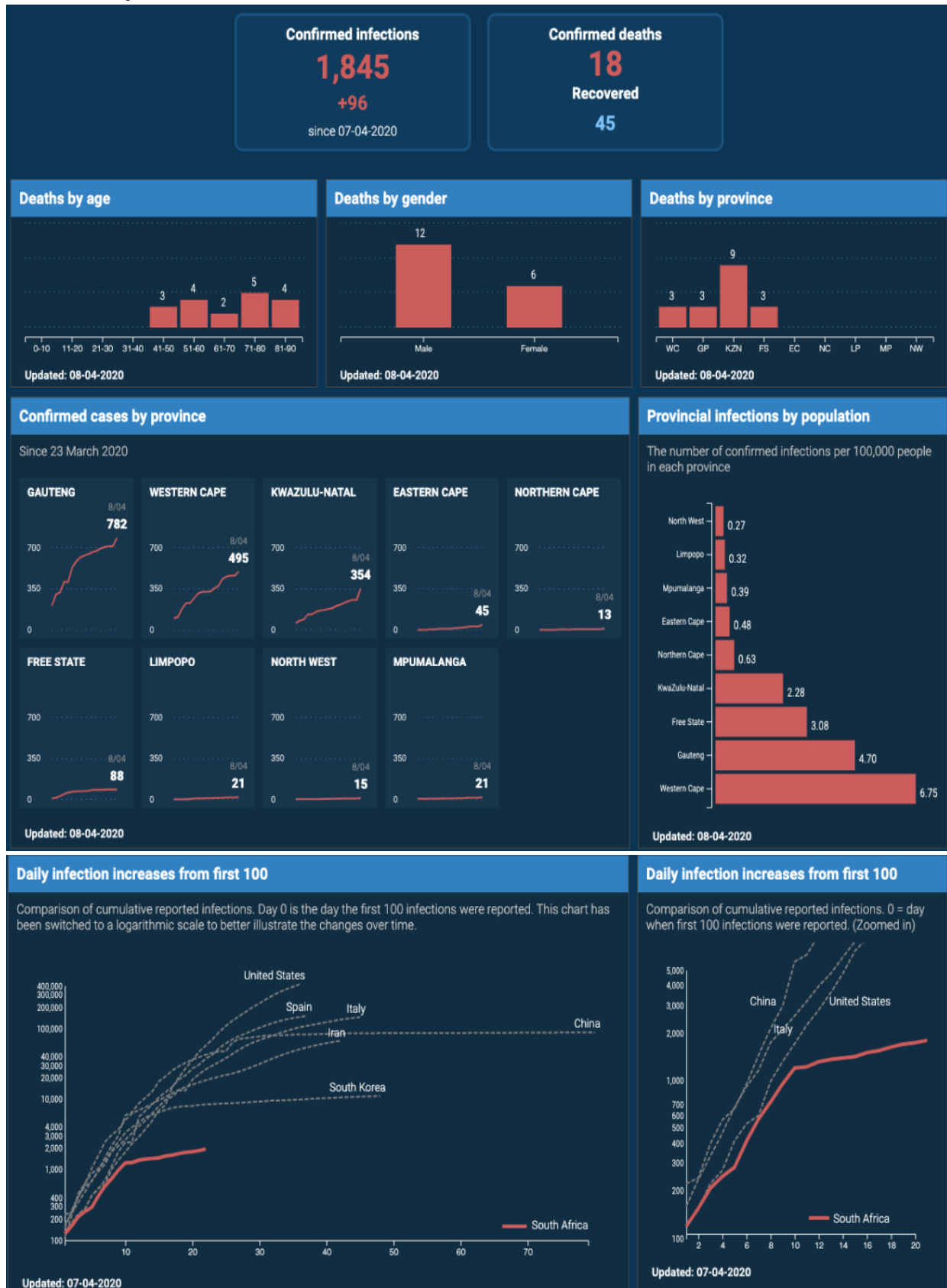


# UNICEF SOUTH AFRICA

## PROGRESS REPORT ON THE RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 EPIDEMIC

### Situation Update 01/2020



(Source: <https://mediahack.co.za/datastories/coronavirus/dashboard/> [Raw data from Department of Health, National Institute for Communicable Diseases, Bhekisisa. European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control via Our World in Data, Johns Hopkins University CSSE, Worldometer])

