

**Virtual Workshop for NGOs:
Refugee Protection in the Context of COVID-19**

**Session 1: Protection Principles and COVID-19
1 July 2020**

CASE STUDY

NOTE: The following scenario is hypothetical. Any resemblance to actual persons or events is purely coincidental. We have considered a number of complicated issues as a learning tool, so that participants can spot the issues, and apply protection principles and discuss what they would do to address the issue.

Citing concerns about COVID-19, the Government of Country Y has closed its borders, and has closed travel into and out of the refugee camps in the country. They have announced that only critical services are permitted to continue in the camps and these are limited to food distribution, health and hygiene. The general message conveyed by the government is that COVID-19 is a deadly virus, and people must stay on lockdown and maintain social distancing or they will spread the virus and they or their loved ones could die.

There is only 1 COVID-19 testing center near the refugee camps and treatment facilities are limited. There is a backlog in testing in the area resulting in long delays, and patients need to wait for as long as 10 days for the test results.

A 65 year old refugee from country X is living in a refugee camp in country Y. He has a number of health related issues, and relies on his family for his basic needs, going out of his shelter very little, and only to take short walks and talk to his neighbours in the community. His son is married and has two kids and the 5 of them all live together in a shelter.

The 65 year old refugee began to show symptoms of COVID-19, but he was afraid to visit a health centre in the camp because he had heard that if he tests positive he would be isolated from the rest of his family and would die alone. The stress he was feeling exacerbated his health situation. Later other members of his family also began to show symptoms. It was only when the children showed symptoms that they finally decided to visit a health centre together. A humanitarian worker told them to go home and self-isolate because they were breathing okay, and the health centre was too overwhelmed to accommodate anyone whose condition was not serious, and they could make other people sick by being there. The 65 year old grandfather's condition worsened and the rest of the family tried to avoid him. The neighbours heard that they had visited the health centre, rumours started to circulate and people started to avoid them.

Meanwhile, a member of your staff working in the camps regularly, hears from a refugee about a family that is infected with COVID-19 who is angry and demands that the family be removed from the camps. She relays the interaction to you as her supervisor.

The next morning, you learn that a list of names has been published of persons who tested positive for COVID-19 on a local news website, and your staff's name is on it. The same staff writes to you forwarding a screenshot of a social media post with a photograph of her building where she lives alongside her name and role in your organization, with a stamp across the photograph that says, "infected". She says her landlord has changed the locks on her apartment, and she has been forced to go stay with a friend.

A number of your office staff confront you and refuse to go to the camps. The women in particular voiced concerns that a number of them had been subjected to discrimination and intimidation, they had been shouted at and threatened just because they were women working "unaccompanied" in the camps, and because the number of humanitarian workers deployed to the camps is greatly reduced, security is diminished, and they no longer feel safe.

You have also received a report that a member of the refugee community with whom your organization works has reported to your staff that several asylum-seeking families have been stopped at the border and are being held in preparation for deportation. The refugee who reported it says he knows, because one of his family members is in the group and was able to communicate their predicament to him.

Questions to consider in preparation for the workshop

During the Virtual Workshop, we will examine the case study above and have a discussion based on the following questions:

1. What went wrong here? What are the protection related issues that you see in this scenario?
2. How could things have been done differently?
3. What could you do now in response to some of these issues, or what strategies could we consider?