



## Norwegian Refugee Council's Covid-19 response

The 2019-20 coronavirus pandemic is affecting over 100 countries worldwide. The Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) is committed to preventing and responding to the crisis among refugees, displaced persons and host communities.

### NRC programme activities

Information sharing on prevention of coronavirus and provision of hygiene kits and clean water are ongoing. NRC is also continuing to provide education and legal aid remotely through the use of radio messages, phone calls and video.

### Asia, Europe and Latin America

**Ukraine:** NRC has adapted core essential programming to continue supporting vulnerable population while also mitigating the infection risk to the communities we serve. Legal services have shifted to mobile and digital platforms with provision of updates on legislative and policy changes regarding displaced population. Cash programming remains operational by working with service providers on mitigation measures to avoid increase risk of infection. NRC is collaborating with Health and Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WaSH) agencies and leveraging our extensive communication channels so vulnerable populations have access to vital information regarding the situation. NRC has concentrated efforts on interrupting the transmission and mitigating the spread and impact of the virus. The present activities centre on a strong communications campaign with a focus on key messaging for high-risk groups, supported by the installation of sanitisation stations around essential

services and infrastructure in-line with WHO recommendations.

**Bangladesh:** NRC continues to engage with the wider humanitarian community in Cox's Bazar to prepare for coronavirus related needs amongst host communities and Rohingya refugees in several camps. Education and Information, counselling and ICLA programming have elaborated interim coronavirus response plans and community volunteers are being trained in preparation of supporting health-sensitive awareness raising activities. NRC has been requested by WHO to support construction/refurbishing of structures to be used as isolation centres both within refugee camps and host community settings, and NRC is redirecting funding under our Education programme to repurpose learning centres to prepare facilities for this purpose. Further funding is being sought to support construction/refurbishment of additional centres and their provisioning with requisite basic WaSH and Non-food item (NFI) materials.

**Myanmar:** As the number of confirmed cases increases in Myanmar, NRC is adjusting our response to be able to address needs within government and non-government controlled areas of the country. Modified procedures have been introduced for cash assistance to target households in Northern Rakhine while additional funding is

being pursued through rapid response mechanisms to enable scale up of cash support, in-kind assistance and temporary shelter to relieve pressure in overcrowded displacement settings. We are exploring the possibility of installing handwashing stations and distributing hygiene items to reduce the risk of disease transmission and incorporating Ministry of Health and WHO messaging into awareness raising activities to be undertaken within communities.

**Iran:** NRC has received approval from the authorities to distribute a further 1,600 hygiene kits and information pamphlets in three locations in Sistan and Baluchistan province. Preparations are also being made to distribute 450 household hygiene kits, complemented with 450 NFI kitchen kits which include stoves to boil water and water purification tablets in Sistan and Baluchistan province. We have already re-started rehabilitation work of WaSH facilities in some schools in settlements in Kerman province and in urban areas in Hormozgan province, after they were temporarily halted. The ability to directly assist vulnerable Afghans who have lost their income as a result of coronavirus is currently being explored and authorities have approved direct bank transactions for documented Afghans for the month of April. We are hopeful this method will be extended to May and beyond.

**Afghanistan:** NRC has supported 6,000 Afghan returnees at the Spin Boldak-Chaman border in Kandahar with information on the prevention of coronavirus and the dissemination of leaflets. Ongoing activities include hygiene promotion and distribution of approximately 4,000 hygiene kits across settlements in Herat and Kabul provinces, the two provinces so far with the highest number of confirmed coronavirus cases. We are also looking at opportunities to support households with cash-based interventions as well as targeted protection assistance to mitigate and respond to anticipated secondary impacts of coronavirus as already highlighted by many internally displaced persons (IDPs) and shared with NRC's Site Management team. NRC is in process of rolling out Smart Rapid Response Mechanism (RRM) which is a digital two-way communication platform to support further dissemination of key information, conduct surveys, dispel misinformation and engage in rumour prevention, send alerts and collect feedback from communities. NRC's Smart RRM will collaborate closely with the newly established Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE) Working Group, which we are co-leading together with WHO.

