



UNHCR's sixth meeting with NGOs partners on preparedness and response to COVID-19 in refugee situations

24 April 2020
Online

Participants:

UNHCR:

- Valerie Guarnieri, WFP Assistant Executive Director
- Baptiste Burgaud, WFP Supply Chain Officer
- Dominique Hyde, Director, Division of External Relations
- Arafat Jamal, Head, Partnership, and Coordination Service
- Robin Ellis, Deputy Director, Emergencies Services, Security and Supply

NGOs:

- About 90+ participants, mostly NGOs.

Arafat Jamal

- The meeting will be focused on common service delivery for the benefit of all humanitarian workers in the context of COVID-19.

Dominique Hyde

- Thanks for the work you do in the field.
- Very grateful for a strong and very long-lasting partnership with WFP, especially around food security in that COVID response.
- In some countries, food security issues have arisen as a major concern both for refugees and host communities. COVID is a risk multiplier, affecting food security and other areas of potential vulnerability. The socio-economic impacts and inequalities are growing.
- UNHCR is working closely with governments and ministries of health to reduce transmissions and ensure health system capacity to respond.
- We have also been actively working with governments to include refugees in national plans. We also just got off a call with our regional directors that seem to be moving forward really positively, including on national protection activities and education mitigation measures.
- UNHCR and WFP work really closely together, we have clear joint priorities and we aim to stay and deliver on behalf of the populations we serve, finding both innovative ways to be there for the people of concern and accelerating as much as possible localization.
- WFP has stepped up its overall response in terms of common services for the whole humanitarian community, one of the many reasons for inviting WFP to come and speak to us today is that we have received so many questions related to their work. We thought it was much better to have them answer these questions.

Valerie Guarnieri

- Today's meeting highlights how our two organizations act as one in the field. I am glad to be here with so many of you, the cooperating partners, that make our work together possible.
- Uncertain situation that the world is in right now, we have to be working more closely together than ever, bring all of our capabilities and strengths to the service of the most vulnerable people and this kind of discussion, engagement is absolutely key to that.

Dominique Hyde



- This week WFP released the global report on food crisis and we heard that your Executive Director David Beasley warned the UN Security Council that the COVID pandemic might lead to widespread famines on a biblical proportion, can you tell us more about your concerns and about the report as well?

Valerie Guarnieri

- The global food crisis report is an interagency product hosted by WFP and FAO.
- The launch was a good opportunity to flag the ongoing hunger needs and crisis needs in the world and then discuss how we see those evolving and amplifying in the COVID-19 context.
- Our Executive Director along with the FAO Director General and Jan Egeland from NRC were able to brief the UN Security Council.
- We have to act quickly to avoid this health pandemic from becoming a hunger pandemic. This was really a clear call for action.
- 135 million people at the start of this year are already in acute hunger stage. We have to keep our foot on the accelerator in terms of ensuring that their food and nutrition needs are met.
- The report highlights the imperative of that pre-existing urgent hunger caseload but also flags the impact of COVID-19, both the disease itself and the socio-economic impacts, the fact that people are losing jobs, seeing income loss, remittance loss, countries GDPs are hit; all of these issues not just exacerbate the needs and challenges of reaching 135 million of the most desperate but also doubling those needs.
- We are estimating that an additional 130 million people will be pushed into hunger as a result of COVID-19 socio-economic impact.

Dominique Hyde

- The situation in Burkina Faso, Yemen and Syria were already bad and with this situation it is probably amplifying. What is WFP doing in some very specific countries and how is the virus impacting your work?

