Highlights

• A total of 1073 new confirmed cases were reported in the South Asia region over the past week alone bringing the total to 1407 cases. This represents an increase of 270% compared to last week. The largest increase has been reported in Pakistan 887 cases, followed by India 415 cases, Sri Lanka 82 cases, Afghanistan 42 cases, Bangladesh 27 and Maldives 13 cases.

• With World Bank funding, UNICEF has airlifted 14 metric tons personal protective equipment for health workers to support the Government of Pakistan to respond to COVID-19.

• As part of containment and prevention strategy action, most countries in the region have restricted movements of people including curfews in India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Karachi (Pakistan), closed airports and land borders, suspended visas for tourists and imposed mandatory 14 days quarantine for passengers arriving from hotspot affected countries

• Over 350 million school children have been affected by the school closures in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and India

• 60 million people have been reached across the region with key COVID-19 prevention messages as UNICEF country offices continue to support governments in promoting risk communication and community engagement

• With the high demand for Personal Protective Equipment (PPEs) combined with export ban from major markets, procurement for these critical supplies for small countries is a major challenge and UNICEF is exploring local alternatives and engaging diplomatic missions/embassies

• UNICEF is appealing for $80.4 million to reach 60 million people with risk communication, critical supplies, adequate health care, continuous education, child protection and social protection services to address other social impacts of the disease.

UNICEF’s Response Budget in South Asia

<table>
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<tr>
<td>Critical medical &amp; WASH Supplies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Health &amp; Nutrition services</td>
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UNICEF Appeal 2020
For South Asia
US$ 80.4 million

Regional Office for South Asia
COVID-19
Situation Report No. 3

Situation in Numbers

1073
No. of new cases over the past week ((WHO March 17, 2020)

1407
Total cases of COVID 19
(WHO March 23, 2020)

60,000,000
# of targeted population to be reached by UNICEF response
(ROSA Response Plan 2020)

350,000,000
# of children affected by school closure (UNICEF 2020)

UNICEF Appeal 2020
For South Asia
US$ 80.4 million

Funding Status (in US$)

Funds received, $14,533,888
Funding gap, $65,887,152
Funding Overview and Partnerships

UNICEF South Asia appeals for US$ 80.4 million to support government efforts and interventions to prevent the spread of the virus and respond to those that have been affected through provision of critical supplies and adequate health care and responding to the social economic impacts of the disease. UNICEF has so far received $14.5 million from the Asia Development Bank, Japanese Government, World Bank and Facebook Foundation. In view of the worsening the situation, additional funding is urgently required to support government, communities and children to scale up intervention for preparedness and response to stop the spread of the virus and support government service delivery system and respond to social impacts of the pandemic.

Situation Overview & Humanitarian Needs

The overall situation in the region is rapidly escalating with a total of 1407 confirmed cases reported across the region. The number of confirmed cases has increased by more than 2200% within two weeks as shown in figure 1 below. The highest increase has been reported in Pakistan 887 cases, followed by India 415 cases, Sri Lanka 82 cases, Afghanistan 42 cases, Bangladesh 27, Maldives 13 cases, Nepal 2 cases and Bhutan 2 cases. While WHO is urging countries to test more people the number of tested cases remain very low in the region. Except for Afghanistan, Bhutan and Nepal, all cases in the region are classified as local transmission. Although most of the land borders with neighbouring countries have been closed, there are concerns for the mass movement of Afghan returnees from Iran to Afghanistan. According to IOM, more than 57,000 returnees crossed the Islam Qala border crossing alone over a two days period between March 15 and 17 thereby increasing the risk of the spread of the disease. Similarly, the humanitarian community is concerned about the closure of the Pakistan border with Pakistan as this will likely affect the supply chain of goods thereby driving up prices in Afghanistan which will negatively impact on the most vulnerable population.