**Colombia:** NRC is piloting distribution of cards (CBP) to vulnerable Venezuelans and Colombians in the West. Last week, 1,000 food baskets were distributed in the Northeast in collaboration with local authorities and partners. 350 Venezuelans stranded on the way back to Venezuela were assisted on the northern Bogota highway by our Rapid Response Unit.

**Honduras and El Salvador:** We are scaling up humanitarian assistance for the families of persons receiving education assistance, providing them with cash transfers, food vouchers and water tanks. In Honduras, our teams have received a safe-passage exemption, allowing the assistance in person to people, shelters and reception centres on Tuesdays and Fridays. NRC and UNHCR have trained officials in the reception centres to identify protection needs and to refer cases.

### Central West Africa

**Burkina Faso and Niger:** Our distributions of shelter kits in Burkina Faso's Center-North region have been adapted to include precautions against the spread of coronavirus. The number of displaced persons present at these distributions is limited and adequate spacing for social distancing is required. Messages on frequent handwashing and hygiene are shared during the distributions.

**Cameroon:** In the South West and North West, NRC has integrated hygiene promotion activities and has provided intertwined messaging on both coronavirus and Cholera. Sensitisation activities and hygiene related information sharing has reached a total of 11,125 persons so far. In the Far North region, a total of 16 hygiene promoters have been trained on coronavirus sensitisation messages. A total of 491 persons have been reached with hygiene messaging in 4 localities. NRC continues to do needs assessments related to the virus and so far, needs in 10 villages have been mapped out.

**Central African Republic:** Our WaSH team has intensified hygiene promotion activities focusing on preventive measures for coronavirus through the dissemination of key messages on social distancing and handwashing portrayed through illustrations and posters available in local languages.

**Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC):** In DRC we are consulting with communities in urban and rural areas to better understand their perceptions and needs related to coronavirus. We have also begun to move emergency shelter-WaSH assistance that

was ear-marked for rural areas, towards coronavirus needs in new and existing IDP sites in urban areas. We have also directed capacity towards the preparation and distribution of essential WaSH items for handwashing and awareness raising materials in urban areas.

**Mali:** In Mali we have strengthened our WaSH team to ramp up WaSH activities including water trucking, and the creation of water points for a hygiene response. Our WaSH and RRM teams are also working in close synergy to ensure a timely response adapted to the coronavirus context, to new displacements that still occur due to continuing violence.

**Nigeria:** Our teams in Nigeria are working with community volunteers in 39 displacement camps in Maiduguri to promote protection measures against coronavirus. We are talking to traditional leaders, youth and women groups about hygiene, handwashing and social distancing in these displacement camps.

### East Africa and Yemen

**Kenya:** Education teams are securing school, children and teaches by providing hygiene promotions, installing handwashing points, ensuring functional running water in addition to printing and displaying prevention measures. NRC has also started digital classes by providing video lessons. In Dadaab, we are supporting the local production of 300,000 masks for refugees and the host community. NRC has mobilised 110 former tailor graduates from the Youth Education Pack (YEP) programme to produce 175,000 masks. We will support the tailors as livelihood groups with materials. In addition, local soap producing groups will produce 600 cartons of soap (+/- 720kg of soap). The soap will be sold locally at a subsidised price. Part of the soap will also be distributed to community places like markets, hospitals, water points, abattoir, police stations etc. in both refugee camps and the host community.

**Somalia:** NRC has started mobilisation campaigns on hand washing and other coronavirus prevention messages in schools. In addition, our teams are doing awareness raising activities in all entry points, health centres and learning institutions. Our teams have installed 15 hand washing stations with soap and clean water in 15 strategic locations with 4600 people currently reached on a daily basis. In addition, NRC has recruited 15 community hygiene promoters who are delivering awareness on coronavirus. Hygiene and awareness raising

sessions are also being delivered through radio targeting 25 900 persons. The aim is to expand the target audience through radio to 100,000 persons with a focus on IDP populations in South West, Banadir and Galmudu. Our ICLA teams are supporting IDPs evicted in Kismayo with post eviction cash support and they are also providing information on coronavirus during registration of house to house visits.

