



UN AND THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS

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(Views expressed in the brief are those of the author, and do not represent those of ISSI)



The recent pandemic, Covid-19 continues to wreak havoc across the globe and devastate lives and livelihoods. Just as Covid-19 pandemic has changed much for the world, it has had the most harsh effect on the most vulnerable and weak segments of the society. This pandemic also affects a group of people, who are already at the lowest rung of the social ladder. These are people on the move, such as internally displaced persons (IDPs), refugees, economic migrants and all those who have had to leave their homes due to various challenging situations.

Such people are already in the grip of a crisis and during the ongoing pandemic, the foremost challenge faced by them is a health crisis, as becoming exposed to the virus in extremely poor conditions, where social distancing is impossible, puts such susceptible people at a very grave risk. Due to being in crowded conditions, where social distancing is impossible and where basic facilities such as water, sanitization, and access to health care and adequate nutrition are already hard to find, these people face a devastating risk in the current situation.

It is pertinent to note that one third of the world's internally displaced populations live in countries most at risk to Covid-19.¹ People on the move face multiple crises, just as those mentioned above. More than one hundred and fifty countries have imposed border restrictions to contain the virus, and this includes countries which make no exception for people looking for refuge in the face of

¹ Antonio Guterres, "The Covid-19 Crisis is an opportunity to reimagine human mobility", *The UN*, <https://www.un.org/en/coronavirus/covid-19-crisis-opportunity-reimagine-human-mobility>

persecution.² It may be noted that people on the move are people with existing vulnerabilities and already face an existential crises in terms of their survival. Global migration is largely being affected by Covid-19 and besides disrupting daily life around the globe, there are numerous repercussions. Human experiences regarding work, mobility and above all, freedom of movement has in several ways been phenomenally altered.³ As the world came to a sudden halt, bringing a stop to mobility across the entire globe, along with economic repercussions, which alone are likely to become a part of the recession which has already hit the world and left millions jobless and pushed others below the poverty line. The lasting impact on migration is unprecedented. Among those affected, the effects on migrant labor are noteworthy. As a consequence of social distancing practices, businesses are likely to further accelerate automation and many have already done that by reducing labor in many sectors, resulting in job losses.

In most of the industries, migrant workers are likely to be laid off. The trend of hiring local citizens instead of migrants will also be an alternative. All this will lead to the existing global inequalities adding further to the number of poor people. Labor migrants also face several challenges due to the pandemic situation and other migrant communities are also being turned away from hospitals in host countries. Due to xenophobic reactions towards migrants, the United Nations Network on Migration has called for better approaches and non- discriminatory attitudes. People flee their homes due to persecution, conflict, human rights violations as well as other reasons like precarious situations in their own home countries which lead to internal displacement. Asylum seekers and refugees are already vulnerable people who seek refuge across international borders and the pandemic has aggravated their existing vulnerability.

The challenges for these people are three pronged; a health crises, a socio economic crises and the most difficult, border closures. Refugees lack nutrition, access to clean water, sanitation and among others, exploitation and gender-based violence. The UN agencies are at the forefront of this crisis and are trying their level best to help people on the move. However, the scope of the problem is such that it requires states to cooperate and adopt inclusive policies, which aim to be all encompassing and accommodating for refugees and asylum seekers. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), there are 216 countries which are globally affected by Covid-19 and 134 refugee hosting countries are reporting the local transmission of Covid-19. Similarly, 71 million people around the world have been forcibly displaced. The challenges are enormous and UN cannot take the challenge alone. The UNHCR has scaled up operations by

² Ibid.

³ Erol Yayboke, "Five Ways COVID-19 is Changing Global Migration", March 25, 2020, *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/five-ways-covid-19-changing-global-migration>

giving support to refugee communities; however, the agency requires 745 million dollars to help countries hosting refugees to deal with the pandemic.⁴

The UN role in this regard has been significant and it may be noted that over 80% of the world's refugees and nearly all the world's displaced people are hosted in low and middle income countries. These countries have extremely weak health care systems which makes it very difficult to survive in a pandemic. By April 19, 2020, 122 refugee hosting countries had reported local transmission of Covid-19 and the number has increased, as mentioned above. Meanwhile, UNHCR and partners had already started constructing isolation and treatment facilities.⁵ The ordeal of migrants, displaced persons and refugees is enormous and despite UN efforts, there is a vacuum which requires sincere multilateral efforts to overcome these crises of enormous proportions. In this regard, the WHO and UNICEF (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund) have decided to partner on a Solidarity Response Fund in order to fight the pandemic, which will be powered by the United Nations Foundation and Swiss Philanthropy Foundation.⁶ As a major partner in this joint effort, UNICEF will lead emergency efforts to ensure that communities get access to basic amenities and health workers are guided properly to deal with this pandemic. The Covid-19 Solidarity Response Fund is aimed at helping vulnerable communities.