![Figure 1: South Asia COVID-19 confirmed cases March 01 - 23, 2020](https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/situation-reports/20200323-sitrep-63-covid-19.pdf?sfvrsn=2176eb7a_2)

Source: WHO COVID-19 Daily Sitreps

Partnership and Coordination

UNICEF regional office and country offices continue to engage and work in close collaboration and coordination with WHO, governments, Inter Agency taskforces/other UN agencies, Centre for Disease Control, INGOs and other stakeholders including donor agencies such as Asia Development Bank, World Bank and others. In Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, India and Sri Lanka, UNICEF is actively engaged in the UNCT coordination mechanism to support the government response. In Nepal where government led cluster mechanism remain active, UNICEF co-leads the WASH sector, Education, Nutrition and Child Protection and is engaging in the inter sectoral working group to develop joint inter-sectoral preparedness and response plan.

UNICEF in Sri Lanka and Nepal is closely working with religious leaders to explore different communication modalities to spread COVID-19 awareness and to promote non–discriminations of victims and their families. As part of the business for result strategy, UNICEF Nepal is engaging the Federation of Nepalese Chamber of Commerce and Industries (FNCCI) to support preparedness and response actions including conducting mass scale outreach for risk

1 OCHA Afghanistan COVID-19 Brief No. 18, March 23, 2020
communication and hygiene promotion. Similarly, UNICEF is working with Unilever to explore co-creation and dissemination of handwashing messages and provision of essential WASH supplies including soap to frontline health providers to support hand-washing campaign. UNICEF Pakistan country office advocated for and supported the government to establish communication coordination task force both at federal and provincial levels, which included development of Terms of References (ToRs), identification of task force members and technical discussions.

Summary Analysis of Programme Response

The Regional Office and Country offices response plans have been developed in alignment with the 2020 WHO Global Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan (SPRP), and the 2020 UNICEF COVID-2019 Humanitarian Action for Children Appeal. The key priority for the RO/CO response plans is on the immediate measures that must be undertaken to ensure preparedness and response actions to prevent and respond to the COVID-19 outbreak in each country focusing on the following areas; (1) risk communication and community engagement, (2) critical medical and Water Supply and Hygiene (WASH) supplies and services, (3) provision of healthcare and nutrition services, (4) access to continuous education and child protection services, and promoting cash transfers to address the social impact of the epidemic. Recognizing the specific impact on women, adolescents and children, the strategy includes engagement with women leaders and organizations to reach communities, and integration of measures for Gender Based Violence (GBV) prevention and response across sectors.

Building on UNICEF wide network of offices, ongoing programs and vast network of partners, UNICEF in South Asia stepped up its engagement in risk communication and community engagement relying on its know-how on hygiene promotion, social and behaviour change communication and experience from previous epidemics, including in this region (SARS, H1N1 etc).

Afghanistan Country Office:
Risk Communication and Community Engagement

• UNICEF continue to support the government and health partners in strengthening the surveillance system building on the existing National Disease Surveillance Reporting (NDSR) system of Ministry of Public Health (MoPH), by training the health professionals and increasing number of sentinel sites;
• In Herat province, the current epicenter of the disease, 17 media partners are broadcasting the TV/Radio spots for free for the duration of 10 days.
• Risk communication presentation integrated into community dialogue training of Child Protection in Northern Region of the country.
• UNICEF had supported establishment of a digital sign board in Herat city and 100 small billboards to display hygiene messages specially targeting handwashing with soap and other COVID-19 preventive messages
• UNICEF negotiated with 19 and 5 channels in Kandahar and Nangarhar provinces to broadcast radio and TV spots without cost and channels have agreed to do so
• 12 women’s community committee and religious leaders trained on COVID-19 to create awareness using their local language for the families and IDPs.
• All female social workers in Herat trained on COVID-19 and mobilized to manage case management (separation, discrimination, GBV and mental health).
• Advocacy with DOPH to involve women health workers, community women shuras in their preparedness response plan on COVID-19.

