

Key findings

The 462 members of the Humanitarian Experts Network (HEN) reported a number of concerns that were consistent across all regions:

Humanitarian and development operations continue but they are shrinking and they are challenged. There has been a reduction in programs with some already closed. **Protection and education programs are particularly difficult to deliver** in the current context and are not being prioritised in national and donor responses.

Containment measures are already resulting in a loss of livelihoods and economic downturn, reducing food security for the most vulnerable: people living in informal and congested urban settlements, the poorest, people with disabilities, people living in conflict areas, minorities, IDPs and refugees. **These groups will be hit hardest and first by the secondary impacts of COVID-19.**

Increasing tensions as people struggle to meet basic needs will impact social cohesion. This will include a rise in criminality, discontent with governments and violence between groups and from government forces as they seek to maintain control. HEN members told us of their real concern that **human rights will be violated** as the crisis continues to unfold.

Tension will also be felt within households, the combination of unmet needs, lockdowns and movement restrictions is likely to result in increased domestic violence.

The gap between rich and poor will widen; HEN members said low-middle income countries, reliant on tourism, remittances, and agricultural exports are hit the hardest with an increase in basic commodity prices. There are serious concerns about the **economic impact on the poorest,** with disrupted informal markets and heavy reductions in daily labor opportunities.

African and Asian countries noted greater economic impacts on women due to their role in the informal economy with limited job security. The psychological toll on women as frontline workers including nurses, cashiers, and cleaners is a major concern.

There are major concerns around health workers and the resources and equipment they need to do their jobs, both trained people and supplies are insufficient (especially personal protective equipment (PPE)).

Existing health services already stressed and stretched, such as immunisation programs and life-saving support, are at risk of being neglected as resources and attention are diverted to COVID 19. Hen members fear **this risk reversing previous development gains.**

COVID 19 does discriminate

COVID-19 spreads to anyone who has contact – rich, poor, old, and young across the globe. Yet the complexity of the world and its varying social, political, and economic dynamics are already dictating where, and on who, the worst effects of COVID-19 will be felt. Those who are most vulnerable before the outbreak are being hit the hardest. Countries with higher poverty rates, depleted medical systems, corrupt governments, ongoing wars and conflicts, refugee camps, IDP settlements and congested urban areas are likely to face the greatest challenges in containing the spread of the virus and protecting the most marginalised and poor.

See [ACAPS CrisisInSight page](#) and [Global Risk report](#) to find out more about pre-existing vulnerabilities.

See [ACAPS Government Measures report and data set](#) to find out more about how measures to contain COVID 19 – often legitimate and necessary – are leading to secondary impacts on vulnerable populations.

Introduction

COVID-19 is unlike any crisis we have seen before. It is global, evolves quickly and we do not yet know how it will impact already vulnerable communities. What we do know is that there is a significant risk of worsening humanitarian outcomes, some of this is already being seen.

Covid-19 will have primary and secondary impacts on humanitarian needs. Primary impacts are how the virus itself affects people. Secondary impacts are how the containment measures instituted by governments, the behaviours of people and systems in response to the virus, and how the measures that cultures and societies they are a part of reshape the humanitarian landscape, adding new dimensions to the already complex and strained global health response.

To help make sense of this crisis ACAPS launched the **Humanitarian Experts network (HEN)**, a contributing group of humanitarian experts based all over the world who can provide rapid information as the crisis unfolds.

This report includes the first findings from HEN's global survey launched on April 6, 2020. Within five days 462 individuals from 132 organisations joined the HEN.

About the HEN network

Each week, HEN will provide rapid analysis in a digestible format, creating a shared situation awareness across the humanitarian sector.

HEN is new. We want to grow the network to include more development and humanitarian experts, community leaders, government and policy makers and academics from across the world. Please **share the HEN network** with your contacts across the globe who can help us all develop a clearer picture of how this crisis is evolving and impacting on the most vulnerable communities.

How did ACAPS analyse the HEN data?

Six ACAPS analysts, with technical support from Satellite Applications Catapult, cleaned, coded and summarised the HEN results. We used a Grounded Theory Approach

We tested our assumptions in a joint analysis session with three partners

We grouped our findings by **five regions** (Africa, Asia and Oceania, Middle East, Americas, Europe) to make it easier to digest, but contact us at hen@acaps.org if you want more detailed information. Over time we will transition to more country level information

Limitations

HEN provides a rapid snapshot of what experienced aid workers across the globe are **thinking** and **doing** on the front lines of the COVID-19 response and how things are changing as the crisis evolves

