UNHCR online meeting with NGOs on COVID-19

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UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

Key protection issues related to COVID-19

Communication especially important

- **With our persons of concern**
  Engaging communities

- **Between ourselves**
  Information sharing and cooperation on protection tracking

- **With the wider public**
  Ensuring a balanced advocacy, based on protection tracking

Balanced messaging

- States can take necessary and proportionate measures to protect public health AND meet international legal obligations to respect refugee and asylum rights
- Avoid messaging that risks fostering stigmatization of refugees, IDPs and others of concern to UNHCR
- State containment measures should not target refugees or be discriminatory and should be temporary

Risks to protection: asylum-seekers, refugees and IDPs especially vulnerable

- Border closures and denial of entry
- Restricted access to and suspension of asylum procedures
- Restriction of movement, including detention, due to quarantine measures
- Social isolation may deny access to rights and critical protection services

Threats to fundamental human rights and refugee law

- Drift to ‘externalization’ of asyum procedures
- Willingness by states to risk *refoulement* by third country transfers
- Lack of access to basic services within host country
- Restrictions on access to employment, health services and education

Long term impact of Covid-19 measures: We need advocacy by NGOs please!

- Access to persons of concern may be restricted
- Localization of UNHCR work: capacity building
- Emergency measures remain in place long-term: arbitrary detention, exclusion policies, denial of access to asylum at border

Q&A