Critical medical supply and WASH Services

• UNICEF in collaboration with the Provincial Rural Rehabilitation and Development Directorate (PRRD) completed the WASH assessment of the screening facilities at Islam Qala Border crossing between Iran and Afghanistan.
• UNICEF and partners have constructed six temporary washing stations for Afghan returnees at screening facilities and will soon finalize the construction of 19 permanent WASH facilities at the Islam Qala border crossing to ensure appropriate preventative measures of travelers returning from affected COVID-19 areas.
• WASH has prepositioned of WASH supplies for approximately 100,000 people and procurement for additional supplies (primarily soap bars and chlorine products) is underway.
• UNICEF had repaired over 50 water points in Herat IDP sites to ensure continuity of water supply to the IDPs in Herat Formal sites

Provision of adequate health and nutrition care

• 60 UNICEF-supported Mobile Health Teams are on stand-by across 13 provinces to provide primary health care services in potentially affected areas

Bangladesh Country Office:
Risk Communication and Community Engagement

• A total of 500,000 leaflets and 20,000 posters on handwashing, coughing etiquette, self-distancing while having signs and symptoms, and hotline numbers were distributed through government system. A PSA on messages aligned with the leaflet and poster is developed and in the process of finalization.

3
• Over 15 million people have been reached with messages promoting handwashing, coughing etiquette and social distancing through social media and other platforms since 29 January.
• 1-minute handwashing instructional video has been launched on all BCO social media platforms as a challenge where audience and 33,000+ strong volunteers are showing the video and reporting back. It has already reached over 5 million people.
• Press releases issued on safe school operations and child protection during containment measures. Countering misinformation through social media, website and media statement.

Critical medical supply and WASH Services
• UNICEF is supporting the government to procure critical medical supplies for the paediatric Intensive Care Unit (ICU) including paediatric and neonate ventilator, CP monitor with accessories, ICU bed, Paediatric defibrillator and ultrasonic nebulizer; PPE and lab equipment for case management.
• Messages are being developed with Islamic Foundation and C4D for dissemination to 500,000 Islamic leaders (IMAM) and Madrasa Female Teachers.
• In Cox’s Bazar, UNICEF hygiene promoters are working to strengthen handwashing with soap at community level through community engagement (CCC-PLTH) and behaviour change methodologies based in previously identified barriers which prevent people from washing hands as well as motivators.
• A total of 480 trained Hygiene Promotion Volunteers are supporting the work of the Hygiene Promoters around handwashing behaviour change.
• WASH together with partners have developed Business Continuity Plan. The plan will support the Rohingya Community based Hygiene promoters to maintain hygiene activities in the event of lack of access to the camps during COVID19 lockdown.
• WASH and Health Sector will develop the joint Preparedness and Response Plan to ensure coordinated and effective COVID response.
• Regular Soap distribution to 240,000 Rohingya refugees in the camps.

Access to continuous education and child protection services
• Department of Social Services has agreed to support 500 new social workers, with UNICEF committing to supplies and training. This will ensure the scale up of case work to the most vulnerable families.
• COVID-19 prevention messages have been shared with partners and through the social service workforce of 3,000 workers.
• Child Protection messages have been shared by various social media platforms and other key child protection messages and tools are under development. Child Helpline 1098 has had an increase of 30% of calls that are now COVID-19 query related.
• UNICEF support sensitization session for all social workers working on the helpline to be able to explain prevention measures as well as psychosocial support messaging; UNICEF has agreed to support 6 new Child Helpline Social Workers.
• In Cox’s Bazar, UNICEF is working to amplify correct awareness messages (WASH and C4D) via 2,500 Rohingya teachers to children and members of learning centre management committees UNICEF will also provide learning materials/activities to over 300,000 children to keep them engaged while learning centres are closed.

Bhutan Country Office:
Risk Communication and Community Engagement
• UNICEF is supporting the Ministry of Health and other relevant ministries to update the Crisis Communication Strategy and develop IEC materials to promote preventive health and hygiene practices in schools, monastic institutions, nunneries, Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) centers, youth centers and communities.
• With UNICEF support a team of experts from Khesar Gyalpo University of Medical Sciences Bhutan (KGUMSB) deployed to sensitize sector heads of all 20 districts; heads of all monastic institutions and nunneries; Deesung (national volunteers); government ministries; transport associations (taxi drivers, bus drivers, truckers, etc); migrant workers; armed forces and; financial institutions across the country on COVID-19 preparedness and response practices and to engage communities and families in their locality.
• Over 220,500 people have been reached with risk prevention messages using different platforms including social media.