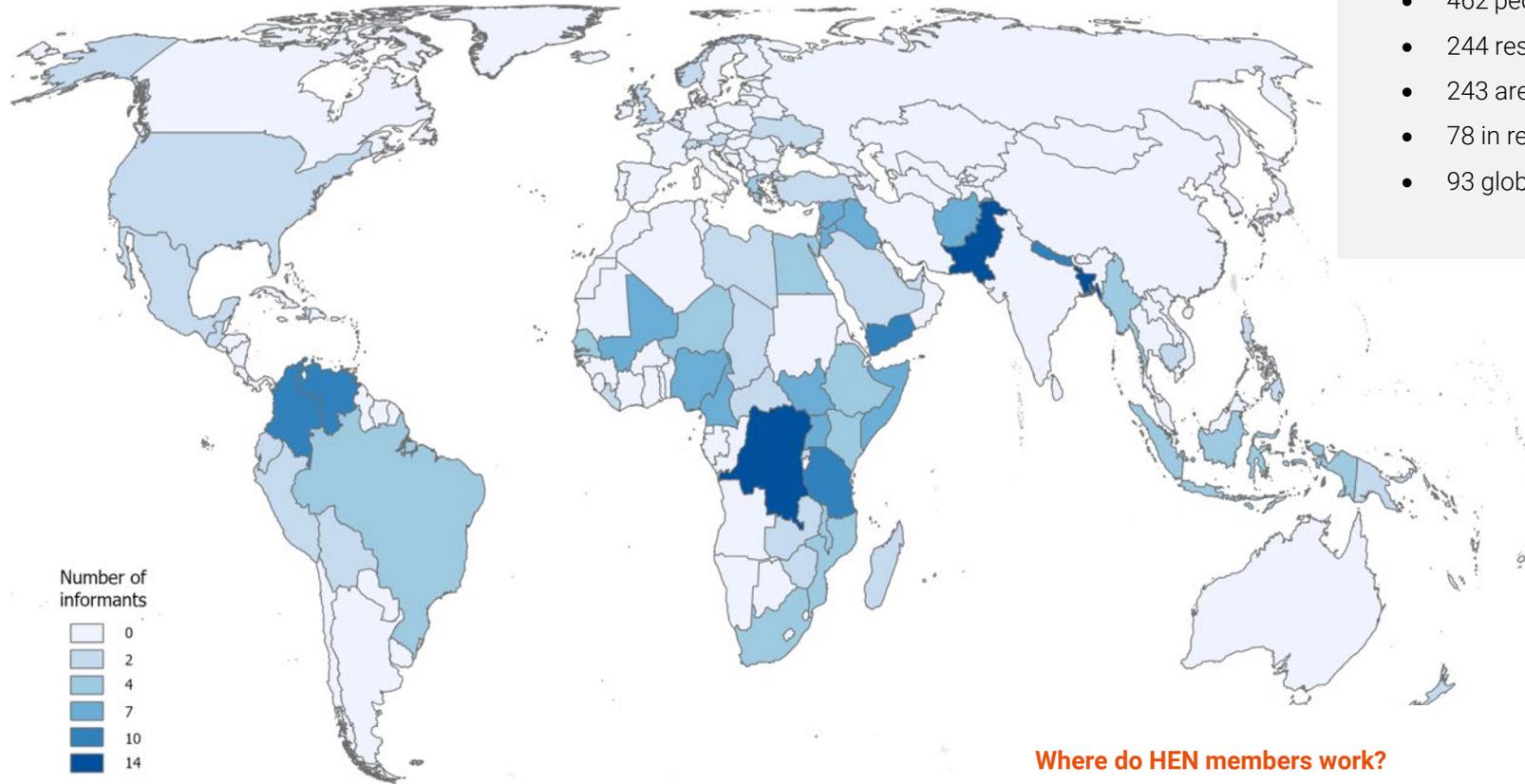
HEN is NOT based on a statistical sample. HEN combines and contrasts the current observations of people on the ground in each country. It provides a unique source of information on people's lives not captured by statistical information on COVID disease and the economy

Each survey is designed to capture feedback from busy humanitarians. Within the first week we received responses from 462 individuals across 63 countries. While our goal is to provide country level data – it may take some time to get there. If you have questions or concerns related to a specific context or topic we'd welcome your input – please reach out and contact us at hen@acaps.org.

To join the HEN and participate in future surveys, [click here](#). Surveys are administered on a weekly basis and will take 5-7 minutes. If you wish to be involved to a greater degree – please contact hen@acaps.org we'd love to hear from you.

Who is in the HEN?

Humanitarian Expert Network as of 13 April 2020



Who are HEN members?

- 462 people (44% female, 54% male) from 63 countries
- 244 responded to round 1
- 243 are in a country level position
- 78 in regional position
- 93 global staff (48 answered N/A)

48% of HEN members have more than 10 years' experience in humanitarian and development work

Help us get a clearer picture!

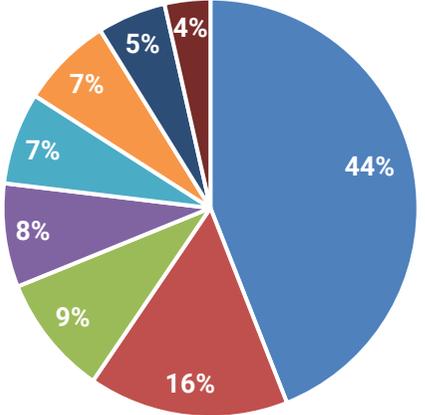
We need more HEN members in:

- The Pacific Islands
- Central Asia
- Countries with experience of Ebola response

But wherever you are, we value your knowledge, so join us!

Where do HEN members work?

- INGOs/NGOs
- Independent Consultant
- United Nations
- Government Agency
- Corporate/Private Sector
- Academia
- Other
- Donor Agency