## **Introduction**

South Africa, the worst affected country in Sub-Saharan Africa by the coronavirus epidemic, detected the first case of the disease on 5 March 2020. A week later, the government declared a national state of disaster and heightened surveillance activities. When more cases were detected, South Africa imposed a national lockdown lasting 21 days, effective 27<sup>th</sup> March. Since then, the government has taken bold measures to contain the spread of the disease and mitigate its social and economic impact. All schools and businesses have been closed and a 24-hour curfew holds across the country. The Ministry of Health has also intensified screening and testing activities. As of 8 April, there have been 1845 cases, 45 recoveries, and 18 confirmed deaths.

The COVID-19 epidemic coincided with a period of poor economic performance in the country. The economic growth rate is low and unemployment high. On 27 March, the global ratings agency Moody's downgraded South Africa to subinvestment status thus adding to the strain facing the country. The negative rating will further compound social impact of COVID-19 in a country facing poverty, income inequality and a high rate of infection with HIV. About 5,5 million people, including migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, are vulnerable.

Yet, South Africa is resolute in its response to the public health and economic challenges facing the nation. The President has announced bold steps. The government, public and members of the private sectors have shown commitment and solidarity in tackling a national threat. Despite the challenges, South Africa is the only country in Africa that has rescued citizens stranded in a foreign country during the epidemic. South Africa is also one of the countries selected for the Solidarity Clinical Trial of treatment drugs.

## **Progress Updates**

UNICEF's contribution to the epidemic response is a part of a larger plan supported by 17 United Nations agencies based in South Africa. Developed in early March, the UN Plan is fully aligned with the national COVID-19 response plan which, in turn, draws from the WHO's Global Strategic Response Plan (SRP). UNICEF supports two of eight pillars: Public education and risk communication, and infection prevention control (IPC) through handwashing. This report presents highlights of the SACO achievements in the past several weeks. All the interventions carried out to date fall under the Phase One of the Epidemic, The National Disaster Phase.

## **Public Education and Risk Communication**

Much of SACO's work falls under this pillar. In selecting interventions, our team considered three things: the quality and content of each message, the medium for communication for delivering it, and the audience.

To address the knowledge gap on the disease, the Office supported the timely dissemination of vital information on the corona virus, its symptoms, the modes of transmission of the disease, preventions strategies and stigma associated with the illness. Wherever possible, we adapted materials from credible sources to save time and resources. We also produced new material as needed and translated into local languages. In our work, we tried to ensure that the urgency of the moment does not undermine the production of quality material.

The team considered various channels for delivering the information and has benefited from South Africa's rich menu of options. Securing partnerships, however, called for negotiation and careful screening. With some partners, we reached an agreement quickly because UNICEF South Africa has an ongoing relationship them.

Current partners include traditional channels of mass communication such as radio and TV, and new media for communication. We have used social media (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter), the Internet of Good Things, and Tiktok. We also have arrangements with the radio, a mobile cell-

phone platform, electronic media (Viacom) and U-report. In addition, we have used UNICEF goodwill ambassadors to record messages, videos or clips.

All the UNICEF-supported messages target the audiences cited in the SACO Plan. Among them are children, youth, parents, pregnant women, care givers and teachers. Estimates of the audience range from 90,000 U-report users to one million pregnant mothers, two million youth to ten million listeners of community radio stations, and ten million children, parents and teachers. Illustrative examples of interventions supported by SACO appear below.

