

# COVID-19 update in our program areas

While we are worrying about the coronavirus outbreak in Hong Kong, at the same time the pandemic is also widespread in the developing countries. In this information sheet we would like to explain how our program regions are affected, what this means for sponsorship and our work on the ground.

## Situation in Latin-America and Caribbean

In the states of Central and South America, the number of cases has developed very differently. A particularly large number of infected persons are to be found in Brazil, with over 2 million cases, while only a few thousand people are affected in the neighbouring state of Paraguay.

In the countries of this region there are or were extensive exit restrictions. In Peru, for example, all people have to stay at home or in a shelter. Exit is only permitted on special occasions, such as for a member of the household to buy the necessary food and to visit a bank or pharmacy, as well as for people who need medical treatment in an emergency. The borders of the country are closed. It is not only in Peru that schools are unlikely to open this year. In El Salvador, the closure has had a negative impact on the most vulnerable families, people without permanent jobs and those who have limited access to basic services. Children in Plan communities often do not have access to the Internet to participate in state-funded online learning program.

14 million people in Latin America and the Caribbean could face serious food insecurity this year due to

the COVID-19 pandemic, according to World Food Programme forecasts.



*We distribute necessary hygiene kits in the communities in affected areas of Latin America.*

*Photo: Plan International*

It is to be expected that the COVID-19 pandemic will again worsen the security situation, including shoplifting, domestic robberies, domestic violence, looting, extortion and gender-based violence.

**"If you suffer domestic violence, report it! Don't be silent, your voice counts, we all have the same rights, if you speak out, your life will be changed for the better, do it for yourself and others! Now is the time!" Nancy, leader of a youth group in Guatemala**

Plan International reaches around 6.8 million people in Latin America with its COVID-19 emergency aid programmes.

## Situation in Africa

The number of cases of people infected with the virus is not yet very high in the program countries in Africa. Egypt as well as Ghana and Cameroon are the most affected countries. As in many other parts of the world, the hidden danger is that the number of undetected cases is very high because sufficient testing facilities are not available.



*Hygiene and prevention measures must be observed in our learning centres*

*Photo: Plan International*

Many governments in this region imposed strict exit restrictions. Some countries in Western Africa are now planning for the "reopening". Of particular importance for children and young people is the planned resumption of schooling, including in Benin, Cameroon, Mali, Niger and Senegal - either completely resume or restricted to students taking exams. It is feared that the decision to lift the containment restrictions could lead to an increase in the number of COVID-19 cases, as the internationally recommended preventive measures, e.g. social distancing, wearing of masks, etc., are not sufficiently practised.

In many program countries in the region, however, strict restrictions such as curfews and travel restrictions remain in place for the time being and have a particular impact on the living conditions of poorer sections of the population. Children, and girls in particular, have to take on even more household tasks during the crisis than usual, which always carries the risk that families will neglect the importance of education even after school has opened. Moreover, girls in this situation are increasingly exposed to the risk of sexual violence, genital mutilation and child marriage, and are at risk. In some areas of Western Africa, such as in the Lake Chad region, the security situation is still poor due to the activity of terrorist organisations or political conflict.

**"Some of my family members advise me to marry because COVID-19 doesn't seem to end today or tomorrow. The chances of going back to school are slim and I'm getting old." Victoria, 17, Sponsored child from Tanzania**

Plan International's emergency aid programs have so far reached around 21 million people in West and Central Africa and 13 million people in East and Southern Africa.



*We also reach the rural communities with educational events on infection prevention*

*Photo: Plan International / William Domapielle*

## Situation in Asia

The first cases of COVID-19 were already known in Asia in January 2020. Since then, the coronavirus has become a global crisis. While the number of cases is decreasing in China, which was previously severely affected, the infection is spreading to other countries and regional hotspots are forming with a rapid increase in new infections, for example in India and Bangladesh. In addition, Indonesia, Philippines and Nepal have recently seen a sharp increase in the number of infections.

In order to slow down further spread, governments have imposed severe restrictions on public life and travel in many places. After all our Asian country offices had largely switched to working from home in recent months, most colleagues are returning to office work with gradual relaxation and in compliance with infection control measures.



Information on prevention measures to contain the pandemic. Photo: Plan International

The restrictions for children and families vary. While the schools in Bangladesh, for example, are expected to remain closed at least until September, schools in Vietnam, which was less affected, have been opened again since mid-May. The challenges here are to ensure that girls in particular can return to school, to make school attendance safe and to implement hygiene measures.

