

ICRC RESPONSE TO COVID-19 NEAR AND MIDDLE EAST

APRIL 2021



A YEAR OF LOSS, DISRUPTION, SOLIDARITY AND HOPE

One year on since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, this newsletter provides an overview of the ICRC response across the Near and Middle East and illustrates how, despite many additional challenges and restrictions, our teams have continued to support people affected by war and violence.

From visiting places of detention, to providing hygiene kits and public service information, to the provision of personal protective equipment (PPE) to frontline workers, the ICRC COVID-19 response continues to adapt to the new realities of this global health emergency.

This year marks the second time that the holy month of Ramadan takes place amid the restrictions of lockdown. Yet, despite the ongoing uncertainty, the roll-out of the vaccine has provided a glimmer of hope. We must continue to advocate for its equal distribution and ensure people and communities are not left behind. We are all in this together.

Ramadan Kareem!



How are Iraqis spending #Ramadan during the #COVID-19 crisis? Find out here: [Link](#)

SUPPORT AND PROTECTION FOR AFFECTED COMMUNITIES

Throughout the pandemic, we have continually adapted the way we work to protect and support affected communities, adjusting our response to meet the needs arising because of the pandemic.

Below are some highlights of our assistance work in the region:

IRAQ

In northern Iraq, our teams distributed food and hygiene items to families most affected by the COVID-19 curfews in [Dohuk](#) and [Sulaymaniyah](#), and cash assistance in [Ninawa](#). Our [economic security specialist in Iraq](#) explains more.



Social distancing is a critical preventive measure for containing the spread of the COVID-19 virus. Here, during a distribution of relief items, in Ninawa, Iraq, our teams make sure everyone is complying with the safety measures. [Watch more](#)

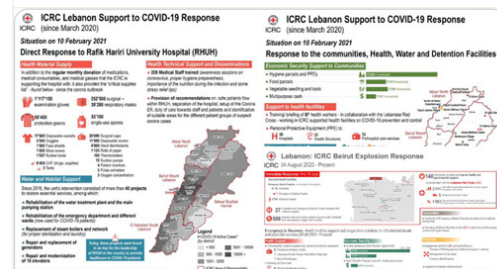
JORDAN



Mafrqa, Jordan. The ICRC distributes medical and hygiene items to the Directorate of Health to help them in their efforts to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

LEBANON

Zoom in [📄](#) to get a precise idea of what incredible work the teams have been undertaking throughout 2020



We continued to support the Rafik Hariri University Hospital, the primary hospital responding to the crisis, and support families affected by the pandemic. Our visits to places of detention and cooperation with the Lebanese Red Cross were also an important part of our response. Read more about our response [here](#):

SYRIA

In Syria, the ICRC's largest humanitarian operation globally, we have been working together with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) and the authorities on various fronts, such as community hygiene promotion and disinfection of public spaces.



With the support of the ICRC, the Syrian Arab Red Crescent disinfects the streets in Damascus and rural Damascus areas.

[Link to Facebook post](#)



To ensure access to water for students and enable them to wash their hands frequently, the ICRC and SARC installed water tanks in 25 schools in different neighborhoods in Hassakeh, northeast Syria.

[Link to Facebook post](#) / [Link to tweet](#)



In northern Aleppo, the ICRC and SARC provided clean water to about 6,000 people who returned to their homes in Handarat camp and the Bakara district. Here, 48 water tanks are filled daily to make sure residents in the region have water for drinking, washing and cooking.

[Link to Facebook post](#)



In December, the ICRC and SARC distributed 46,500 hygiene kits to some of the most vulnerable people in Aleppo.

[Link to tweet](#)



In June 2020, the ICRC and SARC delivered two large tents, 80 hospital beds, a power generator, lamps and fans in the COVID-19 isolation center established in Al Hol camp, northeastern Syria.

[Link to Tweet](#)

PROVIDING ASSISTANCE IN PLACES OF DETENTION

Some preventive measures, such as social-distancing and frequent hand-washing, are a luxury in some situations such as displacement camps or places of detention. To avoid that they become hotspots of the pandemic, we have stepped up our assistance with hygiene and medical supplies (gloves, gowns and thermometers).

IRAQ

The director of Suse Federal Detention Facility in Iraq [talks](#) about prevention measures at the prison and how the ICRC assistance will help.



SYRIA



In Syria, the ICRC donated personal protection and hygiene items to the main male and female central prisons in Damascus and Homs. [Link to Facebook post](#) (Arabic)

JORDAN

In Jordan, the ICRC provides support to the authorities working to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in prisons.



As part of efforts to stop the spread of COVID-19, ICRC staff prepare to hand over hygiene items to one of the Correctional Centres in Amman, Jordan.