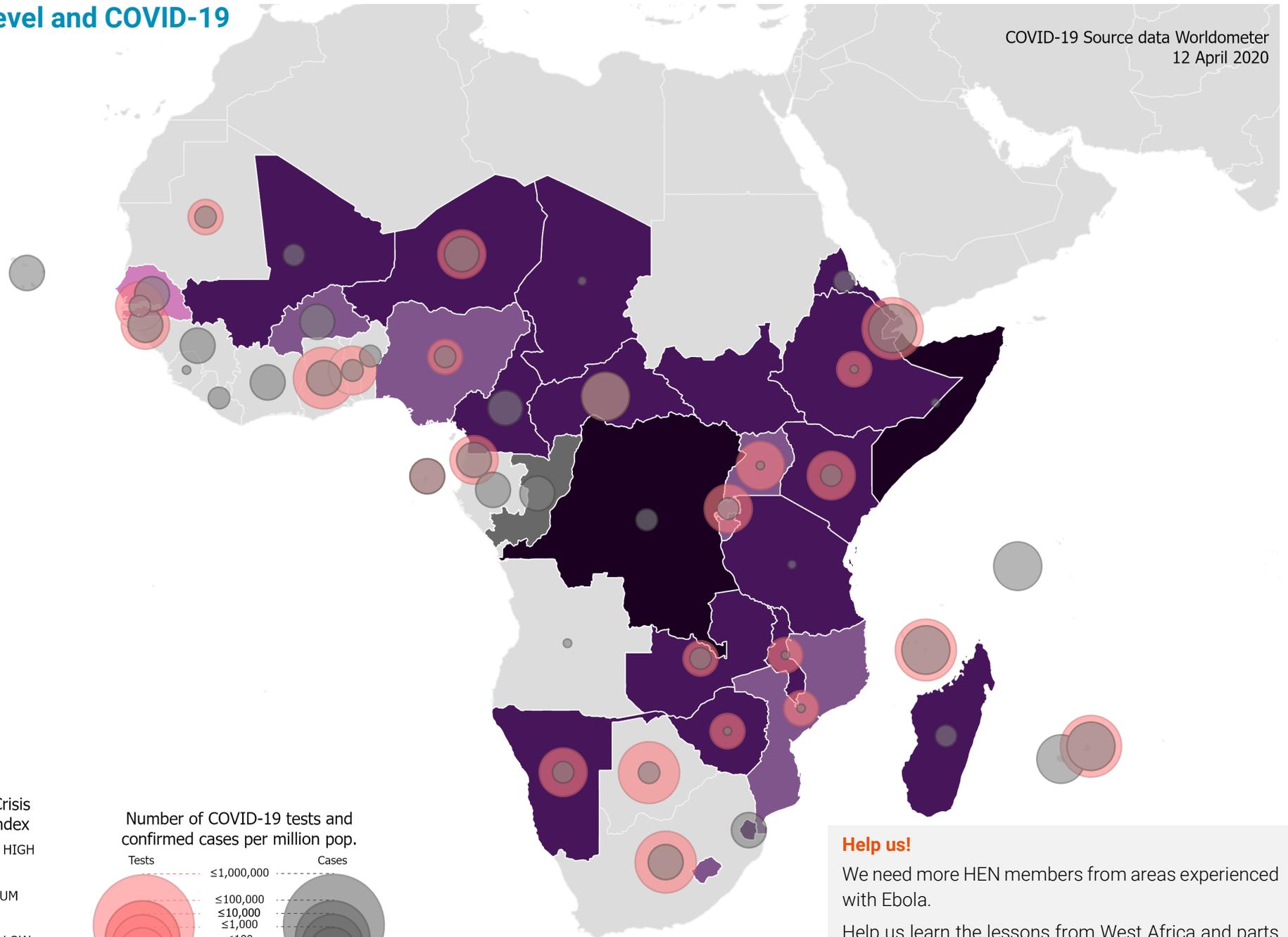
Africa: Crisis level and COVID-19

COVID-19 Source data Worldometer
12 April 2020

INFORM Crisis Severity index

- VERY HIGH
- HIGH
- MEDIUM
- LOW
- VERY LOW
- UNDETERMINED

Number of COVID-19 tests and confirmed cases per million pop.



Help us!
We need more HEN members from areas experienced with Ebola.
Help us learn the lessons from West Africa and parts of South Africa (**Angola, Namibia, Congo, Gabon**).

What HEN members told us in Africa

Health concerns

- **Limited testing capacity** hides the true spread
- The health systems overwhelmed (lack of PPE, infrastructure and personnel)
- COVID 19 **diverts funding and focus attention** from other life saving health programs: maternal and child health, vaccinations, malaria. Africa already has some of the highest maternal death rates

Social cohesion, protection and gender concerns

- Poor, overcrowded urban settlements, including prisons/detention centers face high health and economic risks
- Migrants and refugees face stigma for 'bringing in the disease'
- Children in urban poor settings can't attend school and don't have resources for online or remote learning
- Women are particularly exposed to COVID 19 – they tend to be the primary caregiver and often must leave home to get food and water for the family
- Lessons from other health crisis show women's limited power in decision making leads to their health needs going unmet

“The Ebola outbreak was just declared officially over yesterday so the health system is relatively poised to battle an epidemic. Other programs have been pushed aside and all resources have been diverted to the COVID-19 response. In the immediate term we haven't seen dramatic consequences, but this will change as the weeks drag on.”

DRC

“Various income streams for the country (such as tourism) have dried up. The lockdown has severely affected farmers' production and supplies of agro inputs.”

