



COVID-19 Situation Report No. 2

Highlights

As of 31 May, Lao PDR has 19 confirmed COVID-19 cases (last reported 12 April) and zero deaths, with 16 patients now recovered (MoH).

The UN Country Team (UNCT) continues to provide support to the Government of Lao PDR prepare and respond to the COVID-19 Outbreak across a range of sectors, including health, migration, education, nutrition and food security, agriculture, labour and social services and protection.

The UN Secretary-General's Multi-Partner Trust Fund (MPTF) approved two UNCT Lao PDR joint proposals aimed at assisting provincial health preparedness and essential health services during the COVID-19 Outbreak.

MPI has requested the UNCT undertake a joint impact evaluation of the COVID-19 Outbreak with the objective of identifying policy recommendations and actions for the Government in the recalibration of the draft 9th NSEDP.

Reporting Period: 1 – 31 May 2020

Situation in Numbers (as of 31 May)



of confirmed cases

19



of deaths

0



of return migrants into the country

134,404

(Vientiane Times)



of people tested

2005



of tests conducted awaiting results

14

Procurement of medical supplies and health products remains a high priority for the Government, particularly in preparing Provincial and District health care facilities for COVID-19 outbreaks.

The UNCT has been engaging Lao residents in risk communication and preventative messaging, working with partners from multiple sectors (Government, religious and faith-based groups, INGOs and local CSOs, educational institutions, media and private sector). Target audiences include all Lao children, women and men, with specific focus on vulnerable groups, including returning migrants, persons with disabilities, youth and adolescents, ethnic groups and others. In May 2020, the Government was supported with developing a new phase of public messaging in view of people returning to work and school.

All pre-schools, primary and secondary schools as well as the last year of vocational schools, pedagogical colleges, and universities will open on 2 June 2020. The rest of the classes are scheduled to open on 15 June 2020. The back-to-school campaign online materials have been seen by Lao online platform users nearly 3 million times. The UNCT has assisted the Ministry of Education and Sport (MoES) in developing guidelines for re-opening schools, which is also based on the Lao PDR Education COVID-19 Response Plan.

With the expected increase in protection and GBV issues, 17 hotlines providing remote counseling and psycho-social support have been created in partnership with the Lao Women's Union, Lao Youth Union, and Vientiane Youth Centre. The UN has provided additional training to counselors, ensuring the relevant skill sets are available to manage the increasing case load.

To support the Government in responding to the socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 emergency, the UN is undertaking a range of assessments in the economic and financial sectors, determining the implications on the low-income earning households and vulnerable groups. UNCT partners are also improving vulnerability mapping and spatial analysis, identifying high risk regions across the country. The assessments will also assist in determining the impact against the SDGs and what development of policy options and measures will be required in the recovery process.





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The Lao PDR's Micro- and SMEs were mobilized to produce required PPE, including technical support to MoIC and Lao National Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LNCCI) for sustainability of essential protection supplies.

24 youth volunteers from the Lao Youth Union, Vientiane Youth Centre and the National University of Laos underwent a 3 day training as part of the "Me, My Body, My Planet, My Future" Campaign launched in 2019, learning important leadership skills to drive action in mitigating negative impact of COVID-19 on adolescents and young people.

Funding Overview and Partnerships

Two joint proposals under the UN Secretary-General's Multi-Partner Trust Fund (MPTF) were approved by the Secretariat in May 2020:

- "Supporting essential sexual, reproductive, maternal, newborn, child and adolescent health services during COVID-19" in partnership with the MoH, MoPWT and Lao Women's Union;
- "Supporting provincial health preparedness and surge capacities, including at points on entry during COVID-19" in partnership with MoH, MoHA, MoPS, MoPWT and MoF.

The approved Projects present an opportunity to showcase how inter-ministerial and inter-agency coordinated planning can strengthen programming design and development outcomes for communities. With an expected decline in ODA funding due to the strain on fiscal resources in donor countries attending to increased domestic needs in the wake of COVID-19, there is an increased need for reprogramming amidst the crisis in tandem creative joint proposals to ensure adequate, sustainable response interventions against the COVID-19 Outbreak.