- Content finalized for a radio programme to be aired by Children’s Radio Foundation (CRF). The programmes will reach roughly 10 million children and parents/caregivers and teachers.
- Messages on key hygiene practices included in the MomConnect platform reaching 1 million pregnant women.
- Handwashing videos posted on Tik Tok platform, reaching 2 million youth in South Africa
- Ongoing COVID-19 messages on Social media, Facebook (66,000), Twitter (20,800), and Instagram (19,500).
- Support youth to access services remotely and earn digital rewards through an innovative platform called Zlto. The platform uses blockchain technology and aims to expand on available services to reach youth and households during the COVID-19 outbreak, reaching 5000 people.
- Deployment of the U-Report SA social network platform comprising of more than 90,000 users to amplify risk communication messages and obtain direct community feedback.
- Support the Department of Basic Education to broadcast pre-primary and primary education lessons (radio/tv) and other distance learning platforms (as required), reaching roughly 10 million children and parents/caregivers and teachers.
- Support the Department of Basic Education to use the existing ECD mobi app to provide information to the network of ECD practitioners.
- Partner with VIACOM to amplify UNICEF’s COVID-19 messaging on their platforms, such as Nickelodeon, MTN Struga and Comedy Central.
- Partner with Heartlines to produce adequate and relevant public service announcements on handwashing, childcare and protection, learning and child rights and having it broadcast on national and community radio stations, potentially reaching 10 million people.
- Partner with Internet of Good Things/Free Basics promote COVID-19 content on mobile platforms in South Africa with free access for all Cell-C users, with an estimated 21,931 articles to be read per month.
- Partner with Childline South Africa to provide a complimentary COVID-19 helpline/hotline covering all 9 provinces for children and parents, including providing child protection and C4D related information, counselling and informational support to children and families impacted by COVID-19, and referral to specialized mental health services.

### **Infection control**

UNICEF’s work on IPC focuses on the promotion of handwashing among vulnerable populations and clients at ECD centres. We launched an initiative called “Little Hands Matter” that appeals for public financing. The initiative, which involves UNICEF and private sector partners, seeks to provide handwashing stations for school children in informal settlements and hygiene education. Funding will be used to procure 20 handwashing stations and to support dissemination of information specific to handwashing. The initiative has invoked interest from members of the public who have raised 60% of the target budget in about two weeks. Once the curfew is over, UNICEF will also support a handwashing campaign in selected ECD centres, primary and secondary schools catering for the poorest learners to improve preventive practices among children, at-risk groups, and the public.

### **Other UNICEF activities**

SACO is providing additional assistance to the Government of South Africa. UNICEF is one of the UN agencies nominated by the UNRC to provide strategic support to the Department of Social Development (DSD) for the national response to the social impact of the epidemic. UNICEF staff also sit in three high level sectoral committees: In education, UNICEF participates in the Interim Steering Committee charged with coordinating the sector response. In the Ministry of Human Settlements, Water and Sanitation, UNICEF participates in the WASH Taskforce. Two UNICEF officers are attached to two of the Provincial Command Centres, Gauteng and the Free State. They provide technical support with data analysis which the provincial authorities use to inform disease control and containment measures. On advocacy and public relations, SACO has been on several broadcast media (NewzRoom Afrika, SAFM, MetroFM and eNCA). On Friday last week, UNICEF and 28 local NGOs and academic institutions submitted a petition to the President to secure top-up funds for children surviving on the Child Support Grant.

### **Resource Mobilisation**

- R 1,320,000 has been raised from corporate sector (Momentum Metropolitan, Standard Bank, Unilever and other donors). An additional R120,000 has been raised through the “Pledge to the Little Hands” handwashing campaign.
- With assistance of UNICEF NYHQ, SACO submitted a funding proposal worth US\$500,000 to USAID. This grant will support Infection Prevention (IPC) and WASH services in informal settlements and other potentially high-risk groups and communities.

### **Staff Well-Being**

- All staff UNICEF staff in SACO are well and motivated. Everyone receives updates on COVID-19 and security.
- Every staff member has received briefings from the UNICEF Regional Office and the recommendations of the guidance on tele-working.
- The Office has weekly staff meeting which are conducted virtually. The Staff Counsellor has participated in the last two sessions. They have been encouraged to attend virtual well-being sessions with the staff counsellor.
- Members of the CMT check on other colleagues periodically.
- Staff members have received hand sanitizers. The Office was fumigated once following the report of one COVID -19 positive case among the UN staff at the UN Metropark building which is about ten kilometres away.

### **Challenges**

- The speed of epidemic and the restrictions which came with it are new and unsettling to most South Africans. The unfamiliar controls and uncertainties are worrying but, overall, the team is coping well and working resourcefully.
- The rapid onset of the epidemic has interrupted regular programming for children. It will take some time to assess the overall impact of the COVID-19 on programmes that promote children’s health, education and well-being.