Rwanda

Livelihoods and services

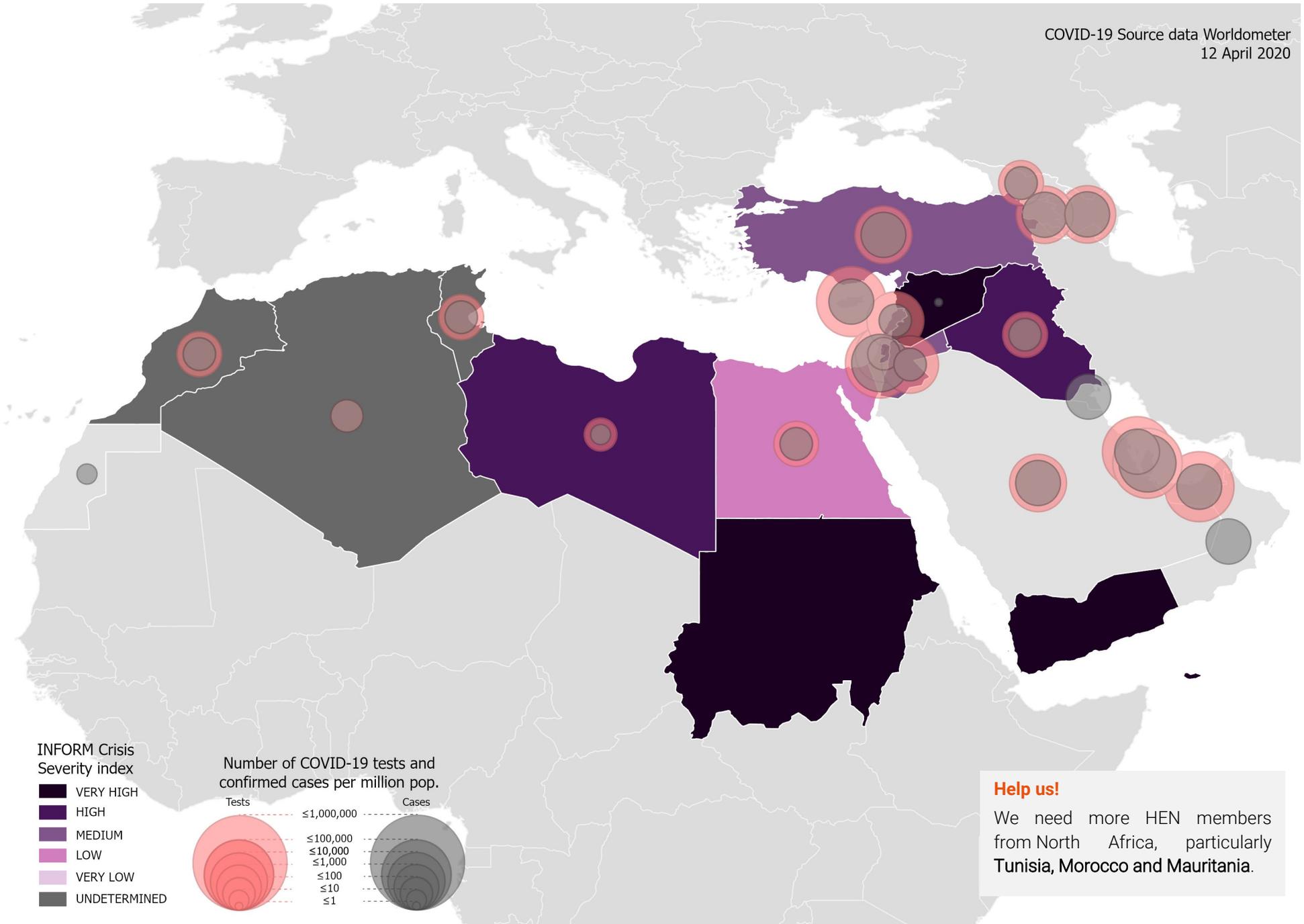
- Market and border closures are already hitting the economy, particularly **small business, entrepreneurs, farmers and street vendors**
- Food and essential commodity prices are already rising – those living 'hand to mouth' and female headed households most impacted

Humanitarian and development operations

- Education and protection programming is not prioritised. This could erode long term development gains
- COVID 19 could divert government and donor resources and attention away from long term challenges: Refugees, locusts agricultural support
- Governments may focus too much on urban centres, excluding vulnerable rural communities
- Remote working makes it extremely difficult to reach vulnerable populations. It is particularly hard for female aid staff who often juggle domestic duties

Middle East and North Africa: Crisis level and COVID-19

COVID-19 Source data Worldometer
12 April 2020



What HEN members told us in the Middle East and North Africa

Health concerns

- Limited testing could be downplaying the current scale of the crises
- Pre-existing weaknesses in health systems after years of conflict (Yemen, Syria, Libya, Iraq)
- Concern that other essential health services will not be able to be provided (cholera, chronic disease)
- Resource challenges including the lack of trained staff, PPE and equipment
- Health workers fear about contracting the virus
- Women are at greater risk of being denied care

Social cohesion, protection and gender concerns

- Women in MENA face increased risks of GBV. Women's health and protection programs have scaled down
- Women face increase domestic burdens as the main care givers
- Displaced populations across the middle east are perceived to be the most vulnerable due to their pre-existing conditions and challenges in accessing food, hygiene, and health care
- Daily wage laborers and small businesses are facing challenges due to strict government guidelines, raising concerns of salary cuts among those already considered poor and unable to purchase basic essential commodities
- Ongoing conflict in Yemen, Syria, Libya and Iraq makes people vulnerable to the potential spread of COVID-19

"Imagine a fragile health system that has been crippled by over 5 years of conflict damage, drained of professional staff and facilities."

Yemen

"Jordan has sacrificed the economy over saving the health care sector and people's health."

Jordan

Livelihoods and services

- Majority of markets are closed, except essential food and medical supplies
- Costs of basic supplies are rising
- People who are already in poverty with limited income sources, have lost their jobs due to business disruption and are struggling to fulfill basic needs