Valerie Guarnieri

- There are three things that are always an issue when we approach a crisis, that makes it a struggle to reach people and meet their most essential needs:
 - 1) Funding that enables everything that we do.
 - 2) Having regular access in order to identify the needs and reach people with the full range of assistance required.
 - 3) Capacity in order to address these issues and that is where we all need to bring our strengths to the table in order to ensure that we deliver those capacities, capabilities on behalf of the most vulnerable.
- All of these areas are potentially either directly impacted by the current virus or have the potential of being impacted.
- We know that it is crucial to be able to stay and deliver in these most difficult contexts and that requires having a support system in place so that health and humanitarian workers can get to the field to provide the work needed but that they can also be removed from those situations should they fall sick and should they be in need of urgent healthcare.
- It also means that activities needed to be modified and adapted to the COVID context, to ensure that we are neither being a means of transmission of the virus to the population nor risking our staff to the virus in the field.
- Access is also linked to that issue. We have the blockages of people being unable to move into countries and the difficulties being able to come out, so access is also constrained both by physical changes but also by any policies that are put in place.



- On funding, we are all painfully aware that there are challenges in terms of being able to have countries balancing the surge on domestic requirements that they have to meet, with these urgent needs abroad.
- For the populations that we serve we need to be working really closely together to ensure that funding continues to prioritize the most vulnerable and the refugees, displaced people are absolutely at the sharp end of that stick.

Dominique Hyde

- We have been receiving so many questions from our partners on common services and some of the challenges that they are facing in this regard. On the UN Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS) experience, WFP is now in the process of inaugurating an impressive logistics setup, including for medical goods, humanitarian workers and medical evacuations. Could you tell us about your plans?

Valerie Guarnieri

- We saw this ourselves facing it at a HQ level in Italy, as the country came under siege from the virus early and then we realized that this would be a bigger issue in the countries where we are all working together.
- The need to ensure freedom of movement of the humanitarian, health personnel, movement of supplies for our collective operations and the access to emergency health care services should be required for our work around the world.
- We were asked to put in place as part of the GHRP, an initial request for USD 350 millions to set up these services for the global humanitarian and health community. This involves the combination of establishing a series of strategic hubs and regional staging areas in order to be able to move air assets in and out of countries. We are in the process of putting in place a fairly impressive network of air assets to enable this.
- WFP is co-leading with WHO the supply chain task force for the COVID-19 pandemic. This has been a huge responsibility and we have agreed to deploy our capabilities to support the surge of equipment needs that are required to face the response.

Dominique Hyde

- NGOs have always been big users of UNHAS. Will you make new channels available to NGOs?

Valerie Guarnieri

- Between UNHCR, WFP, UNICEF, operational UN Agencies, it was clear from the beginning that these air services to transport people and the cargo services to move goods needed to be fully accessible to the broader humanitarian community, NGOs as well as UN Agencies, building on the kind of service model that we have with UNHAS.

Dominique Hyde

- The need to ensure that all humanitarian workers have the necessary protective equipment to be able to do their work is a challenge that WFP has been leading as part of the supply chain. Could you provide an overview of where that is?

Valerie Guarnieri

- We have been striving to ensure PPEs are available for workers on the ground and I think there has been some progress there.

Baptiste Burgaud



- The last few weeks have been an evolving picture as we all observed the growing needs and the distortion in the global market for PPEs.
- The current setup which is documented at the Geneva and interagency level is that we are asking all the HCTs in every country to coordinate those requirements and put them forward to what is called the global supply and markets working group in Geneva. So that the demand and the supplies can be matched by the various actors sitting in Geneva.
- Our role as WFP is not to procure PPEs and medical equipment on behalf of other actors. This is not an expertise we have. Our role focuses on coordination with various sourcing entities and transporters to ensure that this is dispatched in a timely fashion to the countries affected.
- There are growing donations as well, getting involved in that process that are being discussed at the Geneva level.
- It is still a fairly complicated endeavor at this stage, most of the production capacity in China is now back to 70-80% and we expect that this will continue to grow in the next few weeks but we do not see yet a fully re-established supply system for PPEs before June or July.
- There is a first level with the internal requirement that we have for our colleagues in the field for our partners, contractors and a second level which is enabling the health response in itself.
- Please approach WHO teams in countries and make sure that those demands are related to the Geneva interagency cells so that demand and supply can be matched as we keep dealing with limited availability of those for the next months.