Currently, the MPTF has received contributions from Denmark, Netherlands, Norway, and Switzerland.

As part of the partnership between the UN and the private sector, Banque Franco Lao (BFL) and Crowne Plaza have provided hygiene, dignity items and essential food supplies that will benefit more than 3,000 women from quarantine centers.

Funding gaps are expected in all sectors. UN Agencies, Funds and Programmes (AFP) have reprogrammed funds to respond to COVID-19 needs where possible. Resource mobilization efforts are ongoing across multilateral, bilateral and private sector partners.

Situation Overview & Humanitarian Needs

Lao PDR has contained the COVID-19 Outbreak to 19 cases to date. All cases are either travel-related or linked to those.

The initial data on food security and agriculture indicates a visible impact of COVID-19 on the sales of farmer produce, as well as on the availability and prices of some food products in Luangnamtha and Bokeo Provinces. It also shows an unemployment spike in many parts of the country, in particular in Attapeu, Bokeo, Luangnamtha, Savannakhet Provinces, and Vientiane Capital, with daily labourers most impacted. The overall income for farmer households also declined as a result of both reduced volume of sales and price fluctuations.

Migrant and mobile populations bear a high risk of infection as well as broader social and economic impacts of COVID-19 due to several factors and barriers such as lack or inadequate access to proper information on prevention; limitations in or exclusions from accessing diagnostic and treatment services; cramped and crowded living and working conditions; stigma and discrimination; and other factors.



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All Lao children have been affected by school closures since 19 March totalling 1,440,733 (52% girls) aged 3-17. Schools commenced reopening to transition grades on 18 May 2020, with all grades/levels of education expected to resume classes from 2 June.

The Lao Economic Monitor rapid assessment of the COVID-19 impact on Lao PDR's growth and debt projects Lao PDR's economic growth in 2020 to range between negative 1.8 and 1%. A sharp drop in the performance of the travel, tourism, and hospitality sectors – which account for 11% of total employment and 22% of employment in urban areas – has caused widespread job losses. Between 96,000 and 214,000 additional people are projected to fall into poverty as a result of the pandemic. The Monitor also shows that the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic will increase the fiscal deficit in 2020 to between 7.5 and 8.8% of GDP, from 5.1% of GDP in 2019. Consequently, debt levels are expected to increase to between 65 and 68% of GDP in 2020, from 59% of GDP in 2019, which will generate higher debt service obligations.

Summary Analysis of Programme Response



UN LEADERSHIP, COORDINATION AND STRATEGY

The UN Sustainable Development Group globally developed the [Framework for the Immediate Socio-Economic Response to COVID-19](#) which sets out the framework for the United Nations' urgent support to countries and societies in the face of the pandemic, putting in practice the [UN Secretary-General's Shared Responsibility, Global Solidarity report](#). It calls for protecting jobs, businesses and livelihoods and to set in motion a safe, sustainable, gender-equal, and carbon-neutral path to recovery from the COVID-19 crisis.

The UNSDG's Framework became one of three critical components of the UN's efforts to save lives, protect people, and rebuild better, alongside (1) the health response, led by WHO, and (2) the humanitarian response, as detailed in the UN-led [COVID-19 Global Humanitarian Response Plan](#). UNDP globally has been appointed as the technical lead in the programmatic socio-economic recovery efforts and will support the UN Resident Coordinator and the UNCT across all aspects of the response to COVID-19.

The UNCT is supporting the Government-led response to COVID-19, highlighting the need for strong coordination and a multi-sectoral approach. To assist in the wider coordination efforts with national and international partners, the UNCT has been formulating a matrix-based One UN Conceptual Approach to COVID-19, outlining the immediate, medium and long-term needs. Key Strategic Priority Areas to date include (1) coordination; (2) risk communication, and community engagement; (3) health surveillance mechanisms at borders and Quarantine Centers; (4) support to essential health, nutrition and WASH services; (5) support to the education sector; (6) enhancing social protection mechanisms through immediate impact measures; and (vii) sustaining socio-economic development, ensuring a "build back better" approach. The UNCT's country-level Conceptual Approach draws on the five Pillars of the global UNSDG's Framework: (1) Health First: Protecting Health Services and Systems during the Crisis; (2) Protecting People: Social Protection and Basic Services; (3) Economic Response and Recovery: Protecting Jobs, Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises, and Informal Sector Workers; (4) Social Cohesion and Community Resilience.

