



## Norwegian Refugee Council's Covid-19 response

The Covid-19 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

NRC continues to share information on prevention of coronavirus and provide hygiene kits and clean water. In addition, we have started providing education and legal aid remotely through the use of radio messages, phone calls and video.

#### Asia, Europe and Latin America

**Venezuela:** NRC is preparing to digitally share messages on coronavirus prevention and response in addition to providing multipurpose cash and WASH in health clinics. We are also initiating procurement of health and hygiene items identified through assessments as the most critically needed. NRC managed to re-adapt our school feeding programme and to continue delivering food during the month of March, while different modalities for distributions are being considered for the future, as restrictions of movement have become stricter. Negotiations for humanitarian exemptions are still ongoing.

**Afghanistan:** NRC continues to deliver essential programming by promoting access to essential services and protection, while adapting our operations to support and strengthen the broader public health response and reduce protection risks to vulnerable communities. We have ramped up our

information dissemination activities to inform communities of the risks associated with the coronavirus and promote behaviour that can mitigate the chances of contracting the virus. NRC is currently focusing on providing water and sanitation facilities, including critical hygiene kits. In addition, we continue to provide assistance in obtaining civil documentation to ease access to health facilities, particularly for displaced Afghans who have recently returned from neighbouring Iran and Pakistan and we are carefully monitoring the rate of evictions that might increase as result of social stigma related to coronavirus. Finally, together with WHO, NRC is co-leading the newly-establish Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE) Working Group, which aims to establish a collective approach to RCCE for all operational humanitarian actors in country to ensure that messaging is consistent with that of global coronavirus guidance, but tailored to the specific information needs and local dynamics of the Afghanistan context.

**Iran:** NRC is quickly adapting programmes to address the immediate response needs of vulnerable populations at risk of coronavirus infection. To date, we have already distributed soaps and information leaflets among 6,000

households in three settlements in Kerman, Qom and Semnan provinces. NRC is further preparing to facilitate distribution of 1,600 hygiene kits and information pamphlets to 3 locations in Sistan and Baluchistan province. Discussions with authorities are also ongoing to provide assistance to health posts in urban areas highly populated by Afghans. We are attempting to negotiate identification of and access to schools to rehabilitate hand washing stations and other WASH facilities and equipment that will contribute to a healthier learning environment when schools resume. NRC recognises the critical need to continue reaching the most vulnerable Afghans in order to meet their basic needs, support those who have lost their income due to coronavirus and reduce negative coping mechanisms and is exploring how remote cash-based assistance can be utilised.

**Honduras:** NRC is assisting recently arrived refugees and have requested safe-passage documents to enable us to assist cases, shelters and reception centres directly. We are also scaling up our humanitarian assistance for the families of children in our education programmes, providing them with cash transfers, food vouchers and water tanks. We are also providing ICLA support via telephone.

**El Salvador:** Our ICLA and education teams continue to provide cash transfers to ensure that displaced persons can access shelter and basic needs. We also continue to provide ICLA support via telephone.

**Panama:** Due to the increased restrictions on movement in Panama, NRC is now facilitating our cash programming through online banking platforms. We have requested safe-passage documents to enable us to respond to emergency cases directly. In Panama as well we are providing ICLA support via telephone.

**Colombia:** NRC continues to deliver multi-purpose cash via electronic distribution methods as the livelihoods of vulnerable displaced populations have been severely affected. WASH activities, specifically hygiene promotion, awareness messages and construction or rehabilitation of handwashing stations and water provision have been implemented. Additionally, we provide accommodation solution for homeless persons, people on the move or populations that do not have permanent shelter so they can practice social isolation or quarantine as necessary.

**Ecuador:** NRC has established a communication system using phone calls where displaced persons can communicate to receive legal information and referrals to service providers. WASH activities, specifically hygiene promotion and water provision, have been implemented. We are also currently providing accommodation solutions for Venezuelan migrants and refugees.