Critical medical supply and WASH Services
• Installation of mass handwashing stations with provision of safe drinking water initiated in public places (bus terminals, vegetable markets) in partnership with MoH and SNV through engagement of private sector.
• Procurement of paddle waste segregation bins for health facilities and soap for schools/monastic institutions has been initiated.
India Country Office:
Risk Communication and Community Engagement

The government of India has invoked powers under the Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897 and declared COVID-19 a "notified disaster" under the Disaster Management Act 2005 and the country is currently under lockdown. UNICEF’s is engaging with the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare as part of the UN preparedness and response strategy that is led by WHO. Through this engagement, UNICEF has taken following actions to date:

- Developed a draft risk communication and community engagement strategy that is shared with WHO
- Developed risk communication materials that are uploaded on the website of National Center for Disease Control https://ncdc.gov.in/index4.php?lang=1&level=0&linkid=127&lid=432.
- Social media packs and digital content developed, based on social listening and C4D insights. Content shared with field offices and UN agencies for adapting. Content produced/translated into five languages in addition to English and Hindi. Influencer videos shot and shared widely. Partnership with TikTok is yielding good results in reach and engagement – currently we have two million views and influencers are producing TikTok videos using UNICEF messages.
- Social media content on risk communication has reached almost 60 million and engaged 1.8 million. On average, content has been seen five million times a day (total of 115 million impressions).
- UNICEF continues its engagement with WHO and MOHFW in capacity development at national and state level
  - FLWs kit is being finalized and planned to be rolled out this week at national level.
  - All states completed RCCE orientation sessions with government relevant officials, including IEC officers.
- Over 1.6 million SHG members are being reached with 4 key COVID-19 prevention messages in the form of small SHG level activities in UP
- IEC products have been developed and in use to reach general public with key messages in all states. Development and use of innovative approaches on social distancing
- States are mobilizing government resources to roll out RCCE activities. For example, in Gujarat, INR 1.49 Cr was dedicated for IEC. UNICEF is also leveraging Swachh Bharat Mission and Jal Jeewan Mission (sanitation and water supply missions) budget for the response, as well as Swachhagrahis (sanitation foot soldiers) and Gram Panchayat members.
- Celebrity engagement with Amitabh Bachchan and Trisha completed to disseminate messages on COVID-19.
- One tool kit being developed for National Disaster Management Authority to prepare various security agencies for possible engagement in phase 3 and 4.

Provision of adequate health care, including case management, WASH and nutrition

- Monitoring and follow up of training for health professionals at States and Districts level jointly with WHO
- Mobilization of SMNET in UP and Bihar under planning with state level authorities
- Development and testing of IPC in health facilities assessment tool adapted to COVID-19.
- Developing guidance related to continuity of essential maternal health and newborn care, and nutrition services in light of COVID-19 outbreak
- IPC in communities and households: Several states are in process of installing handwashing stations

Maldives Country Office:
Risk Communication and Community Engagement

- UNICEF is engaging with health staff in the National Emergency Operations Centre (NEOC) bilaterally on sub-activity areas, such as risk communication and community engagement.
- UNICEF continue to disseminate prevention messages developed by the Regional Office and the Government of Maldives through social media and mass communication channels.
- Support the government in hiring required technical assistance to public messaging, media research, rumors tracking and so forth to implement activities under the RCCE plan.
- Support designing of key IEC materials for identified audiences including the general public, children and SOPs for frontline workers to include child and gender sensitivities and inclusive service provision.

Access to continuous education and child protection services

- With the closure of the schools the Ministry of Education has already activated online learning platforms to ensure children are continuing learning. However, major gaps in teacher and parental capacity have been identified in terms of guiding and providing online learning. Therefore, UNICEF is planning to support the government to train 7,000 teachers to acquire Google classroom certification.
- UNICEF is providing support to the government in development of the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for the state-run alternate care institutions to ensure safe behaviours among social workers in the homes to protect both children and staff members.
- Initiated discussion with the government agencies (Ministry of Gender, Family and Social Services, Maldives Police Service, and Ministry of Education) to identify needs and preparation of prevention and response plan to violence against children and gender-based violence during this quarantine period, as leaving children at home due to closures might add another level of risk to already vulnerable children.
UNICEF is providing support to the Maldivian Red Crescent in their psychosocial support response – specifically to support parents to inform children on COVID-19, and managing their emotions.