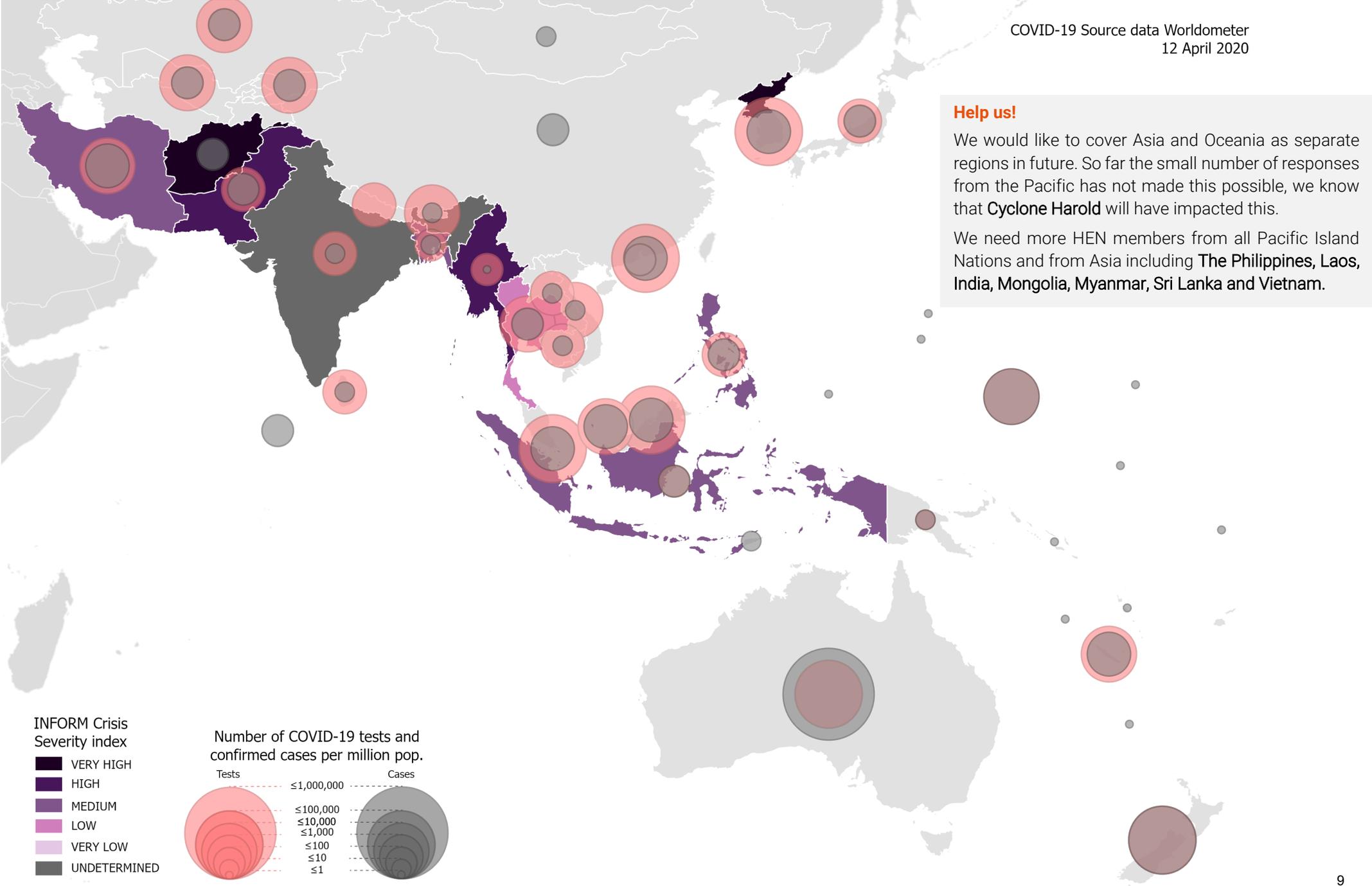
Humanitarian and development operations

- Most HEN members were able to continue some level of programs, though many had been reduced or closed, particularly education and protection programming
- Priority is services to camps, including food and WASH
- Most organisations are still able to get goods and supplies, though some saw costs increase
- Some reports that it is getting harder to move cash as banks and money transfer offices have closed
- Aid funding not affected yet; concerns about future funding as donors and host countries become absorbed in their own COVID 19 response

"My main concern is the impact on the refugee and IDP camps, their health and safety, the possible break down of security in the camps and consequential violence, abuse, boost to non-state armed actors, traffickers, smugglers; though the restructuring of the whole setting could be positive."

Iraq

Asia and Oceania: Crisis level and COVID-19



What HEN members told us in Asia and Oceania

“Many people will die, security conditions will deteriorate, and more will be affected by those events, and that there isn’t honestly much we can do in such a congested refugee camp.”

Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh

Health

- Limited testing capacity means that the extent of spread is unknown
- Some locations report that health systems appear to be managing at present but, as the full impact is not yet visible, many anticipate overwhelmed health systems due to pre-existing weaknesses if community transmissions begin
- A lack of resources and supplies to deal with COVID-19
- Focus on the outbreak will disadvantage other health services
- Serious challenges within the health profession including workers’ fear of contracting COVID-19
- Women have a key role as frontline health workers, and there are concerns that available PPE is not properly fitted to them, increasing their COVID-19 exposure

Social cohesion, protection and gender concerns

- Social cohesion and protection is difficult to disentangle from livelihoods and essential services
- Families living closely together have difficulty following “social distancing”
- Loss of livelihood is linked to domestic and gender-based violence risks (Oceania suffers from extremely high rates of gender-based violence) and concerns over increased child marriage, already prevalent in Asia
- Marginalized groups including LGBTI, and religious minorities were perceived to have experienced a greater negative impact

Living conditions and essential services

- Many markets are closed causing disruptions in normal economic activity and access to essential commodities
- Loss of income is impacting those who were already struggling to meet basic needs. As containment measures continue, more households will be impacted and the deeper the impact will be
- Farmers’ livelihoods are impacted by lack of essential inputs and the inability to get to market to sell produce.
- In both Cambodia and Bangladesh women’s significant engagement in the garment industry and micro-enterprise, which have suffered serious cutbacks will impact household livelihoods and may have effects on women’s treatment at home. Significant economic impacts on women who disproportionately work in the informal sector were also highlighted