### Central West Africa

**Central African Republic:** Our teams have ensured critical input to the planting season through seed distributions in Alindao ahead of possible movement restrictions that would make it harder to carry out field activities. This was done through open fairs, keeping the necessary distance to avoid possible transmission and included coronavirus sensitisation as part of the activity.

**DR Congo:** NRC is working against time to continue supporting communities' access to food through our emergency programming. We adjust by choosing bigger sites, football fields and school yards and put marks on the ground so that people stay 1 meter apart when they line up to receive the assistance. A strong engagement with the communities is key for a better understanding of the risks and adherence to prevention measures. NRC will do its utmost to stay, engage, adjust and deliver.

**Nigeria:** Negotiations with local authorities in Adamawa state were successful in allowing the continuation of critical humanitarian activities to continue in a context of heavy movement restrictions put in place by the state authorities. NRCs teams in Borno state have scaled up WASH programming as part of the camp management. A camp environment is one of the most vulnerable, should the coronavirus reach these communities already living in precarious conditions the consequences would be devastating. NRC is doing its utmost to prevent an outbreak, putting in place and repairing hygiene facilities, installing handwashing stations, as well as an enormous effort to sensitize the communities to how to prevent spread.

**Burkina Faso and Niger:** NRC has initiated the development of a brief that shows the impact of the coronavirus on humanitarian needs and access together with the Crisis Action coalition. The brief can be used to draw attention to the ongoing

humanitarian crisis and maintaining or increasing support to the humanitarian response.

**Mali:** NRC's education teams are relocating certain activities such as awareness sessions with children to their communities instead of schools. We are also using radio to continue teaching.

### East Africa and Yemen

**Kenya:** In Dadaab, NRC is promoting safe hygiene in the schools, installing handwashing point and ensuring running water. Our teams are also providing digital classes through video lessons.

**Somalia:** Awareness raising campaigns on the prevention of coronavirus are ongoing in schools in South and Central.

**Yemen:** NRC is sharing information on hygiene promotion and prevention of coronavirus through radio messages. We have also increased the provision of safe drinking water and sanitation activities in the Aden camps. In Hodeidah, NRC continues to check that all our water supply facilities are working and supplying safe and adequate water to the IDP sites and host communities.

### Middle East

**Jordan:** In partnership with UNHCR, NRC distributed cash to 6,427 Syrian refugee households in Azraq camp. Our education team has prepared a Better Learning Program (BLP) app shared with 350 school personnel to support remote teaching and is also running a hotline to identify specific challenges related to needs and accessibility of the e-learning platform provided by the Ministry of Education. A full support program will be rolled out shortly. NRC's youth team undertook a rapid needs assessment and is working on both online content and accelerated curricula for youth.

**Iraq:** NRC continues to follow up and provide information to displaced persons involved in ongoing legal cases over phone. We are also providing remote legal counselling to those that may face new risks related to the coronavirus or the government restrictions. Additionally, we have distributed cash and non-food items in the camps. Shelter teams have distributed cash and non-food items in the camps.

**Lebanon:** We have continued education activities remotely by phone and WhatsApp groups. NRC has also drafted a needs assessment together with the education sector to map out children's access to devices, internet and family members who can

support home schooling. As a result, an education in emergencies module has been created. NRC is also continuing awareness sessions both over the phone and during hygiene kit and disinfection kit distributions.

**Libya:** NRC is developing WhatsApp education messages with tips to parents on how to support learning at home, messages of well-being from the BLP, as well as personal hygiene awareness.

**Palestine:** Through partners, NRC has distributed hygiene kits to the Bedouin communities and communities in close proximity to settlements.

**Syria:** Among its ongoing work across Syria, NRC is rehabilitating a medical centre with the aim to complete it before mid-April so it can be handed over to local authorities

### NORCAP

NORCAP currently has 294 experts deployed with the key focus to help partner organisations adapt their programming to address the impact of coronavirus.