**Provision of adequate health and nutrition care**
- UNICEF is supporting the government to ensure existing programmes (such as EPI, nutrition) include emergency lens and approach both the ongoing Measles outbreak, chicken pox outbreak, and COVID-19 as one public health emergency. Current COVID-19 response is diverting attention, human resources from existing programmes including the measles campaign.
- Providing technical support to the government to develop clinical guidelines for COVID-19 and pregnancy, and disseminate resources for health education on pregnancy and breastfeeding in the context of COVID-19.

**Nepal Country Office:**

**Risk Communication and Community Engagement**
- 10 million people have been reached with key messages using different information, education and communication materials, social media platforms, radio public service announcements and television spots.
- Around 43 inter-faith leaders (Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Baha'i, Kirat and Islam) participated in the COVID-19 preventive orientation and roles of religious leaders. The religious leaders are active in sharing the preventive measures to their associations and people especially on avoiding crowd.
- 15 youth volunteers oriented on COVID-19 risk communication and community feedback survey for field testing and mobilization for information dissemination in Kathmandu Valley. COVID-19 awareness messages being disseminated through local FM, TV and newspapers reaching out populations across Nepal.
- Two print materials (flyer and poster), radio public service announcements in seven languages (Tamang, Newari, Nepali, Maithali, Bhojpuri, Doteli and Awadh) developed and shared with Ministry of the Communication and Information technology, local levels through Ministry of Federal Affairs and General Administrations, Association of Community Radio Stations, Broadcast Association of Nepal (BAN) and Ujjayalo Network (network of commercial radios).
- Collaborated with India Bihar Office to develop communication materials in Nepali, Bhojpuri and Maithali covering the 38 blocks between Nepal and India Boarder.
- Facilitated sending out COVID-19 preventive messages to 26 million telecommunication subscribers through Post Ring Bound Dialing (PRBT).

**Critical medical and WASH supplies and Services**
- UNICEF’s Programme partners, programme officers and social mobilisers have been mobilized to support the local government to screening and hygiene promotion. By 22 March 2020, Tilathi Koiladi of Saptari district and Dasharathchand Municipality of Baitadi screened 2,688 and 2,197 people who came from India. They also installed handwashing stations and made hand washing compulsory for all staff and service seekers in all wards.

**Access to continuous education and child protection services**
- UNICEF will be supporting the government to develop the Learning Pack. The Centre for Education and Human Resource Development (CEHRD) has identified 5 types of learning mode for continuation of education through online, offline and off grid modality through Online portal; Mobile Apps; Radio; TV and Learning Pack (printed material).
- Protection Cluster capacity mapping has been completed and it will be updated at regular intervals.
- Messages for protection issues has been compiled and adapted as necessary and dissemination plan has been developed. UNICEF is in the process to include interventions on psychosocial and unaccompanied, separated children and other vulnerable with the respective implementing partners.

**Pakistan Country Office:**

**Risk Communication and Community Engagement**
- UNICEF has also provided technical support to develop a combined Federal RCCE strategic and action plan, which has now been approved and shared with other UN partners. All provinces have developed costed RCCE plans with UNICEF support and are now implementing the plans.
- UNICEF also supported the development and printing of IEC material including in local languages (2.5m posters and flyers, 300 standees, 1,000 banners and a community engagement tool) and is supporting provincial health offices to develop and disseminate these materials on corona virus in close coordination with health department, WHO and other partners.
- UNICEF is supporting the polio helpline which is being used to address public concerns on COVID-19. So far, the call centre has received 75,046 calls with a spike in calls received reaching almost 9,000 a day over the last few days mostly on COVID-19 related concerns.
- 100 banners on key steps for effective handwashing printed and displayed on strategic points in Lahore and Digital media campaign launched and being aired through Clean and Green Punjab social media platforms. In Sindh, the orientation of 48 CSO staff, 821 community resource persons (CRPs) and Village WASH Committees on COVID-19 prevention and control conducted.
• Over 3 million people have been reached with risk prevention messages using different platforms of social media