Apart from the above, the UN agencies, among others, mainly WHO and UNHCR are helping people on the move deal with Covid-19. In order to cater to the millions of forcibly displaced people around the world, a new agreement between WHO and the UN refugee agency has taken place, which further adds to the agreement signed in the year 2019 with the International Organization for Migration (IOM). This is the latest in a series of efforts and measures which aim at preventing public health emergencies and cater to health needs in refugee and migrant populations. The main aim of the agreement is to support the ongoing efforts to protect about 70 million displaced people from Covid-19. According to WHO, out of these, 26 million are refugees 80% of whom are residing in low and middle income countries, with already over-burdened and weak healthcare systems. The WHO efforts are in respect to distributing health education materials in several languages as well as

⁴ Coronavirus outbreak, UNHCR, <https://www.unhcr.org/coronavirus-covid-19.html>

⁵ UN Scaling up COVID-19 response to protect refugees and migrants, United Nations COVID-19 Response, <https://www.un.org/en/un-coronavirus-communications-team/un-scaling-covid-19-response-protect-refugees-and-migrants>

⁶ WHO and UNICEF to partner on pandemic response through COVID-19 Solidarity Response Fund, <https://www.who.int/news-room/detail/03-04-2020-who-and-unicef-to-partner-on-pandemic-responsethrough-covid-19-solidarity-response-fund>.


distributing Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), along with other related essentials like disinfectants and other personal hygiene products.⁷

WHO has also gathered information from countries globally and drafted a plan, called the Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan which outlines public health measures for countries to follow if they are to effectively tackle the pandemic.⁸

Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan aims to: Data as 3 June 2020


- 1** Improve country preparedness and response
- 2** Accelerate research and development
- 3** Coordinate across regions to assess, respond and mitigate risks

PROCURED PPE (for shipping to 135 countries)




- 4 million gowns
- 3 million goggles
- 11 million face shields
- 18 million N-95 respirators
- 28 million gloves
- 136 million medical masks

SOLIDARITY TRIALS




- 3500 patients enrolled
- More than 100 countries joined
- >400 hospitals in 35 countries
- 10 candidate vaccines in clinical evaluation and
- 123 in preclinical evaluation

PARTNERS PLATFORM




- 143 countries on-boarded
- 116 countries active
- 105 national plans uploaded
- 98 checklists started/ done
- 78 resource requests
- 393 donor contributions

STRENGTHENED LABORATORY CAPACITY



- > 1 million test kits to 129 countries
- 5.1 million manual tests secured
- 3.05 million swab kits secured
- orders ready for 135 countries


R&D FOR TOOLS ACCESSIBLE TO ALL



Global launches with world leaders:


- ACT-Accelerator: development of vaccines tests and treatments
- C-TAP: Technology Access pool

EXPERTS DEPLOYED WORLDWIDE



- >100 Emergency Medical Teams
- 59 experts / 27 institutions GOARN/WHO
- missions to Azerbaijan, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, China, and Italy

GUIDANCE AND TRAINING




- 130+ technical guidance docs
- OpenWHO platform:
- 90 courses
- 12 topics
- 29 languages
- >3 million enrolments
- new WHO Academy App

Collaboration with WhatsApp, Facebook, Viber, governments to fight misinformation

#COVID19
#coronavirus
#WHOImpact

GLOBAL PARTNERSHIPS AND MULTISECTORAL COLLABORATION – WHO is working with



- International Federation of the Red Cross (IFRC), International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) on guidance for asylum seekers, displaced persons and refugees
- International Chamber of Commerce on logistics and supply-chains issues
- International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) and International Air Transport Association (IATA) on guidelines for travel (domestic/international)
- World Economic Forum (WEF) engaging businesses
- World Trade Organization securing people's health and livelihoods
- Consortiums for PPE, Diagnostics and Biomedical products, for procurement

World Health Organization

Donate: www.who.int/covid19responsefund

WHO is responsible for promoting health of refugees and migrants amid Covid-19 and has been in touch with local partners and is continuously helping in the provision of guidance and help. For instance, the UNHCR and the World Food Program (WFP) are also working in collaboration with each other, in the effort to help refugees in Iraq and Libya which includes food assistance and hygiene products.

This pandemic should make the global community rethink about the interconnectedness of the world and how this interdependence should now lead towards unity and cooperation at all levels.

⁷ How WHO is supporting refugees and migrants during COVID-19 pandemic, World Health Organization, <https://www.who.int/news-room/feature-stories/detail/how-who-is-supporting-refugees-and-migrants-during-the-covid-19-pandemic>

⁸ How is WHO responding to COVID-19, <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/who-response-in-countries>

Since this pandemic has not left anyone untouched, the global community of nations must move towards greater collaboration and multilateral cooperation.