



World Health  
Organization

# *World Health Organization*

*TOPIC A:*

**Strengthening Laboratory Capacity  
and Health Services in Somalia**

*Undersecretary:  
Rodrigo Cárdenas R.*

# Introduction:

The daunting pandemic occasioned by the novel Covid-19 has deeply impacted every sector of today's globalized society. New ways of solving these global challenges emerged from the necessity of adapting to a new post-pandemic planet. However, despite the urgent demand of modifying and creating new public policies that accommodate to these circumstances, many nations cannot efficiently respond to the issues caused by the Coronavirus due to their situation before the announcement of the pandemic in March. Somalia was already enduring severe ongoing insecurity, the worst desert-locus infestation that rose the starvation index of the country to a severe level, and a cholera outbreak that began in 2017: making Somalia one of the most vulnerable nations in response to the pandemic. The Covid-19 effects can devastate the nation, which has no laboratory capacity or health services to test and control the consequences of the virus, which can potentially worsen their situation and place them in a more critical state.

## Background Research:

Many factors compose the humanitarian crisis in Somalia, which is considered one of the most significant emergencies of the 21 century. Since the beginning of the year 2019, global warming has had disastrous effects on Somalia's agricultural industry. 4.8 million people currently suffer from food insecurity, and there are approximately 180,000 malnourished children under the age of five. These events have led to enormous migratory movements, since there are currently 2.6 million people displaced within the region in search of food and shelter (Care, 2020).

This infectious virus can spread and affect millions of individuals in these vulnerable situations through the constant movement of persons. Migration in Somalia, however, is very complex and multidimensional. The country is located in one of the most dangerous migration paths in the world, which means millions of refugees in the region escape armed conflicts within their nations and go through Somalia. The U.N Migration Agency reported that 51% of those refugees have never heard of Covid-19, which worsens the situation. Nevertheless, migrants are not the only ones misinformed about the virus. Several rural areas of the country, specifically the ones held by the Muslim extremist group Al-Shabab, overlook concerns about the pandemic (Ritter, 2020).

Violence has also torn apart Somalia's stability, damaging and undermining their ability to adequately respond to the situation. The Somali government, along with some sporadic military operations, has been in constant conflict with the Islamic extremist group Al-Shabab, which carried out several attacks against civilians that resulted in half of the 982 casualties that were reported this year. Additionally, there have been several allegations against the government and allied powers because "...Security forces unlawfully killed and wounded civilians during infighting over land, control of roadblocks, and disarmament operations..." (W.H.R, 2019). With 20% of the country's population being internally displaced, stretching the health system so that it can reach over more than 2,000 settlements is a complicated challenge (Ahmed, 2020).

All of these situations have left the Somalian health system in a very fragile state. When the pandemic began, the country had no ventilators to deal with the health effects caused by Covid-19. More significantly, Somalia only had 2 healthcare workers per 100,000 people. Furthermore, the main quarantine hospital in the capital of Somalia had about 71 beds for a city of about 2.5 million people. "Early evidence suggests the pandemic is slowing other health services, and we are seeing an alarming rise in hunger and malnutrition levels, particularly among the most vulnerable communities" (Ahmed, 2020). If the situation continues, child mortality in Somalia could increase an estimated 13%, and the virus consequences might be catastrophic. Even though there are around 113 deaths and 4,451 confirmed cases, experts and field operators believe the real number is much higher (Ahmed, 2020). The only way to truly understand the effects the pandemic has brought upon the country and begin to solve the obstacles presented by it is by having quantitative evidence of how big the problem is: which doesn't exist because of the lack of laboratory capacity for testing.

Currently, there are no laboratories within Somalia. The testing done thus far has been made by three main laboratories in neighboring countries: Kenya, Somaliland, and Puntland (WHO, 2020). "Well-equipped, well-functioning laboratories are key building blocks for any health system and disease surveillance system" (WHO, 2020). Unfortunately, these efforts have proven to be impractical and inefficient by not being able to improve Somalia's state. Time is running out for all the people living through the Somalian humanitarian crisis (which makes up about half the population of the country), and international action is urgently needed.

## *United Nations Intervention:*

Several efforts have been made by the World Health Organization to deal with this issue. They have partnered with international agents, such as the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation, and have moved forward to resolve the problem. They have developed and improved the three existing laboratories' capability for testing (already mentioned earlier), and each one of them can currently run 1200 samples a day (WHO, 2020). "WHO has trained laboratory technicians to conduct COVID-19 tests, with a focus on maintaining high standards. The Organization provided protective gear, testing kits and other laboratory supplies for the laboratory personnel working in these laboratories" (WHO, 2020). Still, Somalia remains broadly vulnerable and unprotected against this disease.

## Points To Consider:

- To solve the consequences of the Coronavirus on the country, experts must first understand their circumstances. There is no way to know Somalia's situation regarding Covid-19 without testing.
- Somalia's health system is completely incapable of handling a potential outbreak.
- The displacement of millions of migrants and refugees around the country can spread the virus and lead them to a crisis which they are not able to handle.
- The effect of a possible outbreak can worsen the humanitarian crisis of the country.

## Questionnaire:

- A. What is my country's position?
- B. What are my country's policies?
- C. What can my country do to solve this issue?
- D. Which countries can my delegation work with?
- E. What are three possible solutions?
- F. What has been done to solve the problem?

## Useful Links:

- World Health Organization. (2020). WHO EMRO | Developing the building blocks of public health — strengthening laboratory capacity in Somalia | News | Somalia site. Retrieved November 29, 2020, from [www.emro.who.int website: http://www.emro.who.int/somalia/news/developing-the-building-blocks-of-public-health-strengthening-laboratory-capacity-in-somalia.html](http://www.emro.who.int/somalia/news/developing-the-building-blocks-of-public-health-strengthening-laboratory-capacity-in-somalia.html)
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