Critical Medical and WASH Supplies and Services
• With World Bank funding UNICEF has airlifted 14 metric tonnes personal protective equipment (PPE) for health workers to support the Government of Pakistan to respond to COVID-19.
• WASH teams conducted assessments in 53 designated health care facilities (HCF) across the four provinces. The assessment found that 80 per cent of the HCF assessed in Balochistan and 40 per cent of the HCF in Sindh had no basic WASH facilities. Most HCF in Punjab have good WASH facilities, however 11 per cent of these facilities lack safe drinking water. The only assessed facility in KP also lack basic WASH facilities.
• In Sindh, 3 mobile water tankers fixed with hand washing stations have been deployed for 10 days to the three isolation centers in Karachi while long term handwashing stations are established. In Punjab, 20 mobile handwashing stations installed in public places in Lahore and in KP the handwashing station design has been finalized.
• In Sindh, UNICEF is supporting a local NGO, HANDS, to conduct hygiene promotion, monitor handwashing stations and conduct IPC trainings in 23 health care facilities reaching 100,000 people in 11 districts.
• 1.5 million aqua tabs for point of use water treatment procured and 500,000 were deployed to Balochistan

Access to continuous education and child protection services
• UNICEF has developed a training package on Psychosocial Support for social workers, care workers and psychologists and a total of 93 people (37 women and 56 men) have been trained so far in Baluchistan, Sindh and Punjab. Last week in Punjab 17 care workers and psychologists (2 women and 15 men) were successfully trained through virtual source due to Government restrictions and social distances. This approach will be explored further for the delivery of child protection services as social distancing is emphasised across the country.
• Additionally, the child protection team of Social Welfare Department South Waziristan, KP, jointly with the health department are using the Child Protection Van for promoting awareness among community and disseminating messages for taking preventive measures against COVID 19.
• UNICEF has drafted a guidance notes on the provision of psychosocial services in response to COVID 19 in Pakistan as a follow up to the ongoing training which will be finalised next week.

Provision of adequate health and nutrition care
• UNICEF in Coordination with Director Nutrition, WHO and WFP, endorsed the nutritional guidelines for the COVID 19 crisis which were developed by UNICEF in line with international guidelines. These guidelines cover the following 3 areas: for Nutrition Managers, Coordinators & Supervisors; Health Facility Staff and Community Health Workers
• The Director of Nutrition Pakistan issued a letter, along with the nutritional guidelines, to all nutrition programme directors in all provinces calling for the continuity of nutrition services including protection and promotion of adequate IYCF

Sri Lanka Country Office:
Risk Communication and Community Engagement
• UNICEF and WHO mass media campaign on key prevention messages through hygiene is on-going and has reached around 6.7 million people through mass media TV shows alone (based on pre-evaluation data). The same campaign had reached 2.8 million people through social media and COVID-19 prevention messaging was viewed 8 million times and additionally UNICEF video assets accumulated over 1.1 million video views.
• UNICEF has developed a draft UN Risk communication strategy, in collaboration with the WHO and the RCO, and is working with the Health Promotion Bureau to implement this. The plan agrees key messages and sequencing to ensure critical messages are relayed at opportune moments during this response.
• UNICEF CP team is closely working with religious leaders to explore different communication modalities to spread COVID-19 awareness and to promote non-discriminations of victims and their families, considering all gatherings are completely restricted and ongoing curfew in all island.
• UNICEF supported the Health Promotion Bureau to print and distribute 100,000 COVID-19 awareness posters in 3 languages in all 25 districts.

Critical Medical and WASH Supplies and Services
• UNICEF has also procured urgently required PPE supplies to be delivered to the GoSL by the end of March 2020. This includes 11,648 PPE kits, 2,688 N95 masks and 672 packs of surgical masks (50 each in a pack).

Access to continuous education and child protection services
• Child Protection working group has been activated and is currently working on development of a child protection emergency strategy and plan for COVID-19 response including development of child friendly materials.
• UNICEF is technically supporting the Department of Probation and Childcare Services to develop and adopt special working arrangement for children affected by COVID-19, in case there is situation where children are separate from or unaccompanied by their parents.
• Special technical note on children in institutions was developed and shared with all provincial level probation commissioners to share with 414 children homes currently registered under the Probation and Childcare Services.
• UNICEF is supporting the MoE in identifying options for providing continuous learning to ensure the children from vulnerable populations without access to online platforms are not left behind. As a first step, global guidance materials received from ROSA on continuous learning have been shared with MoE for their review.
• UNICEF convened the Emergency Education Cluster meeting and have discussed with the Ministry of Education (MoE) including the Advisor to the Minister, National Institute on Education (NIE) and have agreed on the immediate need to develop an overall sector response plan and a contingency plan.