With the rapidly changing socio-economic situation, a recalibration of the 9th NSEDP is necessary, including understanding how the three criteria outlined for LDC graduation, i.e. per capita gross national income (GNI), the human assets index (HAI), and the economic vulnerability index (EVI) may be shifting. The UN Country Team together with the World Bank and Asian Development Bank, and other Development Partners has been supporting MPI in undertaking an impact evaluation of the COVID-19 with the objective to identify policy recommendations and actions for the Government aimed at the recalibration of the draft NSEDP.





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HEALTH

The COVID-19 Preparedness and Response Plan will be shared with Development Partners in June 2020. In the meantime, the UNCT has been formulating a matrix-based One UN Conceptual Approach to COVID-19, outlining the immediate, medium and long-term needs.

There is ongoing training in all provinces to strengthen the capacity of the Provincial Emergency Operations Centres (EOC). The training includes assessments of the EOC facilities to improve the infrastructure and information, communication, technology (ICT) to improve the communication and coordination between provinces to the district level and up to central level to manage the COVID-19 response throughout the country.

To ensure that health facilities are equipped to meet the case management demands that a COVID-19 outbreak presents, the UNCT continues to assist MoH in procuring the required medical equipment and personal protective equipment (PPE). Through the leadership of the Supply Chain Coordinator, Lao PDR has fulfilled its global supply chain allocations based on the current available supplies, demand and priority determined by the WHO chaired Global Supply Chain Taskforce. The medical equipment and health products will likely arrive in Lao PDR in June 2020.

The MoH clinical management guideline was revised in May 2020, and simulation exercises and trainings in infection prevention and control measures, including appropriate use of PPE, screening, triage and treatment of COVID-19 patients and hospital preparation (including surge capacity for healthcare facilities, human resources for health and logistics management) for COVID-19 have been completed across the 17 Provinces. Hospital preparedness tools have been implemented during the training, working with health facilities to assess their current capacity and conduct local planning for surge management. Further, there has been continued support to strengthen surveillance, including provincial Rapid Response Team (RRT) deployment.

MoH has developed guidance on the management of returning migrant workers to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the community through quarantine measures. The UNCT has supported MoH to develop the guideline, disseminate it and provide trainings on how to disinfect for the non-health sectors nationally. This guidance has been applied to Quarantine Centres throughout the country, both active and those that have now been returned to normal use such as schools. In addition, MoH has developed guidance on preventive measures for COVID-19 in various settings such as schools, restaurants, public transport and shops and disseminated it to relevant sectors.

While combating COVID-19, MoH has, with support, made great efforts to ensure continuity of essential health services during the Outbreak. Regular monitoring on use of essential health services using data from District Health Information System (DHIS2) was conducted by MoH. Technical programs including Reproductive, Maternal, New-born, Child and Adolescent Health (RMNCAH), immunization, malaria and HIV/TB have assessed the risk of disruption during the Outbreak after reported signs of decreased use and developed a response as part of the draft National COVID-19 Response Plan.

Guidelines were developed to support midwives in providing maternal health services in the community through outreach and home visits. The COVID-19 Guidance for Maternity Services is being translated into Lao languages. MoH was supported in data collection of pregnant women, children and adolescents in communities, including those in temporary Quarantine Centers. Specific support for pregnant female migrants in quarantine and under surveillance has been strengthened.

Support was provided to RMNCAH/MoH to adopt and develop integrated RMNCAH service guidelines for health care, changing the delivery modality of selected integrated services, including outreach modality and remote counselling, which will contribute to the optimization of service delivery of essential health services in the time of COVID-19.

