<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/e1da7d80fbcf4ce8a3a954910c1e7f37>

**Refugees struggle to cope with the crisis.**

**By Chiara Fabb**

The current pandemic has severely hit the globe as a whole. It is renowned that the most vulnerable individuals of our society, such as refugees and displace people, are the ones that are suffering the most the consequences of the pandemic.

From the recently [published data by the UNHCR](https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/e1da7d80fbcf4ce8a3a954910c1e7f37) (The UN Refugee Agency), it is clear to notice the COVID-19 health risks that refugees, and other displaced people, have to face daily. Living in crowded camps, urban shelters, and settlements, they are excluded from the basic health services essential to prevent the spread of the virus. Indeed, their living conditions are highly crowded, access to soap and water is limited, and health infrastructures are insufficient.

A point to consider is that many of the countries where they are displaced were already facing a collapsing health system, which are now put under additional pressure. The virus has also worsened the psychological burden of the most challenged individual in these groups (e.g. women and children) who are now victim of further domestic violence, abuse, and sexual exploitation.

In countries such as Iraq, even though all displaced people have access to the national care system, there are severe shortages of essential healthcare supply, medicines, and healthcare workers. As a consequence, the spread of the virus continues at a concerning rate, disrupting social support systems, and preventing aids from reaching refugees, and internally displaced individuals.

**Overcrowding**

When displaced in urban settings, refugees are living in dangerously crowded environments which prohibits the adherence to social distancing.

For instance, in Kutupalong (Bangladesh) 41,000 people live per sq Km, whereases the minimum humanitarian standard is 22,200 people per sq Km.

Another element that renders the situation more problematic is the limited space inside the refugee’s houses. To face this issue, the UNHCR and the Bangladeshi government are piloting the strategy of adding a mezzanine to the planned shelters, which would increase the liveable surface within the house by 69%.

**Scarcity of resources**

Other than physical distancing, an additional issue concerning the basic health needs to contrast COVID-19 is access to water and soap.

The minimum amount water standard to contrast the pandemic should be 15 liters per person, per day. This amount can guarantee drinking, cooking, and personal hygiene. To this day, 22% of refugee sites do not guarantee this basic amount of water. This is in strong contrast to 144 liters, which is what an average European consumes daily.

From the start of the COVID-19 crisis, in In Ajuong Thok camp, Sudan Sudan, only 54% of households have access to water.

In terms of soap, people living in three-quarters of developing countries do not have access to washing facilities, including soap.

At this point, it is important to note that the consequences of this crisis do not only impact refugees and displaced people soley in terms of COVID-19 related issues, but have severely disrupted sectors such as education, housing, access to food and water, and many other aspects of livelihood.