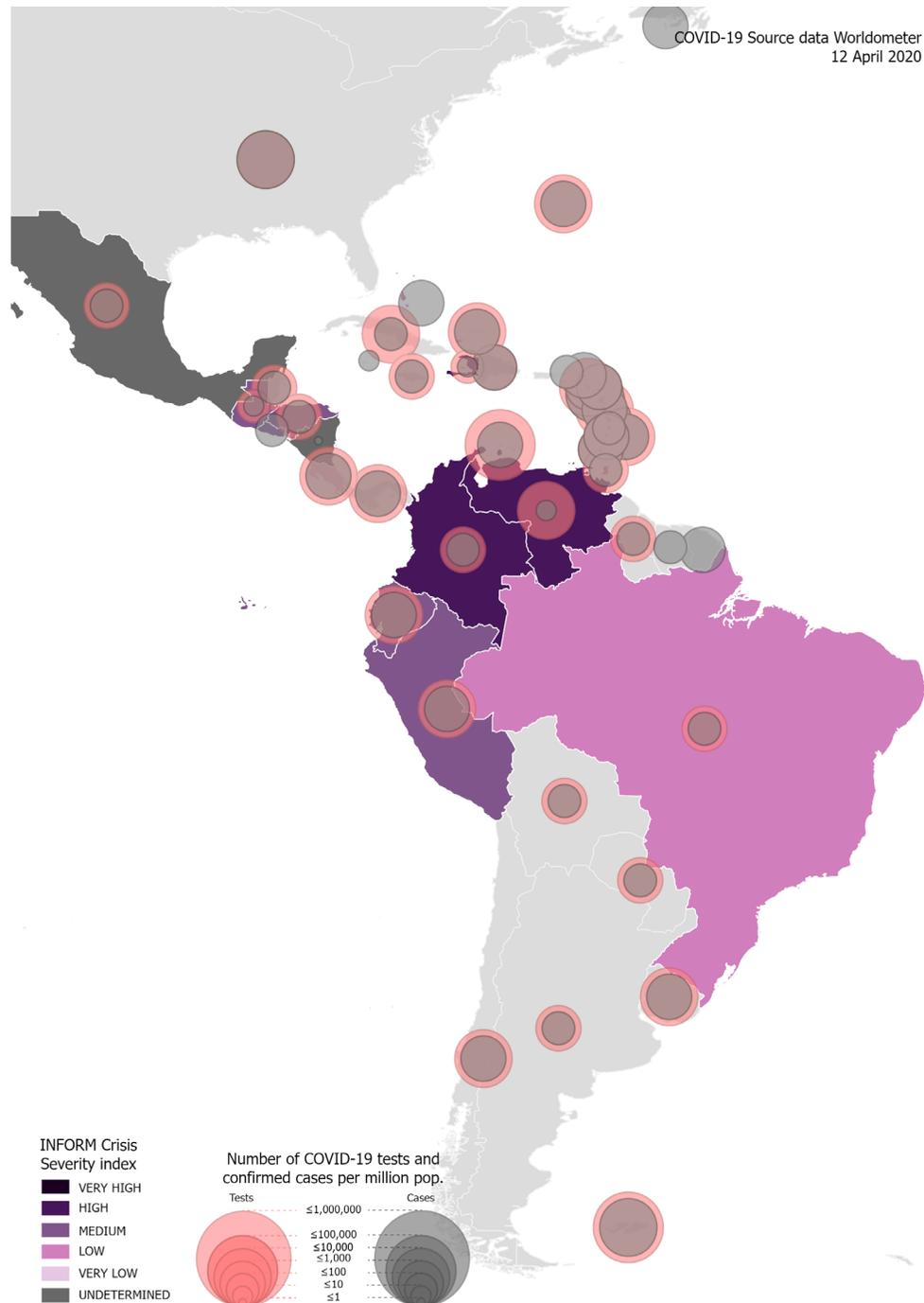
Humanitarian and development operations

- Concerns around coordination were greater in Asia than in other regions
- Other concerns were the reprioritization of humanitarian programs and diversion of focus from existing lifesaving interventions to COVID-19
- A significant concern for staff at country level is that programs have already been closed. This will impact livelihoods of those in need (especially refugees and IDPs) and is already preventing access to refugee camps and other project sites
- As oversight becomes remote, physical isolation and poor internet hamper operations, even with staff still on the ground

“COVID 19 has [had a] huge impact on Bangladesh’s garment industries as most orders were cancelled, this puts high risks on people [who] relied on this industry.”

Bangladesh.

Americas: Crisis level and COVID-19



What HEN members told us in the Americas

Health concerns

- Only respondents from the US reflected current COVID-19 health related impacts, including rapid transmission, limited testing and overwhelming of health systems in hot spots
- Respondents from Latin America were more likely to discuss secondary impacts, such as the negative impact on other health services including chronic and underlying health conditions
- An increasing strain on the health system, notably human resource challenges, with the workforce experiencing significant distress surrounding heightened exposure to the virus as well as long shifts with higher numbers of extremely sick patients

"[T]he primary concerns are the impact on the broader economy. Local jobs are disappearing, the collapse of regional economies has meant that the remittances from the diaspora have disappeared. The collapse in oil prices has meant the government is in a very weak position to maintain even limited social services."

Venezuela

Help us!

The Americas covers respondents from **Latin America, central America, as well as the United States**. We need more HEN members to better understand the regional impact across the Americas.