The MoH has launched a mobile application called “Noi Yakhoo” to provide basic sexual and reproductive health information to adolescents and young people and to develop referral linkages with adolescent helplines for in-depth information as part of innovative approaches to reach out to target groups, specifically in the context of COVID-19. This android based App covers common youth enquiries including, feelings, relationships, mental health, gender,





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health issues, menstruation, pregnancy, sexuality, STIs, contraception and life skills. Brochures/posters have been printed and shared among partners with information about the App, and how to download to be disseminated through different channels (hotlines, services through hospitals/outreach, radio advertisement, Facebook and others).



POPULATION AND PROTECTION

The UN internal Population and Protection Sub-Group focuses on three levels of protection, at the border, in camps and for vulnerable groups. This includes comprehensive protection (PPE, supplies, mental health and psycho-social support as well as protection of rights) for frontline workers, migrants and vulnerable groups including women and youth.

Lao migrants returning from neighbouring countries were provided IEC materials on basic hygiene practices, precautions, and national regulations (3,000 copies at border checkpoints), as well as water and food. Data collection tools were adapted to better understand the origin and destination of migrants, at the Friendship Bridge and in Vientiane Capital. UN partners supported MoLSW with developing a rapid assessment of returned migrant workers which is being conducted by the Skills Development and Employment Department under MoLSW (SDED) across all 18 provinces of Lao PDR. The SDED is analysing data on migrant returnees.

Daily updates of the status repository of border locations during the lockdown are ongoing through the Network of the Border Liaison Offices and MoPS. The Border Liaison Offices are being supported to adapt the manual for border check-points officers to include WHO Guidelines on Pandemics at the Borders.

Women and girls-centered response is being facilitated through Lao Women's Union for women migrants. Technical standards for GBV prevention and sanitary supplies were made available at the Quarantine Centers.

Geo-spatial Population Vulnerability Mapping has identified sites with higher population density as well as high levels of returning migrants to focus immediate COVID-19 prevention and response. The results can subsequently be used to improve the decision-making process to efficiently and effectively respond to the Outbreak by prioritizing low, medium and high-risk areas and vulnerability.

Over 530 callers, across 17 hotlines, were provided with psycho-social support in the month of May 2020. The counsellors have recently been trained under Lao Women's Union, Lao Youth Union and Vientiane Youth Center. The hotlines were developed in anticipation of increasing gender-based violence prevention, servicing youth and women. The UNCT is now working with partners to promote the psychosocial support hotlines, printing 30,000 brochures that will be disseminated across existing networks and into provincial areas.

Support was provided to MoLSW in conducting a costing exercise for payment of unemployment benefits to workers under the National Social Security Fund Office.

As of 30 May 2020, 82,976 people have been reached with mental and psychosocial support (MHPSS) messages through social media, LWU Hotline counselling and other awareness raising activities. Additionally, MoICT/MoLSW/LWU are developing TV/Radio spots and public speaking announcements (PSAs) on violence against children, child online protection and hotline numbers for violence in Lao and ethnic minority languages.



SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACT

To mitigate the socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 emergency, a number of surveys and rapid assessments have been supported and are at various stages of implementation which will lead to an understanding of: (1) impact





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of COVID-19 on the economic and financial sectors and on the SDGs (including agriculture and manufacturing industries); (2) studying the implications on the social sectors and on the SDGs, namely: poverty, education, health, social protection (including children, women, migrants, informal workers), protection against violence, exploitation, and abuse; and (3) developing policy options and measures (short, medium and long-term) needed to avoid a further deterioration in the economic and social sectors in the country and support a resilient recovery for Lao PDR).

A consultancy team has been recruited to undertake a socio-economic impact assessment of COVID-19 in Lao PDR. This will incorporate both primary data collection and collating the sector level assessments that have been completed by UN AFPs. The outputs will feed directly into the ongoing preparation of the 9th NSEDP, supporting MPI in reflecting the impacts of COVID-19. The assessment will focus on travel and tourism, agriculture, manufacturing, migration and labour markets, micro and small enterprises, and special economic zones and is expected to be completed by mid-July 2020.

