The number of recorded Covid-19 cases in countries across Africa more than doubled in the past five days. The low transmission rate in African countries is most likely due to the fact that, as of now, the majority of infections in Africa have been imported. But community transmission is on the rise in several countries, namely Burkina Faso, Senegal, Cameroon and Liberia, suggesting that the rate of infection is likely to increase in the coming weeks.

The number of cases is growing in Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana and Nigeria. To date, Covid-19 related deaths have been recorded in Burkina Faso, Gabon, and The Gambia. Some countries have not yet reported any cases: Mali, Sao Tome and Principe, Sierra Leone and Guinea Bissau.

With the help of WHO and the Africa’s CDC, African countries have expanded their ability to test, and to screen for the disease at border crossings, seaports and airports.
Most countries in Africa are likely to struggle to contain community transmissions as many of them have limited capacity to handle epidemics, including laboratory preparedness, health communication and case surveillance.

Additionally, introducing preventive measures can be a challenge in communities and areas where different generations live together, in often overcrowded spaces. In a region where over 50% of the economy is informal, many people cannot afford to stay confined. The recommended social distancing as well as hygiene measures such as handwashing with soap can also be challenging in areas with limited access to water.

Finally, the West and Central Africa and the Sahel regions present specific fragilities related to the weakness of basic social services, economic pressures impacting livelihoods as well as growing security challenges (e.g. riots, extremism, xenophobic attacks) that can in turn aggravate an already fragile situation.

Impact on Operations

While many countries (see map) in the region have chosen to tighten controls at their borders or closed down land and air borders in an effort to contain the spread of COVID-19, it is critical that such measures be implemented with respect for human dignity and concern for the protection of vulnerable people and families.

Although too early to confirm as a new trend, migration flows towards Mali and Niger (mainly from Algeria and Libya) and Burkina Faso have decreased. However, border closures have impacted IOM capacity to provide assistance, leaving over 2,200 migrants waiting in transit centers in Niger, Mali, Chad and Burkina Faso. Most of the centers have already reached maximal capacities. In Mali, IOM is limiting admissions to the most vulnerable migrants.

IOM Response

In view of restrictions on mobility, DTM and IBM teams are working together on an evaluation to assess a broad range of multi-sectoral indicators at key border posts and transit areas in the region. By using ongoing data collection in key entry, exit and transit points in 8 countries (Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Guinea, Mali, Niger, Nigeria and Senegal), these assessments will also support IOM Departments in programming for the COVID-19 response along the main West and Central Africa routes.

In some countries, support has focused on reinforcing port health capacities to carry out health screenings at airport, seaport, and at select land border crossings. Additional, activities include awareness raising, screening and referral as well as coordination support to national structures involved in the COVID 19 response. COVID-2019 prevention messages are being broadcasted by radio in Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mali and Niger.

Fully engaged in the Regional Coordination Platform COVID-19 established for West and Central Africa, IOM is co-lead alongside WHO for the Surveillance/POE pillar in addition to its active involvement in Operational Coordination, Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE) and Rapid Response Teams (RRT) pillars.

In the likely event that migrants will need to stay for weeks rather than days in transit centers, colleagues are in the process:

- Elaborating contingency plans in case a beneficiary is affected
- Revising SOPs on new intakes as per different scenario (with budget, communication needs etc.)
- Ensuring information is provided regarding temporary measures put in place until borders reopen
- Reinforcing communication on coronavirus and awareness raising on hygiene practices, recreation activities
- Maintaining adequate NFI stocks and other items of first necessity
- Exploring solutions to mitigate tensions
- Reinforcing MHPSS capacities in view of growing needs
Appeal

RO Dakar submitted three appeals. You can access a brief summary [here](#).

Communications

Click [here](#) to access posters for IOM’s transit centers, medical facilities, etc. And access our Covid-19 special icons to be used in your documents [here](#).

The Observer: IOM staff

Dr. Fatoumata Keita at IOM Guinea tells us how the Ebola response helped the mission be prepared for the Covid-19 outbreak.

The Observer: IOM beneficiary

Ramatoulaye, a returning migrant from Senegal tells us how the outbreak impacted her life.

The Observer: in IDP camps

When IDPs in North-East Nigeria help spread the word.

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Stay informed on the epidemiologic trend in the region on the RO Dakar regional Covid-19 webpage!