Key Regional Updates

- As of 27 January 2021, a total of 3,522,128 COVID-19 cases have been confirmed in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, out of which 61,830 fatalities have been reported.

- On 19 January 2021, the IOM Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Regional Office (RO) organized, with the League of Arab States (LAS) and UNESCWA, a Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) side event: “Migration governance in the Arab region: trends, challenges and priorities for the future”. The side event opened with speeches provided by the Assistant Secretary General of the LAS, the IOM Regional Director and Cluster Leader of Gender Justice, Population and Inclusive Development at UNESCWA. The Deputy Assistant Minister for Migration, Refugees and Combatting Human Trafficking of Egypt and the UN Network on Migration Secretariat also intervened noting on the work of countries towards GCM Objectives, on the impact of COVID-19 and the role of GCM Champion countries.

- Supplementing ongoing research conducted by IOM’s MENA Regional Office into social protection in the MENA region, as well as possible linkages between humanitarian assistance and longer-term integration into social protection schemes, IOM has invested additional support towards the advancement of an inhouse training programme on social protection in IOM programming. The mini course consists of a learning event (webinar), a background paper and supporting presentation. A series of audio podcasts, which will complement the content of the presentation, the webinar and the background paper aim to encourage interactive learning. Social protection mechanisms represent a critical component of the COVID-19 response and recovery.

- IOM MENA RO created a Gender Checklist for COVID-19 Response at Points of Entry (PoE). The tool will be used by IOM when working with governments to mainstreaming gender into the COVID-19 response at border crossing points. The checklist is based on a previously developed internal checklist that supports staff in incorporating gender considerations in all aspects of IOM’s projects regarding COVID-19 response at PoEs.
It’s never too late to catch up with the future – Souleymane’s story

Souleymane is a 26-year-old Gambian. Back in 2018, while he was a business school student, his childhood friend convinced him to migrate. “He told me it would be great, he also told me I could find a job easily and earn a lot of money, and I genuinely believed him”.

When Souleymane finally decided to migrate, he had to work hard to save the 800 euros needed to cover the cost of making it across the border from the Gambia to Algeria.

“The way we were transported was really dangerous and risky,” described Souleymane. He felt confused during the journey on his ride from Mali to Algeria. On the one hand, he told himself repeatedly that he is a grown man and must power through the ordeal, but on the other hand, he could not stop thinking that he was still young and had goals and dreams to fulfil.

The entire journey from the Gambia to Algeria was hectic and full of unpleasant surprises. At one point, Souleymane was forced to give his money and belongings to the smugglers, in addition to the 800 euros he already paid to cross the border to the Algerian desert, where he spent some time working on construction sites. Souleymane wanted to head to the northwest of Algeria and when he saved enough money, he continued his journey and secured another job on a construction site.

As things were not going well as he had initially anticipated in Algeria, Souleymane decided to attempt the journey in Europe. Unfortunately, the situation turned from bad to worse, as he almost lost his life while he was embarking on the dangerous journey. Against all odds, he survived, hoping to cross to Spain, but it was an expensive and risky trip with no guarantees of success. “It felt like I was going to pay a huge amount of money to die”, described Souleymane. At that moment, he made the decision to go back home to the Gambia.

On his way back, Souleymane met a lot of young people with the intention of crossing to Europe. He tried to convince them not to do so by sharing his misfortunate experience, and, indeed, one of the individuals did heed his advice. However, as his own journey progressed, he continued to wonder how to go back to his home country safely.

He remembered there was an organization in the Gambia that used to assist and help migrants in need, but he was not sure if there was an office in Algeria. On the internet, he found out the location of IOM’s Algeria office. Accompanied by another Gambian friend, Souleymane took the road to the IOM office in Algiers as a last desperate attempt to find a way to return to the Gambia. Along the way, both Souleymane and his friend doubted they would get help. “Fortunately, we were welcomed at the office and taken care of by an IOM counsellor right away”.

 Sadly, the whole story overlapped with the outbreak of COVID-19 with travel restrictions implemented across the country. As a result, Souleymane was unable to return home for almost nine (9) months, suffering from stress and frustration. “Luckily, IOM organized a series of sessions with psychologists, which were very helpful and useful for me. The psychologist actually listened to me and gave me many pieces of advice and tips that got me through the lockdown period”, he highlighted.