**Uganda:** Awareness raising activities with messages on prevention of the coronavirus are being developed for use in schools and other public places.

**Ethiopia:** NRC is providing awareness sessions on the coronavirus in all schools and YEP centres. Our ICLA teams are providing information and counselling through telephone with a new 4-digit hotline number and SMS service soon to be activated. NRC is also installing handwashing facilities at public places and isolation centres, disseminating key information and messages to targeted vulnerable populations and providing soaps and alcohol sanitisers.

**Djibouti:** Our teams are distributing safe potable water, buckets and soaps in order to set hand washing stations in the refugee settlements and host community public institutions. In addition, NRC is providing trainings on hand washing practice with awareness messages on the coronavirus at the Holl Holl and Ali Addeh health centre.

**South Sudan:** NRC continues to provide information about the coronavirus and hygiene through banners and sessions among communities and at our distribution sites. Our teams have also distributed WaSH items to 8400 individuals and installed hand washing facilities in 2 GFD centres in Mayom.

### Middle East

**Iraq:** NRC has distributed coronavirus prevention kits in Anbar, Ninewa, Kirkuk, and Dohuk governorates both in and out-of-camp. These kits have been accompanied with hygiene promotion and awareness raising. For the most hard-to-reach locations, we have started with bulk SMS dissemination of coronavirus messaging, to be followed up with services once access can be negotiated. Alongside health authorities, NRC has been erecting isolation units in the form of Rubb/Wiik Halls and ensuring that camp contingency plans and distributions have been conducted by partners, including food. Education teams' distributions of home learning materials

have been conducted for children in camps, with plans to expand to out-of-camp locations. Remote legal counselling has scaled up with a focus on support to people facing eviction. Youth life skills training has commenced using WhatsApp group video.

**Lebanon:** NRC continues the provision of critical lifesaving activities on-site enabling Syrian and Palestinian refugees living in crowded camps and informal settlements with poor infrastructure to better protect themselves against the spread of the Coronavirus. Regular WaSH and shelter activities have been scaled up such as water trucking and desludging, provision of latrines, handwashing stations, water tanks and distributions of hygiene and disinfection kits and related awareness raising. Our Education and ICLA programmes are continuing through remote modalities, including via communication platforms such as WhatsApp, combined with follow-up phone calls to provide guidance and support and to safely refer people to other specialised organisations. We are ensuring adequate follow up on critical legal protection cases such as people at risk of eviction, birth registration cases and detentions. Our teams are also conducting phone surveys across all our programmes to capture displaced persons' concerns, information gaps, priority needs and the impact of coronavirus containment measures combined with pre-existing needs.

**Palestine:** In the West Bank, NRC has been conducting monitoring activities, taking actions against breaches of human rights and advocating on humanitarian issues related to or compounded by coronavirus. Together with consortium partners, our teams continue to monitor, advocate and respond to demolitions of critical hygiene and sanitation structures. NRC has also developed psychosocial support messages and recommendations on digital platforms for school counsellors to improve the wellbeing of children at home.

**Jordan:** NRC in partnership with UNHCR continues to support 120,000 refugees living in camps with cash distribution to cover basic needs. We are also ensuring hygiene kit distribution for camp residents and providing support to ensure continued access to food assistance. In host communities, NRC has relaunched our cash for rent program and is gearing up to launch a multi – purpose cash program for families affected by the lockdown.

**Syria:** NRC is working to finalise improvements to WaSH and health facilities, while joining forces with other responders to support access to safe and clean water and distribute essential hygiene and NFIs to households in need. In parallel, our Education teams are developing 'learning at home' materials for children and their parents and we are exploring options to provide cash assistance to vulnerable families.