Public Service Innovation Facility (PSIF) will be reprogrammed to 1) encourage local authorities to collaborate with non-government actors in their COVID-19 action, particularly civil society, community groups and Non-Profit Associations (NPAs) and 2) facilitate innovative solutions to challenges that communities face in terms of COVID-19, with a special focus on the most disadvantaged groups including women, youth, ethnic groups, and People with Disabilities.



MACROECONOMICS

In May, the latest edition of the [Lao Economic Monitor](#) was launched. This presented both upside and downside scenarios for economic performance depending on the severity of the economic shock from COVID-19 over the remainder of the year. In the upside scenario, GDP would be expected to grow by 1% in 2020, in the downside to decline by 1.8%. As a result of the economic shock, between 96,000 and 214,000 additional people could be pushed into poverty. Both global credit rating agency Fitch Ratings and Thai agency TRIS Rating have reaffirmed Lao PDR's sovereign debt rating, but both have also revised the outlook downwards from 'stable' to 'negative', in large part due to COVID-19.

The UNCT is assessing the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic on the economy, including on trade, inflation, taxes, value chains, and foreign investment as part of its regular monitoring of the macroeconomic situation. Efforts in response to COVID-19 include working with MoIC, MAF, and LNCCI to assess the impact on the private sector, including undertaking business impact surveys.

Support is also planned to MoF to assess the longer-term impact on the potential to raise investment resources from regional markets. In turn, this is expected to help inform the design of context appropriate responses to the changing environment, and to recalibrate strategic plans.

An impact assessment of COVID-19 on Lao PDR's economy (trade, inflation, taxes, chains, foreign investments, etc.) is ongoing by MoF. MoIC, MoF, and LNCCI are assessing the impact of COVID-19 on trade and the private sector for Lao PDR with UN support. These efforts are being supported via a COVID-19 Business Impact Survey and the Tracking of COVID-19 Temporary Trade Measures via ITC's Market Access Map. At the global level, a dedicated [website](#) supporting small business through the COVID-19 crisis has been established to share insights and advice. A 15-point action plan on supporting small business through the COVID-19 crisis has been published, targeting MSMEs in developing and transition economies that are reliant on international trade flows and are therefore particularly vulnerable to the repercussions of the crisis.

The UN has developed partnerships with United Cities and Local Governments to develop the 4th edition of Guidance for Immediate Response to COVID-19 on Local Government finance.

Following the virtual meeting of the G20, Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors issued a [joint communique](#), including setting out terms for the Debt Service Suspension Initiative for poorest countries. As an LDC, Lao PDR is a potentially eligible beneficiary. MoF, in partnership with the UN, is assessing the impact of the COVID-19 on the





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longer-term economic/fiscal space using a regional perspective, examining market evidence related to extending debt financing potentials in regional markets.



WASH

Technical advice was provided to Provincial Health Departments on disinfection and water quality. Data is being sought on the Quarantine Centers WASH needs to facilitate additional disbursement of emergency supplies.

Technical advice was provided to MoH and MoES for the development of WASH and risk communication materials for social and mass media broadcasts and print. MoH was supported in incorporating WASH lessons learned from COVID-19 in the sectoral 5-year plan, including health, nutrition and WASH components.

With the support of key partners, the National Task Force for COVID-19, with the MoES and the MoH, have ensured safe return to school for Lao students. The MoES Back to School campaign incorporated “handwashing with soap” and other hygiene messages to ensure that all children return to school safely. Messages and videos addressed teachers, parents and caregivers, to ensure children understand what they can do to protect themselves when in school, such as frequent handwashing with soap.

For the school reopening, an improved learning environment was targeted through a more comprehensive support to children at the school, including water, sanitation and hygiene facilities and support, as well as health, nutrition, protection, psychosocial and other support. Schools were supported in ensuring conditions that reduce disease transmission, including access to soap and clean water for safe handwashing, procedures on when staff or students feel unwell, protocols on social distancing and good hygiene practices.



FOOD SECURITY, NUTRITION & LIVELIHOODS

In response to the impact on nutrition, MoH (NNC) has developed an Emergency Response Plan for Nutrition to be integrated into the overall MoH Response Plan. This will assist nutrition programme implementation, infant and young child feeding, nutrition awareness and behaviour change messages, the procurement of essential commodities and repositioning of nutrition supplies.