NORCAP cash experts are looking at ways to increase cash distributions and market analysis while gender and protection experts are trying to find new ways to follow up cases and carry out trainings and prevention activities, due to restrictions on travel and public gatherings.

Education experts in Mali, Mauritania and Burkina Faso are working to set up systems of remote learning, but the systems are poorly prepared and offer limited or no alternative solutions to classroom activities. However, the expert in Burkina Faso is involved in developing education projects to reach 4 million children between the ages of 3-17, also taking into account early recovery activities.

### NRC advocacy and media activities

**Raising awareness:** NRC issued a [press release](#) highlighting an example from the Central African Republic where there is only 3 ventilators available to help patients affected by the coronavirus. We called on the international community to support countries that are gravely unprepared to cope with the spread of the virus. The press release was picked up by AFP, Gulf Times, Voice of America, NTB and many other regional news outlets. In addition, country director David Manan did interviews with Bistandsaktuelt and Al Jazeera.

Another [press release](#) was issued about the potential consequences of coronavirus spreading in Sudan - a country crippled by sanctions and an economic crisis. It was picked up by Radio Dabanga and APO Group.

NRC issued a third [press release](#) on Venezuela's frozen funds with an ask to the Venezuelan government and opposition leaders, and their respective backers, to agree to use frozen state assets located in banks around the world to protect the Venezuelan people against the spread of the coronavirus.

Manenji Mangundu, NRC's Area Manager in Burkina Faso and Niger spoke to [Reuters](#), warning that any outbreak of the virus could have catastrophic consequences for displaced families in the refugee camps. The article was widely covered by media outlets including: [Financial Post](#), [Daily Mail Online](#), [Haaretz](#), [The New York Times](#) among many others.

Karl Schembri, NRC's Regional Media Adviser in the Middle East spoke to [The New Arab](#) about the difficulties of social distancing in crowded refugee camps.

Warring parties in Yemen agree to a ceasefire on Friday, March 27 as a result of the coronavirus outbreak. Sultana Begum, NRC's Advocacy Manager was interviewed by TRT World, expressing NRC's concerns about the impact coronavirus could have on the vulnerable population. Sultana was also interviewed by Al Jazeera English, CBC and El Mundo.

Dan Tyler, NRC's Regional Advocacy Manager was quoted in an article by The Guardian about Afghans who have fled the coronavirus outbreak from Iran. "There has been a massive spike in the number of spontaneous returns. There's already a lockdown in Herat and around Kabul and Kandahar, and we're really concerned about the humanitarian impact," he explained.

**Access challenges:** With government restrictions on movements in several countries, NRC's work to reach people in need has become more challenging. Egeland did an interview by [Norwegian newspaper VG](#) to raise the issue. His quotes were shared on by ABC Nyheter, TV2 and other regional newspapers. Egeland also did an interview with [Devex](#) and [The Globe](#) in South East Asia raising the issue.

Pål Nesse, Senior Advocacy and Media Adviser was interviewed by Bistandsaktuellet about the situation in Greece in light of the coronavirus crisis: "Norway should commit to accepting asylum seekers from Greece, and then take them once this has calmed down".

NRC successfully contributed to ensure mobility exceptions for humanitarian workers. We also continue to play an important co-leadership role in different coordination mechanisms across Latin America, where we advocate for a more coherent and coordinated humanitarian responses.

Despite the government's curfew regulations, NRC in Jordan managed to secure 28 permits to work through access negotiations and significant advocacy efforts

In Central and West Africa, we are through advocacy trying to ensure that mistakes taken during the Ebola response are not repeated for the coronavirus coordinated humanitarian response. We are also advocating for our staff to be able to still reach those in need. In the Central African Republic, NRC is advocating together with the HCT, for humanitarian corridors to be put in place by a resumption of flights to allow supplies and personnel for the humanitarian response to continue. The Central African Republic's authorities have ensured exemptions for humanitarian workers despite a general closure of borders.