Once back in the Gambia, Souleymane hopes to go back to business school and complete his degree. Meanwhile, he also aims to start a business of his own with the help of IOM. “That’s what I should have done in the first place instead of migrating in an irregular way and risking my life several times at such a young age”, concluded Souleymane.
Almost a year after COVID-19 was declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) by the World Health Organization (WHO) Emergency Committee, the impact of the disease continues to be felt both globally and regionally. A total of 3,522,128 COVID-19 cases have been reported in the MENA region, out of which, 61,830 have proven fatal. The regional Case Fatality Ratio (CFR) stands at 1.8 per cent while the recovery rate is 88.8 per cent. Fourteen out of the seventeen countries in the region have each reported more than 101,000 cases with only Sudan (26,671), Syria (13,823) and Yemen (2,120) reporting less. Iraq (616,259), Morocco (468,383) and Saudi Arabia (367,023) have the highest COVID-19 morbidity in the region, accounting for 41.1 per cent of the total regional burden. Iraq (13,018), Egypt (9,115), Morocco (8,207), Tunisia (6,446) and Saudi Arabia (6,363) also account for 69.8 per cent of all COVID-19 related mortalities in the region. Countries affected by conflict continue to exhibit higher CFRs than both the regional and global average, including Yemen (29 per cent), Sudan (6.6 per cent), Syria (6.5 per cent).

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to significantly impact regional mobility dynamics in the form of various travel bans and mobility restrictions. Through IOM’s Tracking Mobility Impacts, IOM monitored the operational status of international Points of Entry (PoEs) across the region, capturing key trends and changes in mobility dynamics from April to December 2020. Tracking Mobility Impacts monitored overtime 69 international airports, 106 land border crossing points and 50 sea borders at the end this period. Several trends were identified throughout the year. Analysis indicated a gradual reopening of international PoEs following an initial rush towards closure as the pandemic’s impacts began to evolve. It showed that international airports generally remained closed, completely, or partially, until the beginning of June 2020. Over time, the percentage of closed airports gradually increased. However, around 54 per cent of the total monitored airports are classified as fully operational at the end of 2020. Concurrently, in the end of April 2020, around 65 per cent of at-time monitored land border crossing points were completely closed, while around 47 per cent are classified as fully open at the end of year. Contrary to this reopening process, for sea border PoEs, many remained fully or partially closed until at least mid-November 2020. At the end of the year, only eleven (11) blue border crossing points were considered fully operational for passengers.
Coordinating and Partnerships

In **Sudan**, IOM continues to coordinate with government counterparts, alongside relevant national and international partners, to support the COVID-19 response. IOM supports efforts to ensure migrants and displaced populations, especially those marginalized or in situations of vulnerability, are included in response planning. IOM is a member of several COVID-19 working groups focused on risk communication and community engagement (RCCE), disease surveillance, infection prevention and control (IPC), and case management and continuity of essential services. In addition, IOM serves as a co-lead with WHO on the points of entry (PoE) pillar working group.

IOM in **Iraq** continues to coordinate with health cluster partners, camp management agencies, and other stakeholders across governorates where IOM supported health clinics are affected by IDP camp closures.

In **Lebanon**, IOM has revised operational plans to adapt activities to multiple lockdowns and preventive measures taken by the Government of Lebanon to curb the spread of COVID-19. Outreach teams have been provided with letters from the Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) to ensure their ability to provide lifesaving care during periods of complete lockdown.

Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE)

IOM in **Sudan**, through the EU-IOM Joint initiative for Migrant Protection and Reintegration (EU-IOM Joint initiative) program in Khartoum State, provided food baskets to 23 households of vulnerable returnees. IOM, also through the EU-IOM Joint Initiative, provided personal protective equipment (PPE) and emergency food to the Sudanese Red Crescent Society (SRCS) in Dongola, Northern Sudan State. The contents included 850 boxes of masks, 100 boxes of gloves, 850 soaps and 100 bottles of hand sanitizer. Additionally, IOM provided 190 migrants located at two (2) safe houses with food bags. IOM Migrant Resource Centre (MRC) in Gedaref State conducted a COVID-19 awareness raising session for six (6) Chadian students at a school in Gedaref City, together with the State Ministry of Education and Guidance focal point. Emergency food items and PPE were also provided to the students.

IOM staff collecting information for a study on return migration from Libya ©IOM Libya

In **Yemen**, IOM reached a total of 56,000 people through Risk communication and community engagement (RCCE) activities across 11 out of the 22 governorates in Yemen.

IOM in **Morocco** has continued its hygiene awareness promotion efforts through door-to-door communication when offering direct assistance, social media mobilization and sensitization during the distribution of leaflets. IOM reached around 638 individuals with hygiene awareness promotion activities during the reporting period. Materials are available in three languages and published on the IOM Morocco Website.