Social cohesion, protection and gender concerns

- The informal economy, service industry, and daily wage workers were identified as being particularly impacted by the COVID-19 crisis, pushing the poor further into poverty
 - Respondents in South America identified migrants (mainly from Venezuela) likely to face additional challenges in generating income, noting they would face increasing risk of exposure to the virus and loss of income as movement restrictions increase
 - In South America, rural communities, with limited access to health care, food, and public transport were highlighted as a vulnerable group of concern
 - Increasing incidence and risk of domestic and gender-based violence as well as the increased domestic burden of women due to lockdowns was highlighted
- One respondent noted that women make up the majority of frontline staff, including nurses, cleaners in hospitals, cashiers, and others who are deemed essential and therefore bear increased risk of transmission

Livelihoods and services

- Unemployment and job loss rates have increased in most countries covered by respondents due to disruptions in economic activities
- Respondents shared that only essential markets are operating, and even then, with restrictions
- Substantial impacts on the informal market, particularly small business enterprises are unable to operate due to market shutdowns. Some respondents reported that home delivery mechanisms have surged in activity to help accommodate

“The US economy has lost over ten million jobs in the last two weeks due to the coronavirus lockdown.”

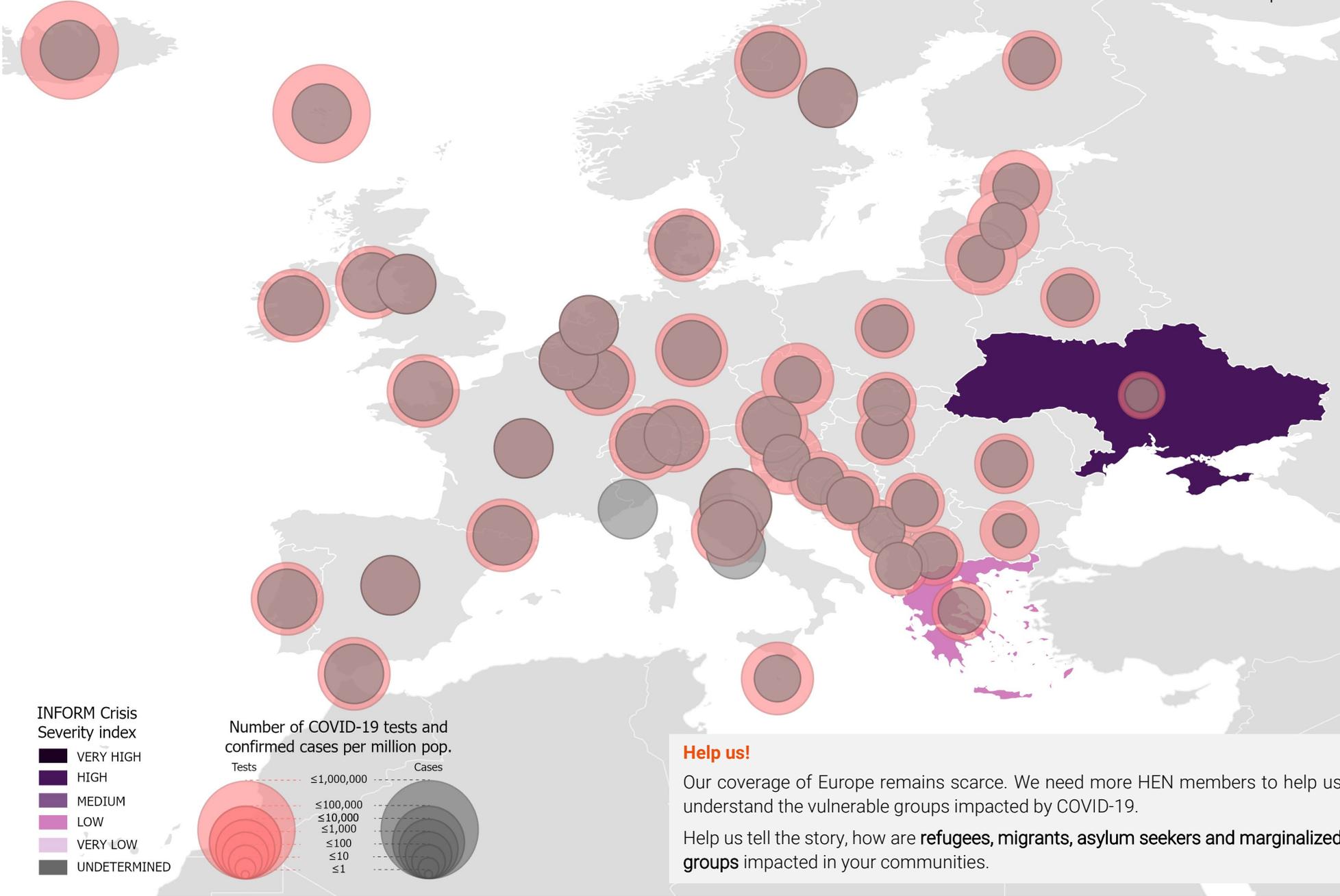
United States

Humanitarian and development operations

- Respondents in South and Central America mentioned supply chain breaks more than other regions – particularly shortages of fuel, which was most acute in Venezuela
- Respondents in this region expressed concern over COVID-19 forced program closures
- Government restrictions and interference in aid activities are hampering response activities
- While respondents discussed the challenges of working remotely, but they seemed less concerned regarding the impact on their ability to deliver aid compared to respondents in Africa. This was found to be generally consistent across South, Central and North America
- In North America, humanitarians were particularly concerned about a global rise in SGBV

Europe: Crisis level and COVID-19

COVID-19 Source data Worldometer
12 April 2020



Help us!
 Our coverage of Europe remains scarce. We need more HEN members to help us understand the vulnerable groups impacted by COVID-19.
 Help us tell the story, how are **refugees, migrants, asylum seekers and marginalized groups** impacted in your communities.