In coordination with MAF, the Food Security and Agriculture Survey was conducted. A total of 1,007 completed responses from all 17 Provinces and Vientiane Capital were received. Access to food was constrained during the lockdown period, especially for poor households and families reliant on daily labour. The most impacted Provinces include Attapeu, Bokeo, Bolikhamxai, Luangnamtha, Savannakhet, and Xaixomboun. A concept for possible responses, including unconditional & conditional food/cash transfers, as well as the possible procurement of specialized nutritious food, complemented by community-level activities, is being developed.

MAF completed the survey for COVID-19 Impact Assessment and first draft of the report has been produced. The National Validation Workshop is scheduled on 11 June. It is a multisectoral workshop where MoES, MoIC, MoLSW, MoH, MoICT, and departments within MAF are to be invited.

MAF has prepared the first draft of the COVID-19 Response Plan for Food and Nutrition Security in Lao PDR for immediate, short, and medium terms. The consultation workshop is scheduled on 23 June. The workshop will bring participants from provinces to share situation update, views on response to COVID-19 at the provincial and district levels.

The Department of Communicable Diseases Control within MoH officially requested the UNCT to support the food needs of returning migrant laborers with a focus on the Quarantine Centers in Savannakhet and Xayabouly Provinces. In cooperation with World Vision, three meals a day to returnees are being provided in Kaysone





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Quarantine Center – the largest Quarantine Center in Savannakhet with a capacity of 160 people, but with daily fluctuating numbers of returnees.

In partnership with the Lao Federation of Trade Unions, UN AFPs have surveyed garment industry workers on factory compliance with the COVID-19 PM's Orders and advisories (focus: COVID-19 prevention measures and payment of workers during lockdown);

Technical assistance has also been provided to LNCCI/ALGI to 1) prepare quarantine centers for garment factory workers returning to Vientiane from their home provinces, 2) upgrade dormitory facilities to meet COVID-19 prevention and control guidelines, 3) build capacity of OSH Committees on emergency preparedness for communicable diseases, such as COVID-19.



EDUCATION

All Lao children have been affected by school closures since 19 March. Transition grades (grade 5, level 4 of lower secondary, and level 3 of upper secondary) re-opened from 18 May. All grades and levels are expected to re-open from 2 June until the second week of July, after which exit exams will be conducted. An [Education COVID-19 Response Plan](#) developed in April is being used by MoES to guide its COVID response. The MoES has been supported with a back to school campaign plan and developing school re-opening guidelines, following the global Framework for Reopening Schools that has been released by UN Agencies and the World Bank. A priority before the school re-opening was the disinfection of schools used as Quarantine Centers for returning Lao migrant workers. Support has been provided to MoH-Nam Saat and MoES to ensure the proper disinfection of these schools. The first set of thermometers have been distributed to some public schools.

MoES was supported in coordination with MoH to develop several risk communication materials for schools (videos, posters, etc.), which continue to be shared with schools, particularly to provide information on proper hygiene practices and social distancing when in schools. Posters have been distributed to all 148 Districts for further distribution to all pre-schools and primary schools in the country.

MoES is also being supported in the distribution of food stocks for school feeding in 925 supported schools across eight Provinces as take-home rations. A total of approximately 943 metric tons of rice, lentils, fortified cooking oil, and canned fish are being distributed starting from the last week of May. The take-home rations support household access to food, especially for young students after the period of lockdown, throughout the end of the school year.

A series of 64 information cards providing teachers, parents, and students with practical tips for living and studying in the time of COVID-19 is currently translated to the Lao language. A regional Asia-Pacific COVID-19 Knowledge Hub as part of the SDG4 regional knowledge portal, and the COVID-19 Educational Disruption and Response in Asia-Pacific (development in progress) will include resources on supporting continuity of learning and education sector responses to the pandemic.