**Libya:** Our teams have sent out 3,175 WhatsApp and SMS introductory messages to families across Tripoli and Benghazi previously registered for NFE programming to introduce NRC's plan to remain in contact and intent to offer advice for well-being, tips for learning and general hygiene awareness. NRC continues to provide remote legal counselling and has also developed a briefing note that provides guidance on registration of life events during the current movement and curfew restrictions in Libya. NRC will commence this week the distribution of hygiene kits in Benghazi and will continue providing one-off emergency cash assistance to conflict and displacement affected families in Tripoli.

### NORCAP

Experts in Burkina Faso are working to get shelters in place for displaced families, while WaSH-experts are focused on improving access to water and water quality, for instance in the Rohingya refugee camp in Bangladesh and in Yemen. CashCap experts have been instrumental in developing a [WHO guidance note](#) on how cash and voucher assistance can be used to support vulnerable groups who are now experiencing a loss of income and increased medical expenses. There is an urgent need to provide alternative messages, adapted to the local context, on how to reduce the spreading of coronavirus. This is especially important in communities where there is insufficient access to soap and water, and physical distancing is not possible.

### NRC advocacy and media activities

NRC's teams across our operations are continuing to advocate for an improved coordinated response to the coronavirus pandemic among displaced populations, in addition to humanitarian access to people in need of aid and basic services.

On 7 April, we issued a [press release](#) about how the coronavirus is forcing Venezuelan migrants and refugees in Colombia back to crisis-ridden Venezuela. Country Director Dominika Arseniuk's quote from the press release was picked up by [Latin Times](#): "Venezuelans that sought refuge in Colombia

are losing their financial lifeline because of Covid-19. Hundreds are now returning home from exile and many more could follow as lockdown continues and if aid is not provided," she said.

NRC also issued a [press release](#) on April 15 about Israel's measures against Palestinians, including demolitions of residential units, undermining the global efforts against coronavirus. The press release was picked up by Norwegian NTB, [IMEMC News](#), [Arabia News Network](#), [The New Arab](#) and [The Morning Star](#). NRC's regional media adviser Karl Schembri was also [interviewed by TRT World](#) saying: "The moment you start attacking residential houses and water and sanitation facilities, you're putting more people at risk. This virus doesn't look at ethnicity, it doesn't look at creed. If there is a serious outbreak in the occupied Palestinian territory, there is nothing to stop this virus from spreading further among Israeli citizens." Schembri was also quoted in an article by [RFL](#).

In addition, on 15 April we also issued a [joint statement](#) together with Yemen Relief & Reconstruction Foundation, Yemeni Alliance Committee and Oxfam collectively urging USAID to pause its aid suspension to ensure Yemen has all possible resources to prevent and respond to coronavirus.

The same day, NRC and twenty-five other international humanitarian agencies issued a joint

statement calling on the Governments of Myanmar and Bangladesh to restore full access to mobile data and telecommunications, which are essential to protecting vulnerable populations against the impact of coronavirus. The statement was picked up by [Relief Web](#): "Coronavirus affects us all, and every measure to protect all vulnerable communities must be employed to end this pandemic and ensure that no person is left behind".

Regional media adviser Tom Peyre Costa spoke to [The Associated Press](#) on U.S.'s decision to halt funding to the WHO expressing concerns that such a decision will hit developing countries: "Trump's decision ... is pulling the rug out from under our feet at a pivotal moment. It will impact the humanitarian community as a whole. It defies logic at the height of a global pandemic and will lead to many more deaths." The article was widely covered by several media outlets in the US and internationally including: [The Daily Independent](#), [The Daily Journal](#), [Daily Herald](#), [Stars and Stripes](#), [Fox 23 News](#) and [NBC San Diego](#).

Senior adviser Roald Høvring wrote an [opinion piece](#) for Norwegian newspaper VG stressing the importance of inclusivity during the pandemic response: "The coronavirus does not discriminate against anyone and nor should we when it comes to supporting those most at risk of infection and illness".