WHEN HELPERS NEED HELP

COVID-19 has overwhelmed even some of the most advanced healthcare systems in the world, let alone hospitals in war zones.

The Red Cross Red Crescent Movement, including the ICRC, have played a key role in ensuring medics, health workers, and volunteers are safely equipped to deal with the crisis, providing PPE items such as face shields, gloves and gowns.

IRAQ

Our teams distributed large quantities of protective personal equipment to the central testing lab, the emergency services, health care centres and to COVID-19 frontline hospitals across Iraq. This equipment protects health care personnel & help working to contain the spread of the virus.



[Watch](#) as Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is delivered by the ICRC to hospitals across southern Iraq
[PPE distribution to COVID-19 hospitals](#)

YEMEN

The ICRC, YRCS and other Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies have been responding to the pandemic across Yemen, by providing personal protective equipment (PPE), medical supplies, food, and hygiene materials on regular basis to hospitals and isolation centres.



In Aden, Yemen, ICRC physical rehabilitation centre started producing protective shields to increase the protection of the health care workers caring for COVID-19 patients.

LEBANON

Through [“help the helpers”](#) programme, we included some mental health tips in the sketchbook which we shared online.



REGIONAL



Series of situational comics that push back against misinformation regarding the spread of COVID-19, through the use of the WHO myth busting information.

TACKLING STIGMA AND INTIMIDATION OF HEALTH WORKERS

Due to the stigma against the COVID-19 patients in the region, a number of health care workers came under attack or suffered intimidation for just doing their jobs. The ICRC and the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement have engaged in advocacy and community engagement to ensure the role of health workers is understood and respected by communities.



In **Iraq**, we conducted a 10-day online campaign to raise awareness of the ongoing attacks against health care providers as well as a session with Iraqi journalists to sensitize them about the topic. We raised our voice along with the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement partners to condemn violence and acts of intimidation against health workers. [Link](#)

In partnership with the Iraqi Red Crescent Society, we launched a social media campaign to honor health care workers and encourage Iraqis to facilitate their work.



Recognizing the courage and sacrifice of frontline health workers and volunteers



In Lebanon, we initiated a [#ClapForOurHeroes](#). We invited Lebanese people to express thanks to health care providers for their hard work.

In solidarity with all frontline workers, Naseer Shamma, a famous Iraqi musician, dedicated this musical piece to all health workers around the world and to the volunteers of the Red Cross and Red Crescent dealing with COVID-19. [Enjoy the music!](#)



STORIES FROM THE FIELD

OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES: THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON WOMEN

Since the beginning of 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has taken its toll on people and families worldwide. People living in the occupied Palestinian territories, already dealing with long-standing movement restrictions and economic hardship, have faced challenges in overcoming additional obstacles and difficulties brought about by the pandemic.

Aya – a COVID-19 Nurse

Aya, 28, is a nurse in the COVID-19 ward in Al-Maqassed Hospital in Jerusalem. During the peak of the pandemic, Aya, six-months pregnant, insisted on remaining on the frontline to help save the lives of COVID-19 patients, while risking her own health and that of her family and three children. The support Aya receives from her mother and sister is vital, especially when she works nights. They attend to her kids' needs and make sure she can fulfil her duty as a nurse. "I constantly encourage Aya to continue working because without medical teams, families will suffer and might even lose their loved ones," says Aya's mother.



Ruba – Bakery Owner

"At the beginning, I was criticised by my community for working in a bakery, an unusual job for a woman in Gaza. But later, people accepted me more and I was encouraged by those around me," says Ruba, 48, the owner of a bakery in Gaza City. Life has been hard on Ruba, particularly during the pandemic, given the significant rise in unemployment in the Gaza Strip. To provide for her family, Ruba started her own bakery and now leads a team of men. She invites the women in her area to come work at her bakery. "I suffered from unemployment for a long time. I want to create job opportunities for other women like myself. With support and encouragement, women can work miracles," says Ruba.



Nayfa & Fatma – Shepherdesses

Fatma is one of three shepherdess sisters living in Kisan village, south of Bethlehem city. The three sisters and their mother own about 30 livestock, with which they earn a living. They do the grazing themselves. Because of COVID-19, merchants are no longer able to come to the village to buy their homemade dairy products. Vets can't come either. Rising to the challenge, the shepherdesses developed a system of shared responsibilities, where Fatma and her 90-year-old mother would head to the city-centre market to sell their products, while Nayfa would take care of the livestock and cook. "I can't imagine how my life would look without the help of my mother and sisters. Without their support, life here would be unbearable," says Nayfa.



JORDAN – CASH ASSISTANCE, GETTING FAMILIES BACK ON THEIR FEET

COVID-19 restrictions have significantly restricted the possibility of daily workers to earn a living. Thanks to the ICRC's cash assistance programme, women like [Abla](#) living in Jordan, can still make ends meet.



YEMEN: ABDUL - A STORY WITH A HAPPY ENDING



Abdul, 58, from the southern Abyan governorate, started to develop COVID-19 symptoms and soon fell seriously ill. As there was no well-equipped health facility in his village to treat COVID-19 symptoms, and he couldn't afford a private hospital, he turned to the Red Cross Red Crescent for help. He travelled to Aden, 3 hours from his home, to the Red Cross COVID-19 Care Center where he was provided with free medical care, free meals and access to WiFi so he could stay in touch with his family. Abdul stayed in the Center for three days until he started to regain his strength. Before he went back home, he was informed about the best ways to protect himself, his family and his neighbours from COVID-19 and given a hygiene kit.

Please see more about Abdul [here](#)

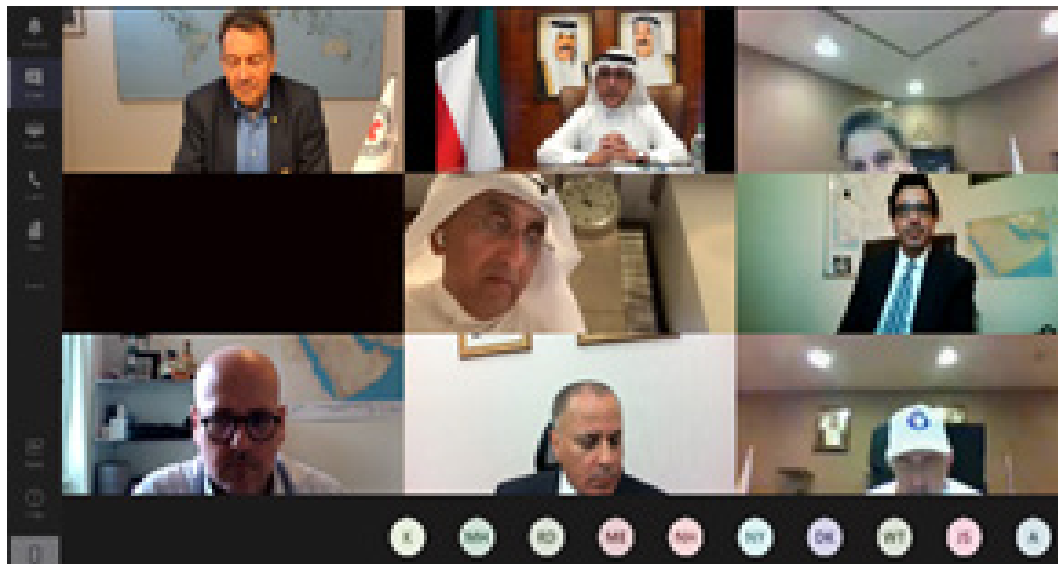
BEYOND COVID-19: DAILY HUMANITARIAN OPERATIONS CONTINUE

The COVID-19 response is only one part of the ICRC's wide-ranging operations. Whilst the pandemic has dominated the headlines, it has not stopped wars, it has not stopped violations of IHL, it has not put an end to the immense needs of detainees, separated families, refugees and those displaced or stranded due to conflict and violence. It has simply made an already terrible situation even worse. Against the backdrop of the pandemic, ICRC teams have continued with our daily work of assisting people affected by conflict and violence.

One example was the repatriation of over 1000 detainees to their homes in Yemen and Saudi Arabia. In October 2020, 1,056 former detainees returned home to Yemen and Saudi Arabia under the framework of the Stockholm Agreement and thanks to the logistical arrangement put in place by the ICRC. It was the largest such operation facilitated by the ICRC during a conflict in 70 years, and a particularly challenging one logistically, due to, among other, the COVID-19 protective measures put in place. You can see the repatriation in photos [here](#).



KUWAIT: HIGH-LEVEL POLICY DIALOGUE EXPLORES COVID-19 HUMANITARIAN CHALLENGE



The ICRC co-chaired the Third High Level Policy Dialogue with our strategic partners, Kuwait's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Kuwait Red Crescent Society and Kuwait Fund for Arabic and Economic Development. The meeting discussed COVID-19 long term impact, exploring avenues of cooperation on sustainable responses to help affected persons. The event concluded with a [joint statement](#) and a [press release](#).

WORKING IN PARTNERSHIPS

The COVID-19 pandemic is a global crisis that requires a global response and solidarity across borders. Throughout the pandemic we have worked in partnership with other members of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and affected people as well as other individuals and authorities to counter the pandemic.

Volunteers of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement continued to support vulnerable communities, all the while contending with the impacts of the virus on their own lives and families.



In June 2020, the Movement formulated concrete, practical and relevant recommendations for authorities and relevant stakeholders regarding COVID-19 in the document titled **“COVID-19 and Emergency Response in the Middle East and North Africa: Policy Recommendations from the RCRC Movement.”**

In September 2020, in an effort to boost a health system devastated by war, the Red Cross and Red Crescent opened a free treatment centre for COVID-19 patients in Yemen, which has suffered from a high rate of death from a crippling first wave of COVID-19.

The 60-bed treatment centre in the southern city of Aden includes a X-ray room, high dependency unit, care wards, a triage area and a laboratory. Several tons of medical supplies and equipment were brought in under the supervision of an international medical team.



The ICRC-supported COVID-19 care centre in Aden, Yemen examined almost 1,800 people with COVID-19 symptoms and admitted 286 between its opening in September 2020 and mid-April 2021.

In Eastern Ghouta, Syria over 200,000 people in 12 locations can access water thanks to the ICRC and SARC water trucking. To limit the risk of COVID-19, SARC volunteers work around the clock to ensure regular disinfection of 225 water tanks every 24hrs. [Link to Facebook post](#) / [Link to tweet](#)





In October 2020, the ICRC and the Egyptian Red Crescent Society (ERCS) distributed food and hygiene parcels to 1,500 vulnerable families in ten governorates across Egypt.



In Iran, we donated funds and equipment to the Iranian Red Crescent Society for the purchase of on purchasing personal protective equipment (PPE), sanitizers, 400 oxygen concentrators and food to mitigate the impact of the pandemic.

KEEPING COMMUNITIES SAFE: PREVENTION AND AWARENESS INITIATIVES



Video 1 [Washing your hands properly](#) presented by an Iraqi doctor from one of the frontline hospitals.

One year after COVID-19 was declared a global pandemic, we shared [four mistakes](#) that many of us still make and which could increase the rate of infection.



We worked with five renowned [Islamic scholars](#) (video in Arabic) to raise awareness of the COVID-19 and disseminate information on how to deal with the pandemic and appropriately conduct [burials](#).



In Aden, Yemen, we supported women with special needs to produce masks for their communities, and thus earn some income, while in Iraq one of the persons we supported helped us make this video [how to make a mask](#).

Having access to timely, reliable information is essential in times of pandemic. We joined forces with Bahrain Red Crescent Society and other members of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement to share reliable [preventive messages](#) and tips on how to cope with the [pandemic](#).



MYTH-BUSTING AND DISINFORMATION

For those who feel hesitant about the use of COVID-19 vaccines, we provided some information on how they work, and asked for [feedback](#):



In Lebanon, we shared [myth busters](#) with communities, explaining some of the most common myths about the pandemic and disseminated the verified information.

A YEAR IN REVIEW

Find here a summary of what we were up to in Near and Middle East in the past year:

EGYPT

COVID-19 response, [Arabic](#)
COVID-19 response, [English](#)

IRAN

Highlights of the past year, [English](#)
Highlights of the past year, [Farsi](#)

IRAQ

Activity Report 2020, [Arabic](#)
Activity Report 2020, [English](#)
Facts and Figures 2020, [Arabic](#)
Facts and Figures 2020, [English](#)

LEBANON

Beirut Blast Response, [Arabic](#)
Beirut Blast Response, [English](#)
COVID Response, [Arabic](#)
COVID Response, [English](#)

SYRIA

Facts and Figures 2020, [Arabic](#)
Facts and Figures 2020, [English](#)

JORDAN

Facts and figures, [Arabic](#)
Facts and figures, [English](#)

YEMEN

Annual report, [Arabic](#)
Annual report, [English](#)

[One year on: stories of hardships, resilience and change in times of COVID-19](#)

- based on real-life experiences documented by the ICRC teams in the field, this report shows how the measures taken to contain the pandemic have affected the lives of individuals and communities caught up in conflict in Iraq, Yemen, and elsewhere. It also reflects on the lessons learnt, emerging good practice and strategies put forward by governments, humanitarian organizations and other stakeholders to mitigate the impact of pandemics on vulnerable communities.

The ICRC helps people around the world affected by armed conflict and other violence, doing everything it can to protect their lives and dignity and to relieve their suffering, often with its Red Cross and Red Crescent partners. The organization also seeks to prevent hardship by promoting and strengthening humanitarian law and championing universal humanitarian principles.