UN Partners are reviewing options on how to best capture the potential opportunities for skills development, e-learning and vocational education linked to employment services and industry as a crucial element to supporting household level income generation as a response and recovery mechanism to the COVID-19 Outbreak.



LOGISTICS (Global Supply Chain, Health, National Supplies)

As of 31 May, the country's Master List of all required supplies and equipment has been finalized by the Ad-Hoc Committee. Multiple Development Partner's and private sector partners have contributed to the ongoing procurement needs of Lao PDR, including both funding and in-kind donations.

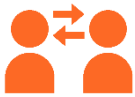




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The UN globally has launched an Integrated Supply Chain Taskforce, chaired by WHO. The taskforce aims to provide some stability across the supply chain for high value items, including diagnostic equipment, PPE and oxygen treatment. To date, the UNCT has supported the MoH in the initial procurement of PPE and medical equipment to assist hospitals in their preparation for a COVID-19 outbreak.

To bridge the gap during the suspension of commercial flights, WFP Aviation will commence return passenger and cargo flights from Kuala Lumpur to Vientiane from 31 May. Weekly flights will continue to operate as long as commercial flights remain suspended. The purpose of the flights is to support humanitarian operations, assisting UN organisations, NGOs and representatives from embassies and the donor community.



COMMUNICATIONS, TECHNOLOGY, COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & ACCOUNTABILITY

In May, a new phase of public messaging has been developed in view of people returning to work and students going [safely back to school](#), with support provided to the CCEH on developing IEC materials on COVID-19 prevention in workplaces, schools, public settings [in English](#) and [in Lao](#). Instructions on the “new normal” and the safe re-opening of schools have been communicated to teachers, parents, and children in multiple ways in cooperation with MoES, including [media spots](#), teachers’ networks, [distributions of food take-home rations](#) for schoolchildren and other programmatic activities.

A wide spectrum of partners has been engaged to disseminate correct information on COVID-19 through multiple channels, including civil society, media, the religious community, social media influencers, networks of workers of education and health sectors, volunteer networks, Migrant Resource Centres and recruitment agencies working with migrants, private sector companies, including public transport and truck operators. Program outreach capacities of the UNCT, including community radio and community volunteers, have also been utilized.

To ensure that no one is left behind by risk communication efforts, and the response is inclusive, communication activities have been targeting additional vulnerable groups: (1) since early May the 165/166 Hotline is available in Hmong, and addition of other minority languages is being discussed; (2) highlights video from MoH daily press conference now comes with sign language; (3) survivors of gender-based violence.

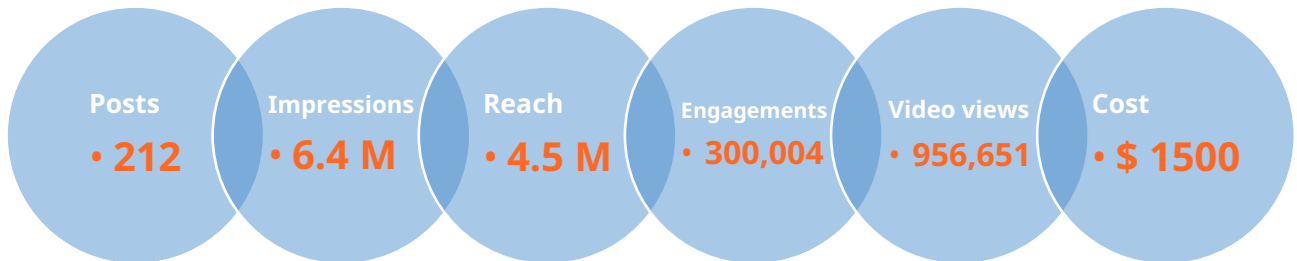
To support the UN Communications Group and the governmental Risk Communications Taskforce, a specialized UN Specialist Volunteer has been recruited for the role of Coordination Officer for COVID-19 Communications and Partnerships Support, funded by UNV through the central Response Mechanism for COVID-19 pandemic put in place by the Special Voluntary Fund (SVF).





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By 20 May, people saw social media posts 6.4 million times in total, which generated over 300,000 engagement actions (likes, comments, shares):



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