

Sustainable Development Goal 7 (Energy) and Covid-19 in Situations of Displacement: A Briefing Note

First Issue, 20 April 2020

The COVID-19 pandemic presents unique risks to the world's 70.8m forcibly displaced people, who are often living in densely populated settlements with poor public services, in which highly communicable diseases can spread quickly. The investment in achieving SDG7 (access to affordable, reliable, sustainable energy for all) during the humanitarian response to the COVID-19 pandemic continues to be important as a means to help mitigate infection risks (for example through providing sufficient and clean water) and improve the medical response (for example through securing cool chains). It also enables affected populations to become more resilient when facing the severe economic crisis that will result from the pandemic.

A cross-cutting agenda with multiple benefits

Access to modern energy is an 'enabler' of all humanitarian and development goals.¹ Electricity is needed to power public services, businesses, and household appliances. Fuel efficient cooking solutions can help to save time and reduce protection risks by minimising the need to gather firewood, while clean fuels can help to reduce household air pollution and thus the threat of developing chronic respiratory symptoms.² **Our aim is to communicate how providing clean and reliable energy, when responding to COVID-19 and similar diseases in the future, can bring short-term and long-term benefits to the displaced and local communities.**

Electricity for Health

Reliable electricity supplies for healthcare, isolation and quarantine facilities is vital to cope with increased demand for medical care. This includes the powering of oxygen concentrators, refrigerators, sterilizing equipment, ventilators, lab testing equipment (where these are available) on a continuous basis.³

Electricity for Provision of Water

Reliable power is needed to pump and distribute sufficient quantities of water (demand for which is likely to increase) to maintain high levels of personal hygiene, more specifically handwashing which is critical to preventing the spread of Covid-19. Water is also an important factor in wellbeing, cooking, growing food and helping displaced communities to stay healthy.

Electricity for Security and Communication

Electricity to power mobile phones, radios and TVs enables the dissemination of important messages, including those related to public health and updates on the present situation, which are critical to containing the pandemic and protecting displaced persons. In addition to powering household appliances, reliable electricity is also required to power community-level needs such as radio stations, public messaging systems, FM signal boosters and boosting WiFi hotspots, so that networks can reach people in their homes thereby negating the need to gather in one location and break social distancing protocols.

¹ More about the benefits of energy for displaced population can be found in the [GPA framework document](#).

² A recent summary on research and evidence for clean cooking can be found [here](#).

³ Additional information on [power for health facilities](#) and [cooling](#) can be found online.

Clean Cooking to Improve Respiratory Health

There is evidence to suggest that exposure to air pollution increases the risk of dying from a respiratory virus.⁴ As such, the full adoption of clean cooking solutions could help to increase resilience to, and recovery from, potential respiratory viral infections such as COVID-19 among displaced people by reducing household air pollution.⁵

Considerations for integrating sustainable energy into the COVID19 humanitarian response:

- Integrate sustainable energy into the preferred solutions when designing COVID-19 responses related to health, water, sanitation, hygiene and communications.
- Distribute cooking fuel to help reduce the risk of displaced people being forced to infringe COVID-19 related travel restrictions in order to gather firewood or purchase fuel to cook their meals. Neglecting this issue could risk spreading COVID-19 to, or from, the host community and/or potentially cause conflict with the host community or authorities.
- Provide electricity to households through small solar home systems, connections to mini-grids or national grids. With 1.5 billion children out of school, needing to learn from home, access to electricity has become critical for displacement effected households to access educational materials and safeguard children’s learning during this period. National governments and other stakeholders are investing in content disseminated by radio, TV or online. Where this is happening, children risk being even further behind their peers when they return to school if they do not have the same access to educational materials, which may also increase the likelihood of them never returning to school.
- Provide or ensure reliable electricity to small and micro businesses to support their commercial continuity, which is key to maintaining or achieving self-reliance. Without such support, reduced incomes may result in additional travel and/or business interactions to supplement the loss and can lead to negative coping mechanisms, which would put people of concern at a greater risk of catching or transmitting COVID-19.

This briefing note was developed jointly by the leading partners of the [Global Plan of Action](#) for Sustainable Energy Solutions in Situations of Displacement (GPA), members of the [SAFE Humanitarian Working Group](#) and [NORCAP](#), the [Norwegian Refugee Council's global provider of expertise](#). Through the collective network of the GPA, we aim to advocate and support humanitarian response on access to, and use of, sustainable energy. The GPA is steered and supported by the organisations below. This paper will be accompanied by an additional guide with recommendations from energy practitioners. Please visit our website www.humanitarianenergy.org or send an email to energy@unitar.org for further information.

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⁴ Ciencewicki, J. and Jaspers I. Air Pollution and Respiratory Viral Infection. *Inhal Toxic* 9, 14 (2007). [online here](#).

⁵ Cooking fuels or energy sources that are deemed clean for the health of the user include alcohol fuels, gas, electricity, and solar energy.