What HEN members told us in Europe

Health concerns

- Most European respondents reflected that the impact of COVID-19 testing and treatment on their health systems has been overwhelming, and that health systems are currently overstretched
- The key secondary impact noted is the impact on non-COVID-19 health care, which is far less available. Blood donations were mentioned as an example of impact
- Human resources are also a concern, staff numbers are insufficient and thus those working are overworked and tired

“Adults and those living alone are at risk of depression and negative coping mechanisms. Alcoholism is a concern, given the social distancing measures and excess of free time.”

Finland

Social cohesion, protection and gender concerns

- The closing of schools has raised concerns for vulnerable children, that may be more susceptible to domestic violence or abuse
- Daily wage laborers, factory workers, and the self-employed were often cited among the most impacted by COVID-19
- Adults living alone or with pre-existing mental health issues are at risk of depression. Alcoholism was listed as a concern, as social distancing measures have created an excess of free time
- Roma and unregistered refugees or asylum seekers were perceived to be particularly impacted by the spread of COVID-19
- Respondents raised concerns of an increase in domestic and GBV
- Women in Europe are experiencing an increased domestic burden in light of school closures and working from home

Livelihoods and services

- Majority of respondents describe market closures with operation of few limited essential markets such as food and basic supplies
- The unemployment rate and job loss rate has increased in most of the countries due to disruption in economic activities
- Government supports available in Europe equally targeted men and women. This has perceptibly reduced the economic impact on women, relative to other continents; however, few respondents noted negative economic and livelihood implications on women in Europe

Humanitarian and development operations

- There are concerns about service delivery to 70,000 refugees in camps in Greece already facing bureaucratic challenges to accessing services pre-crisis
- Drop in value of national currencies has led to funding gaps in aid programs
- Respondents are concerned about the ability to deploy emergency teams or support Disaster Risk Reduction programming. How would Europe respond to a natural disaster under current conditions?

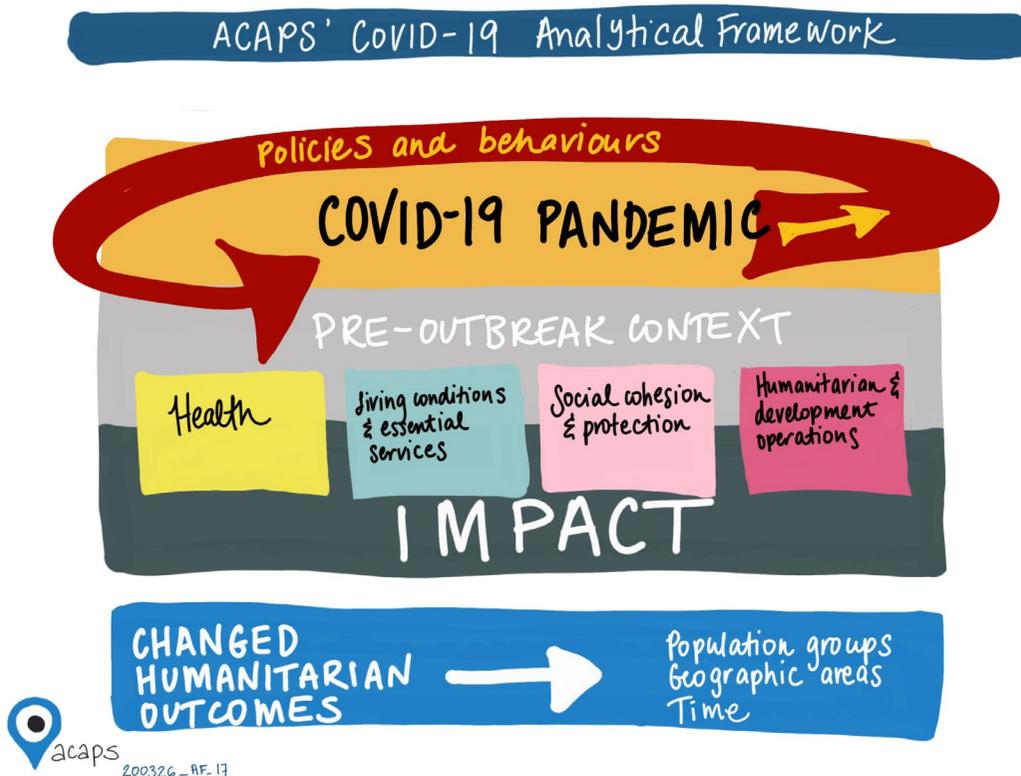
“Price of all food and non-food items have gone up by more than 50%. In some case vegetables, fruits and food items are not available. People lost jobs or are receiving less salary”

Ukraine

ACAPS Analytical Framework

To respond to the need for information and analysis in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic, ACAPS has developed an analytical framework on how we will approach the unfolding crisis. While the situation is in flux as the pandemic progresses across the globe, this analytical framework will guide ACAPS analysis and data collection (ACAPS 2020).

The framework looks at the pre-pandemic context and how changed policies, behaviours, and actions in reaction to the crisis impact humanitarian efforts, and what the knock-on effects of these may be. The framework categorises analysis of impacts in four main areas: health; living conditions and essential services; social cohesion and protection; and humanitarian development operations.



Data and sources

Catapult produced the maps in this report. The COVID-19 tests and confirmed cases per million data came from worldometer.

The INFORM Severity Index is a composite index that measures severity of humanitarian crises and disasters globally. It brings together 31 indicators impacting severity organized in three dimensions: impact, conditions of affected people and complexity of the crisis. All the indicators are scored on a scaled 1-5. These scores are then aggregated into the overall severity score. See the full INFORM Severity Index data set here.

Acknowledgements

This report wouldn't have been possible without the time and contribution of Satellite Applications Catapult, Mercy Corps, and HEN members.