Dominique Hyde

- We have been concentrating on COVID response, but needs are still there and UNHCR and WFP have been struggling in the past months with food pipeline breaks and with the cutting of food rations, as a result, in many African refugee hosting countries.
- Valerie, you used to be the Regional Director for Eastern Africa, what is your take on this, how do you see this evolving and what do we need to be doing more, collectively?

Valerie Guarnieri

- We need to continue to convey the message that those who are most vulnerable continue to be most vulnerable now and on the urgency of securing full resources for those caseloads.
- Refugees are really among the most vulnerable people in any context. We want to reduce the risk of tension between refugees and host communities.
- It is a regular subject in our twice-yearly WFP-UNHCR meetings: how can we keep that attention and focus and resources on the urgent needs within these longstanding refugee caseloads where the prospects for durable solutions are low or difficult to achieve. Those challenges get even higher now when we have this sort of competing global crisis that also affects countries domestically.
- We are going to have to lean in with our advocacy and our voices on behalf of the most vulnerable. We are looking through the UN development system at strengthening national social protection programs, ensuring that additional categories of vulnerable are included.
- We need to be looking very carefully at previously self-sufficient refugees who may no longer be able to meet their food and other basic needs given the COVID context.

Dominique Hyde

- Last question on your role that also includes cooperating partners, NGOs that you work with, that UNHCR also work with – over 1000 partners. You have been looking at different ways of changing modalities and working with NGOs because of the situation. Would you like to tell the NGO partners different things that might be done in terms of relationship?



Valerie Guarnieri

- Recognizing that there would be a risk to supply chains and pipelines due to blockages, we have been seeking to pre-position up to three months' worth of food or cash, depending on the transfer that we are providing in key supply corridors in order to mitigate the risk of any disruptions, whether from border closures or whether they come from delays and other bureaucratic impediments that prevent us from getting on with our work. That was something that globally we felt was absolutely essential.
- In our engagement with our partners, we asked our donors for more flexibility, to commit in advance pledges they had made and leave us some flexibility to be adaptable to the circumstances as they evolve.
- We have been heard on calls for flexibility in terms of our existing agreements. Making those changes where necessary but also giving authorizations for our cooperating partners to be able to get on with business that needs to be done, lightening up on some of the procedures that the current context may not allow, switching to a lighter form of monitoring.
- We all have to ensure accountability and we all have to ensure results. But in the current context, there are ways that we can do that a little bit lighter for our colleagues on the ground, as everybody's time and movement is restricted.
- The common services that have been highlighted by our partners are absolutely essential to enable them to stay and deliver. This has been the other key area we have been leaning on.

Q&A

International Rescue Committee

- UN Agencies in general are perceived to have better access to procure protective equipment which is at the moment very difficult to procure for NGOs and other implementing partners. Would UN agencies such as WFP but also UNHCR, be able and willing to procure protective equipment for distribution to NGOs and clients as necessary?
- If so, what would be the required modalities and costs?
- Can WFP begin pooled procurement activities for NGOs; support a process where purchase requests from central stock can be confirmed in a reasonable timeframe, e.g. 48 hours?

InterAction

- Could Medevac include dependents of foreign nationals and to what degree? Would you be considering it to include national staff of INGOs and or national staff of local NGOs?

Intersos

- Would it be possible to get more details on the operationalization of the strategic regional hubs, maybe if you can give us some details of what's already in place at the moment and when will the entire Plan be in place?

Valerie Guarnieri

- On Medevac, WFP will be providing an 'air ambulance' and then the field hospitals that are set up would be run out of negotiations with a set of countries by WHO or a WHO appointed entity. We are obviously not in a position to provide medical services but we provide the structure for the medical services.
- Taking into account the overall UN system and NGO humanitarian system intention, details on access to the centers is still being discussed but it is not likely to include dependents of NGOs and there may be some limitations on nationals. Some of the work that is still under way really taking into account availability of resources.