In **Iraq**, IOM conducted 121 awareness raising sessions, reaching 1,081 people across Kirkuk, Anbar, Baghdad, Ninewa, Dohuk, Erbil governorates. Separately, a batch of information, education and communication (IEC) materials was distributed in Ninewa governorate. The materials were designed to increase awareness on how to protect yourself and your community from COVID-19 through general precautionary measures. IOM conducted eight (8) trainings on communicating with communities (CwC), accountability to affected populations (AAP) and COVID-19 precautions for staff in Jadah Camp. The sessions were attended by 48 participants. IOM distributed 600 flyers on COVID-19 general precautions in Diyala, Kirkuk, and Salah al Din governorates. The Salah Al-Din camp coordination and camp management (CCCM) team, through coordination support to the site empowerment groups, distributed the IEC materials at 15 informal sites covering 482 households including 1,200 children. The IEC materials included COVID-19 awareness games with posters and leaflets on COVID-19 and important hygiene precautions, consequences of COVID-19 on our day-to-day life, female health and hygiene, use of masks, and shopping precautions. IOM in Iraq has continued providing COVID-19 awareness sessions ahead of activities and field surveys across the country, focused on personal health and psycho-social distress. The sessions reached more than 1,100 people through approximately 40 awareness sessions. These took place in in camp and non-camp settings in Diyala, Dohuk, Kirkuk, Najaf and Ninewa governorates.

In **Lebanon**, IOM provided 2,287 individuals with COVID-19-related awareness raising activities, alongside general health related activities.

In **Libya**, IOM conducted focus group discussions, outreach campaigns and health awareness raising sessions on COVID-
19 symptoms and precautionary measures for a total of 5,604 migrants from different nationalities. IOM also distributed health awareness flyers and posters in English, Arabic and French. Activities were focused on Sabha, Ubari, Gatroun, Zware, Bani Waleed, Tripoli and Benghazi areas, as well as in Tariq al Sikka, Ganforda, Ejdabia, Albayda and Shahhat detention centres. In the detention centres, IOM also distributed hygiene kits and PPE.

**Disease Surveillance**

In Iraq, IOM recruited 58 community-based surveillance health promoters across four (4) internally displaced persons (IDP) camps in Anbar, Dohuk, Erbil, and Nineawa governorates. In total, 28 individuals completed technical training during the reporting period. Trained health promoters will initiate an IOM community-based surveillance pilot in IOM-supported IDP camps and host communities to further support the surveillance of, and response to, COVID-19. Comprehensive analyses of screening data on COVID-19 transmission in targeted governorates is ongoing to improve health data quality and Department of Health (DoH) capacity to use more efficient online reporting systems.

**Points of Entry (POE)**

IOM in Iraq coordinated with the Erbil International Airport and iMMAP Iraq to enhance COVID-19 testing processes at the airport. With technical support from IOM’s migration health unit (MHU) and iMMAP, the airport management intends to rollout COVID-19 PCR tests for all international arrivals in the near future.

In Lebanon, IOM donated a range of PPE to Beirut International Airport, airport authority, airport security, and airport medical team staff to improve protection from COVID-19 for essential workers. IOM also provided health training to General Security Directorate (GSD) staff. This was alongside the provision of equipment at the ports of Tripoli, Masnaa and Aboudiye, and border crossings.

In Libya, IOM’s medical teams supported the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) staff at Ras Jadir and Wasen PoEs by providing medical check-ups to 71,571 passengers returning to Libya including temperature checks and general health condition assessments. IOM provided furniture, PPEs, medical consumables, and medication to the Arnsaad land border PoE and to Mitiga Airport in Tripoli City to set up and enhance the COVID-19 screening capacity at PoEs. IOM also conducted a two-day workshop on “Strengthening Emergency Preparedness and Response for Points of Entry in Libya” on 20–21 January 2021. The workshop aimed to assess the status of PoEs in Libya and to develop a roadmap for the development of a public health emergency plan for PoEs. Overall, 15 NCDC PoE focal points across the country and seven (7) IOM health management staff participated in the workshop. IOM Libya’s medical team, as part of the Fitness for Travel (FFT) assessments, conducted COVID-19 (PCR) swab tests for 167 migrants and six (6) refugees.

**NATIONAL LABORATORY SYSTEMS**

In Jordan, IOM supported the transportation and delivery of Xpert SARS-CoV-2 tests, donated by Cepheid through the Global Drug Facility. The test is a rapid molecular diagnostic test for the qualitative detection of SARS-CoV-2. To date, 1,260 tests were provided to the Jordanian Central Public Health Laboratory of the Ministry of Health (MoH).

