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REGIONAL BUREAU FOR **EASTERN AFRICA**

Staff Wellness

2021 Regional Achievements & Outlook

MAY 2022

Regional Overview

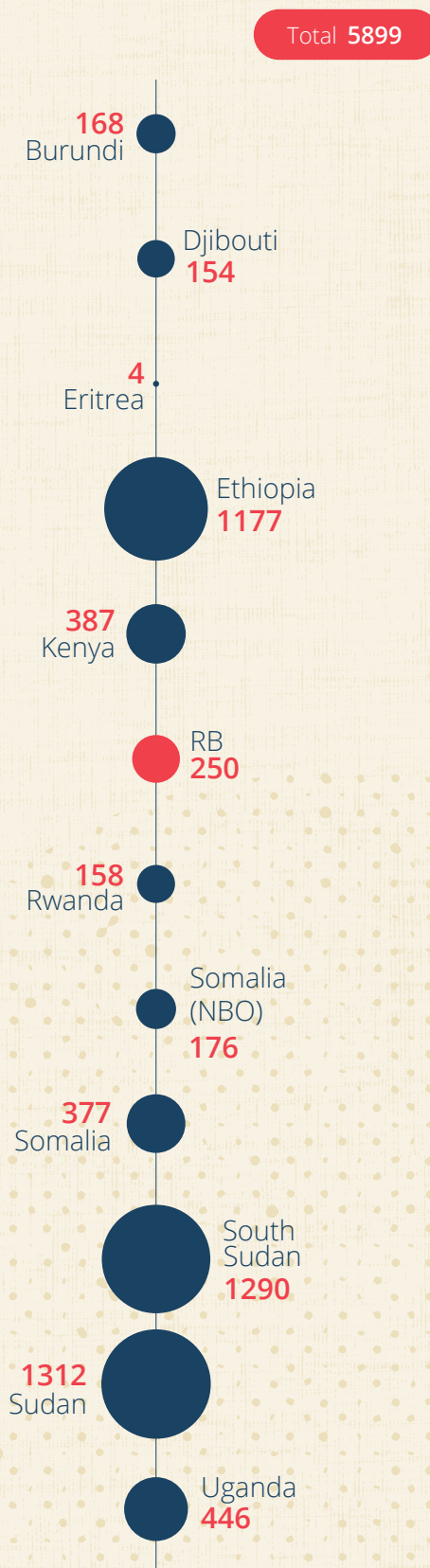
The staff number in the Eastern Africa Region has increased to support the ever-growing operations in the region. Currently, there are around six thousand staff across the 10 countries. Every employee's health, safety and wellbeing are of vital concern to WFP. The physical and psychological health of our employees and their recognized dependents is of paramount importance to the efficiency, productivity, and overall success of the WFP mandate. WFP is committed to promoting a safe and healthy workplace for its employees in order to accomplish its mandate and strategic objectives.

The coronavirus pandemic remained a central theme for the Wellness Unit throughout 2021 and operational tasks focused heavily on COVID-19 prevention, management, and vaccination of staff members, as well as the provision of psychosocial support. Medical Officers and Staff Counsellors worked closely together to raise awareness around COVID-19 and equip staff to protect their physical and mental health in the face of the pandemic.

Of the 79 medical evacuations from countries in the Region in 2021, the vast majority were unrelated to COVID-19, and resulted from other illnesses or injuries, including those related to critical incidents. Countries such as **South Sudan, Sudan, Somalia, and Djibouti** still battle inadequate healthcare systems, and staff are often required to undertake medical travel to Nairobi, **Kenya** for certain types of health care. However, the creation of Sudan Medical Assistance Team (SUMAT) and Ethiopia Medical Assistance Team (EMAT) in **Sudan and Ethiopia** respectively, have improved substantively the support that can be provided to staff in-country and reduced the need for medical travel in these countries. Despite the critical situation in Tigray in Ethiopia, it was also possible in 2021 to maintain clinical activities in Mekelle and to add a new, small clinic in Shire. **Uganda** has its own Roving Medical Officer who was recruited on a short-term contract.

Psychosocial support for staff is provided by the Regional Staff Counsellor in Nairobi and by five Country Office Staff Counsellors in **Burundi, Ethiopia, Somalia (Nairobi-based), South Sudan, and Sudan**. However, in response to growing staff numbers and needs, an additional two Staff Counsellors are being recruited for the Region in 2022 – in Sudan and in Nairobi. RBN is also leading the way by becoming the first Regional Bureau to recruit a Family Liaison Officer, who will focus in particular on the needs of national staff and their families.

Total Number of Staff November 2021



Regional Achievements

COVID-19 Response

- Joint medical and psychosocial COVID-19 awareness-raising webinars were rolled out to all staff in each of the Region's countries, and additionally to some COs in Regional Bureau for Southern Africa (RBJ). Providing clear information and debunking myths around vaccination proved key to ensuring a high level of vaccine uptake.
- The RBN Vax to the Max campaign, a joint initiative of counselling, medical and communications, succeeded in achieving 100 percent vaccination in RBN and was used as a template by other WFP Country and Regional Offices.
- 5500 staff in the Region received their first dose of COVID-19 vaccination in 2021 and almost 4000 were fully vaccinated by year-end. In addition to the Regional Bureau, **Eritrea and Rwanda** also achieved 100 percent vaccination of staff.
- A COVID-19 video filmed by the RBN Wellness team was highly commended and widely shared. [Through Our Eyes](#) features testimony from COVID survivors amongst staff in the Eastern Africa Region.
- In recognition of the service and support given to WFP RBN staff during the pandemic, the RBN Wellness team received the Regional Director's Award of Appreciation 2021

Leading the way

- As soon as COVID-19 restrictions eased, The RBN Wellness Unit held the first joint Regional Medical and Counselling retreat, attended by the Chief Medical Officer and Chief of Staff Counselling. The innovative retreat ensured that WFP medical and psychological colleagues who had been working around the clock to support staff throughout the pandemic, were given an opportunity to debrief on the response, review processes, and receive support for their own wellbeing.

New ways of working

- In-person counselling and psychosocial support missions to field offices re-commenced in the latter part of 2021. However, a high demand for individual and team counselling sessions on Teams and other platforms, reflected the growing familiarization of staff to access psychosocial support in an online format. Key trainings for Wellness Support Volunteers were also adapted for online roll-out.
- Increasing numbers of staff in RBN visited and used the WFP Wellbeing App, with the majority of the Region's COs now hosting tailored pages with local information relevant to specific duty stations.

Challenges

- Key challenges were related to inadequate medical facilities in **Sudan, South Sudan, and Somalia**.
- With the pandemic in its second year and continuing to impact on staff work and personal lives, there was an increased need for psychosocial support to combat COVID fatigue as well as other related issues.

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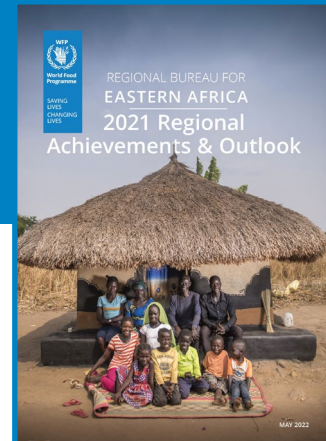
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