One problem for families is the loss of income due to the restrictions imposed by COVID-19, as many cannot pursue their economic activities. This leads to a deterioration in the food situation, and in India, for example, up to a quarter of young women are acutely malnourished. In addition, the population in parts of India and Bangladesh, for example, is still struggling with the aftermath of Cyclone Amphan, which caused severe damage and flooding with fatalities in May 2020.

**"In my community we know the importance of hand washing and social distancing through Plan projects and the local authority. No one in my community is affected by COVID-19." Pheary, 13, Sponsored Child from Cambodia.**

In total, Plan International reaches around 14.2 million people in Asia with the Corona aid measures.

## Challenges for children and families - project examples

A major problem is the widespread closure of schools in the programme countries. As learned from other crisis situations, there is always a great risk, especially for girls, of not returning to school after a break in education. The problematic economic situation of many families, due to falling income as a result of COVID-19 restrictions, increases the risk of early marriage and early pregnancy for millions of girls in our programme regions. Food insecurity is also worsening in some regions, and prices are rising sharply in some cases.

**Plan project example:** The economic consequences of the pandemic hit the most vulnerable families hardest. For example, we are providing food aid to distressed families in camps for internally displaced persons in Myanmar. Sponsored families, e.g. in Kenya, Zimbabwe and Senegal, received emergency cash aid from us to ensure food and survival. Together with partner organisations, we also help to provide good learning materials for schools in the communities.



The construction of hand washing stations is part of the prevention measures against corona virus  
Photo: Plan International

Girls' mental health is a concern in view of the prolonged quarantine, as girls and young women are confronted with many different fears and risks. In many countries, contact restrictions mean that the freedom of movement is severely restricted, especially for girls, and in some cases they are hardly allowed to leave the house. In this context, cases of domestic as well as sexualised violence are strongly increasing. The pandemic has also reduced young people's access to sexual and reproductive health services, and early pregnancies are expected to increase.

**Plan project example:** To reduce child protection risks, we are currently integrating child protection education into all existing projects, such as hygiene or nutrition projects, so that we can quickly reach as many children and families as possible. In eastern and southern Africa, for example, we shared information on child protection, children's rights and gender-specific violence with around 45,000 people last month. In Bolivia, we run online webinars for children where they are trained on child protection and risks. We also work closely with governments in the regions to strengthen national child protection systems.



*We support young women and men in producing protective masks for local communities.*

*Photo: Plan International*

Insufficient hygiene and prevention measures against the spread of the virus can lead to a sharp increase in the number of infections in the programme countries. The supply of clean water, soap, masks and disinfectants is often hardly guaranteed. In addition, the restrictions imposed, for instance on the supply of personal hygiene articles such as sanitary towels, make it difficult for girls and young women to move around freely.

**Plan project example:** In our project activities, we make sure that hand washing stations are also available for children and that they are good and easy to use. We are installing a large number of so-called "Tippy Taps", simple local hand washing systems operated by a foot pedal. In India, for example, we also distributed over 600,000 sanitary pads to young women and provide training in self-sewing sanitary pads and masks.

## How does the sponsorship work continue?

In many Plan program countries, work in the area of sponsorship is either at a standstill or has been suspended. One reason for this was the curfew imposed by many governments, some of which are still in effect. In addition, there is an internationally agreed procedure in our organisation which stipulates that all emergency aid measures are given priority when the "red alert" is declared. What is unusual in the COVID-19 pandemic is that all countries where Plan is working with sponsorships are affected.

We have established extensive protection measures for employees and volunteers. For this reason, visiting communities was difficult at times. However, the sometimes very good relations with the local authorities meant that Plan employees were able to carry out emergency aid measures even during curfew periods. Since we continue to work directly with the community members, there was also good contact with the communities in the last few weeks, even if only by telephone. Due to the closing times, many letters and gift items to sponsored children could not be transported or processed.

Sponsors can continue to send messages to their sponsored child, preferably via our website, <https://www.plan.org.hk/form/letters/en>. Please understand that the exchange of letters will take much longer than usual.

[If you have any questions regarding communication or your sponsorship in general, please contact our Supporter Services Department by email \[supporter@plan.org.hk\]\(mailto:supporter@plan.org.hk\) or by phone \(852\) 3405 5305.](#)