Baptiste Burgaud

- On Medevac, discussions are still in the making in terms of the coverage for nationals and full dependents. To the extent possible, we are trying to follow the existing procedures that are in line with the UN medical network and there will be decisions per country in terms of that coverage. But from our side we reiterate again that we set up the system with air ambulance with the idea to have it based regionally and connected to field hospitals.
- We are also looking for some other context where there might be sufficient medical capacity, but we would not want to limit access to national actors to existing medical facilities, so it is still a lot of moving game.
- We are making progress to give some details in Ghana and Ethiopia which are the first facilities we aim to start implementing. I would be cautious on giving any sort of deadline at this point but deployed personnel and equipment should arrive on site in the next couple of weeks, pending authorizations and groundworks etc. We would hope that the first two facilities would be operational in May.
- On the various hubs and the status of operationalization, the first three hubs at the international level we are considering are Guangzhou in China, Dubai in the Middle East and Liège in Belgium for Europe.
- Why these specific locations? It is a mix of assessing where the supplies are currently sourced. The overwhelming majority of medical and PPE supplies – 70-80% – will be coming out of China. Discussions were evolving around Guangzhou, Shanghai, Hangzhou itself. We have today a contract in place with an entity and we are ready to assist out of there.
- We have already received requests from about 10 different organizations, and we are consolidating a pipeline that is enabling us to start lining up aircrafts.
- We are already working on an *ad hoc* basis with WHO, with the government of China, with specific private foundations that are making donations to Africa mostly.
- We are still doing this on an *ad hoc* basis, and we hope to start scheduling regular flights the moment we have enough in the pipeline to make the commitments.
- In Belgium we are aiming to do the first shipment next week on behalf of Anima which is a close partner of Médecins Sans Frontières Belgium. There will be a lifting stock out of Liège into various countries in West Africa next week.
- Dubai is an operational setup. We are facing limitations right now in terms of access of people but there are enough various airports in the UAE that we can try to keep operating.
- We are relying on our network within the United Nations, with five hubs already in place. We are communicating to the authorities a detailed list of what is required for all of us to operate collectively, namely allowing transit of passengers, the status of cargo in transit and making sure that this is protected from any risk of confiscation by national governments, based on the national emergency regimes that are currently in place in some countries.
- There is a lot of this political discussion happening in parallel, but we are already operational and dispatching on a daily basis out of Addis Ababa in Ethiopia, China and Accra in West Africa which are the primary regions of concern as per the information shared by the interagency cell in Geneva.
- We intend to scale up our presence on the ground in Johannesburg, South Africa and to continue to expand our existing presence in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia and in Panama.
- All of this happening in parallel and in terms of the air services a question that keeps coming back is that by the beginning of May, to start passenger flights out of Europe into Addis Ababa and from that point on, we have regional coverage into East Africa.
- Once we have that system in place and we have enough passengers, with the right precautions – with the right social distancing on flights, and the right measures in terms of transit in various countries – we will expand this to Ghana and to the other hubs.



- Procurement is the challenging point. WFP will consider easier access for their partners or others to procure. It is something that has been under discussion at senior leadership level in terms of how we expand our duty of care to our cooperating partners. However, this does not change the fact that supplies are currently extremely limited.
- On potential pooled procurement, there is one part of the interagency group that is focusing specifically on sourcing and supplies and that is mostly led with UNICEF when it comes to procuring supplies out of Geneva. We are working with them and WHO and messaging others in terms of efficient planner of China supplies.
- We are in the process of doing this for fuel deliveries close to 120 different countries. The more visibility and clarity we get on pipelines, the easier it will be to organize the system.
- We are dealing with requests to specific destinations, i.e. very small deliveries, remote island in the Pacific, so the whole piece of planning process per se is complex and will very likely generate frustrations.
- A lot of the work involving most of the interagency discussion lately has been on how the priorities will be handled, there is a document circulated through the global logistic custom channels that explains how priorities will guide the operation effectively.
There is a well-documented system to prioritize critical COVID-19 medical items and this is based on categorization made by WHO for COVID response and a second tier of category, which is more general humanitarian cargo that have been discussed and endorsed at the emergency director group level. This will be reviewed, and we will use those guidance for prioritization to make sure that assets are utilized to the maximum and that a range of partners can be assisted to allow further response in the field.