Funding Status

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Next SitRep: 31 March 2020
UNICEF continues to monitor the situation very closely and situation reports will be issued on regular basis as the developments unfold.

Internal and External Media
UNICEF airlifts 14 metric tonnes of protective equipment to Pakistan; [https://bit.ly/2Uc7V0y](https://bit.ly/2Uc7V0y)

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Rohingya refugee children lather up the bubbles with confidence and a sense of responsibility

Good hygiene is essential now more than ever. As countries step up to the monumental task of stopping the spread of coronavirus, people throughout the world are re-evaluating how they live, work, and travel, and how interconnected and fragile our lives truly are.

Hygiene practices are at the forefront of this battleground, providing our best defense against disease transmission.

However, in the Rohingya refugee camps in Cox’s Bazar this poses a formidable challenge. The camps are home to 850,000 Rohingya refugees, over half of whom are children. They crowded and densely populated. The risk for any infectious disease transmission is continuously high.

When Rohingya children first arrived in Bangladesh, there were no basic water or sanitation facilities in place, let alone soap and safe water to wash their hands.

UNICEF and its partners raced against time to set up basic water, sanitation and hygiene services to protect hundreds of thousands of children and their families. The risk of a major disease outbreak was contained, and a catastrophe was averted.

Today, a handwashing station with soap and safe water can be found at each of UNICEF’s 2,500 learning centres.

Over 216,000 Rohingya children learn about good health and hygiene and practice their handwashing techniques as part of life skills education. When it comes to hygiene promotion, everyone has a key role to play, including teachers and children.

“It has become a part of their daily routine”

Although UNICEF’s learning centres are temporarily closed as a precautionary measure, these handwashing messages and learned behaviours will play a key role in protecting the health of Rohingya children and their families.
Nazum Bibi is a champion teacher who has been promoting handwashing at her learning centre each day.

“Since I became a teacher 18 months ago, I have not missed a single day to remind my students to wash their hands with soap and water. It has become a part of their daily routine now,” says Nazum Bibi happily.

“I tell children to ensure that they keep their hands clean and to tell their family members to use soap and water. They know that if they keep their hands clean, they will not fall sick so easily. They can play, study and maintain good health.”

Nine-year-old student Ashrafa explains “Handwashing is actually quite fun. We lather up soap and rub our hands and fingers to ensure dirt and diseases are washed away. My teacher taught me how to wash my hands correctly and now I can also teach others.”

“I often ask one child to lead handwashing practice in our learning centre. It gives them a sense of responsibility and confidence,” adds Nazum Bibi.

“Handwashing is a part of life-skills education in our learning centres. We teach Burmese, English and mathematics but we also provide instructions on how to wash hands correctly. Many children did not know how to maintain good hygiene practices before. They had very little access to education in Myanmar and some did not have soap in their schools or homes. Now in the camp, this ongoing handwashing practice has significantly improved cleanliness among children. This has also helped to improve their health condition,” highlights teacher Nazum Bibi.

**Every effort is made to keep Rohingya children safe**

In response to the temporary closure of learning centres, UNICEF is creating pathways for teachers, parents and caregivers to conduct home-learning by providing guidelines, additional workbooks and learning materials.

UNICEF is also scaling up hygiene promotion activities as a key prevention measure against COVID-19.

Some of the groundwork has already been laid through regular hygiene promotion, awareness raising and community engagement across UNICEF facilities throughout the camps.

However, coronavirus poses an unprecedented threat, particularly to the most vulnerable populations such as refugees. UNICEF is working together with the humanitarian community to ensure every effort is made to keep Rohingya children and families safe.
Handwashing is the first line of defense against this invisible threat, but extraordinary asks will be made of health workers, the humanitarian community and the refugees themselves should the virus reach the crowded refugee camps.

Photo UNICEF Bangladesh/Himu: Children washing their hands with soap at a UNICEF-supported learning centre in the Rohingya refugee camps, Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh