. When detected, UNHCR is reporting active case findings, contact tracing, and investigation of alerts in collaboration with ministries of health, WHO, and partners, including at points of entry and refugee sites.
  - In **Bangladesh**, training has started for staff working serving the Rohingya camps, where some 850,000 refugees live in dense conditions. More than 2,000 refugee volunteers are working with community and religious leaders to communicate important prevention measures.

### **UN Population Fund (UNFPA)**

- UNFPA continues to be a leading — and in some cases, the only — provider of reproductive health care in 150 countries, including those impacted by existing humanitarian crises which will be exacerbated by the pandemic.
- Pandemics exacerbate existing **gender inequalities and vulnerabilities**, and girls and women are likely to have an even greater need for protection from gender-based and intimate partner violence. As part of its COVID-19 response, UNFPA helps national partners and health workers effectively address the increased risk of gender-based violence, including how to navigate shifting referral pathways as access to care evolves with the outbreak.
- Just as pregnancy doesn't pause in a pandemic, neither do periods. But hygiene and dignity needs are often overshadowed by efforts to fulfill other essential needs like food, water, and shelter — and, in a health crisis, access to care. In Hubei Province in China, the former epicenter of the virus, UNFPA **delivered critical medical supplies and sanitary items** — such as sanitary napkins and diapers — for frontline health workers, girls, and women and their children to protect their health and maintain their dignity in the midst of response.
- The UNFPA Supplies Programme, which supports countries in strengthening their contraceptive supply chains, is working rapidly to ensure a secure and reliable supply of **reproductive health commodities**, including contraception but also sanitary items and personal protective equipment for health workers.

### **World Food Programme (WFP)**

- **Prepositioning Food** - WFP's first priority in the face of COVID-19 is to sustain its life-saving programs for 87 million people worldwide. So far, supply chain disruptions have been minimal as food supply has been adequate and markets have been stable (in the coming months, WFP expects to see disruptions in the food supply chains from border closures and other factors). Still, the organization is procuring and pre-positioning a **three month-stock of food** in or near countries most vulnerable.
- **Logistics Support** - So far, WFP has delivered health-related commodities and protective equipment to 67 countries on behalf of WHO through its Humanitarian Response Depots, designed an innovative COVID-19 field treatment center with WHO, and maintained vital air and ground transportation services for humanitarian and health responders. The United Nations Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS), managed by WFP, offers safe, reliable, cost-efficient and effective passenger and light cargo transport for the wider humanitarian community to and from areas of crisis and intervention.



- **Food Security Monitoring** - As the crisis worsens, monitoring of food insecurity resulting from food price spikes, border closures and the virus' effect on already malnourished populations will be even more important. WFP's Vulnerability Analysis and Mapping Service VAM provides geospatial and economic analysis, food security monitoring and assessments, and post shock assessments. The information VAM supplies allows WFP to perform effective targeting, determine the most appropriate type and scale of intervention and ensure the most efficient use of humanitarian resources by allocating funding according to needs.

### UN Development Programme (UNDP)

- The growing COVID-19 pandemic threatens to disproportionately hit developing countries, not only as a health crisis in the short term but as a devastating social and economic crisis over months and years to come. **Income losses are expected to top US \$220 billion in developing countries, and nearly half of all jobs in Africa could be lost.**
- UNDP is already working to support health systems in countries including Bosnia and Herzegovina, China, Djibouti, El Salvador, Eritrea, Kyrgyzstan, Madagascar, Nigeria, Paraguay, Panama, Serbia, Ukraine, and Vietnam.
- A UNDP-led COVID-19 Rapid Response Facility has already been launched, funded by existing resources and capitalized with an initial US\$20 million. This facility is disbursing through a fast-track mechanism enabling UNDP teams to offer immediate assistance to countries for their national response.

### Department of Peace Operations

- Secretary-General Guterres called on a **global ceasefire** to fight the larger battle against COVID-19. He hopes this ceasefire will allow humanitarians to reach some of the most vulnerable who are suffering.
- UN peace missions are [messaging with local communities](#) either through radio or social media and sharing accurate and timely information. For example, in the DR Congo, Radio Okapi is informing the population about COVID-19 in local languages, educating on mitigation measures and working to dispel rumors and counter misinformation, similar to their successful efforts when addressing Ebola in the region.
- Peace operations are preparing for an outbreak and sourcing critical protective supplies and treatment equipment. For example, the Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) has received a donation of medical equipment, including 20,000 testing kits, 100,000 masks, and 1,000 protective suits and face shields.
- Missions are **delaying their rotations** in order to minimize the spread of the disease.

### International Atomic Energy (IAEA)

- IAEA will provide diagnostic kits, equipment and training in nuclear-derived detection techniques to countries asking for assistance in tackling COVID-19. The assistance, requested by 14 countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, is part of intensified global efforts to contain infections. The diagnostic technique, known as real time reverse transcription–polymerase chain reaction (real time RT-PCR), can help **quickly detect and identify the novel coronavirus accurately in humans, as well as in animals that may also host it.** The first training course in detection techniques took place on March 27 at the UN Animal Production and Health Laboratory in Austria.