HIAS

- The COVID crisis focus is now on humanitarian assistance funding to support food security needs, can you speak to WFP's role in conversations about how development assistance can be better allocated to support more lasting food security nutrition and resilience?

Robin Ellis

- WFP spoke to a lot of principles around procurement and they are not different from UNHCR but let me repeat them with our own language. In regions and in the country operations, partners which are implementing programs for UNHCR, can ask for PPE items to be ordered on their behalf for UNHCR funded projects. In particular, we take note of WHO guidance as to what is needed in certain circumstances. PPE is reserved for public health particular activities and masks are used in situations where there is a need to be interacting with people where there may or may not be social distancing possibilities.
- I understood IRC's question to include 48 hours. The supplies are extremely limited. Right now it is very difficult and we are far behind where we would want to be at the moment. Items that we have ordered in March-April are only now beginning to have destinations.

Valerie Guarnieri

- It is clear the pandemic does not only affect humanitarian assistance, but it has long socio-economic impacts. This requires we rethink some aspects of development moving forward.
- We have been part of a group within the UN development system looking at what the UN's immediate development assistance offer in the context of COVID-19, defining its focus and how we would set about to deliver.
- The approach is reaffirming that the SDGs are more relevant than ever in that context. Looking specifically at WHO in terms of focus on the most vulnerable in populations and



analyzing what has been really focused on health first, addressing the pandemic but also acknowledging that health systems are under tremendous strain because of the pandemic.

- A range of urgent services may therefore be neglected, particularly in the most fragile contexts.
- Social protection is the urgent need to ensure access to basic social services and needs to be expanding, adjusting, refining, putting in place where they do not exist.
- Looking at the macroeconomic picture and some of these stimulus packages and what this stimulus looks like for low income countries, middle income countries. How can that be guided and supported? What is the policy regime?
- We are focusing on the 'how'. How we deliver on that and on the important role of frontline responders of communities? Governments capacity is a wide spectrum. Some will basically have many of the tools that they need to address it and many more will not. It will require more support from us but also that the principles of UN reform remain very much in place.
- A trust fund has been set up by the Secretary General with various windows. It is financing some actions but the vast majority of that will come from both the repurposing and reprioritization of domestic national budgets.
- We are looking at a crisis that is likely to have intergenerational impact and is going to be reshaping much of what we do and how we do it.
- Counting on the level of engagement, trust, real collaboration, and partnership we have between our two organizations and this meeting is just another sign of that.

Dominique Hyde

- We have the Global Refugee Compact which asks for more development partners and more variety of partners to join the response and the support to refugees and people of concern This will continue to move forward.
- If COVID had not been happening there was a planned visit and work with the BMZ, the German development cooperation, together with WFP and UNICEF, to look at enhanced ways of working more collaboratively in the Nexus, in the development sphere and in more fragile contexts.
- We are looking at expanding and strengthening our partnership. The World Bank is very much interested in continuously increasing their support when it comes to refugees.
- We are hearing the African Development Bank, the Islamic Development Bank, and the Asian Development Bank. More and more of these actors also look at supporting refugees and the work that is being done globally.
- We remain a humanitarian organization, but we cannot be doing our work without UN development actors, without NGOs who are doing development work and more importantly without donors and IFIs. The EU is also a big partner of UNHCR.

Arafat Jamal

- Topics that will most likely come up in our meetings in the coming weeks are: faith-based approaches to our response in this crisis, and localization. The High-Commissioner himself is personally very interested in and began an initial dialogue with a smaller group of FBOs, which we would like to expand and continue.
- Valerie is also the co-chair, along with NRC, of the IASC operational policy and advocacy group so if we do have interest in an IASC session, we may get Valerie again.