**Infection Prevention Control (IPC)**

In Yemen, IOM is providing water, either through water trucking, vouchers, supplying family tanks and water points, in more than 35 sites in Ibb, Marib and Taiz governorates, reaching 71,350 people. To support newly displaced families, 4,068 soaps and 339 long lasting insecticide nets (LLINs) were provided to 114 households in Marib City. Activities to improve access to water and sanitation, through the establishment of water systems and sanitation facilities, are also ongoing, supporting over 70,000 people in Aden and Marib governorates.

In Egypt, IOM provided eight (8) beneficiaries with hygiene kits through its Migration Health Assessment Centre (MHAC). IOM also provided 85 COVID-19 PCR tests for beneficiaries as part of MHAC activities.

IOM in Jordan distributed 1,000 boxes of hygiene kits to refugees in different governorates and remote areas of the country, alongside more than 2,000 washable masks. In total, five (5) health facilities, serving refugees and migrants, received PPE donation including gowns, gloves, surgical masks, N95 masks and face shields.

In Morocco, IOM continues promoting hygiene, hand washing, prevention measure by providing hygiene kits that includes soap and hand sanitizer, as well as face mask where needed.

In Iraq, IOM continues to implement screening and triage processes at IDP health clinics prior to patient consultations in Nineawa, Erbil and Anbar governorates, and in more than 20 community clinics throughout Anbar, Baghdad, Erbil, Dohuk, Kirkuk and Nineawa governorates. More than 80,000 individuals were screened for COVID-19 prior to their health consultation at the supported health facilities during the reporting period. PPE, IPC materials, and essential supplies were distributed to sites in all six governorates (Anbar, Baghdad, Erbil, Dohuk, Kirkuk, and Ninewa) supported during the reporting period. Assessments are ongoing to determine how to meet ongoing PPE and IPC gaps in partnership with DOH.

IOM in Libya conducted fumigation, disinfection and cleaning interventions at twelve (12) disembarkation points, eleven (11) detention centres and four (4) public hospitals as part of the campaign to combat the spread of COVID-19 outbreak and other contagious diseases. IOM delivered PPE to migrants in Abusalm DC and in the vulnerable groups centre in Shara AL-Zawya DC to support Libyan national authorities’ efforts to address the spread of COVID-19. The
In Lebanon, IOM’s outreach health workers provided 144 patients with follow-up visits as part of efforts to support the National Tuberculosis Programme.

In Yemen, IOM is providing medical supplies and human resource support to 17 health facilities across Al Jawf, Aden, Sada’a, Al Baydah, Amanat Al Asimah, Lahj, Marib, and Shabwah governorates. Through eight (8) mobile health teams, IOM is providing access to emergency health assistance in displacement sites and along migratory routes in Aden, Lahj and Marib governorates. During the reporting period, 5,530 people received access to health services. IOM continued to support the National AIDS Program (NAP) to provide nutritional support to a total of 1,837 out of 3,858 people living with HIV (PLHIV) receiving antiretroviral therapy (ART) at five (5) public ART sites in Sana’a, Aden, Taizz, Al-Hudaydah, and Al-Mukalla cities. IOM delivered 694 food baskets to the NAP to provide nutritional support to 694 PLHIV registered at ART sites in Aden, Taizz, and Al-Mukalla cities. IOM delivered a consignment of 4,500 medical examination gloves to NAP-Aden to be distributed to three (3) ART sites in Aden, Taizz and Mukalla city, Hadramaut Governorate and 26 HIV testing & counselling centres in Aden, Lahj, Taizz and Hadramaut governorates. IOM also supported the NAP in providing anti-retroviral drugs (ARVs) for treating the PLHIV. IOM delivered a consignment of 15 types of ARVs to NAP-Aden. The delivered ARVs quantity will secure ART for one year for a total of 694 PLHIV registered at three (3) ART sites in Aden city, Taizz city and Mukalla city in Hadramaut Governorate.

In Jordan, IOM provided 886 refugees and 501 migrants with primary health care services. Out of those, 100 received secondary intervention and 17 received tertiary surgical intervention. IOM also donated medications to the International Labour Organization (ILO) to support the establishment of a migrant clinic and trained on 113 MoH secondary intervention and 17 received tertiary surgical intervention. IOM also supported the NAP in providing anti-retroviral drugs (ARVs) for treating the PLHIV. IOM delivered a consignment of 15 types of ARVs to NAP-Aden. The delivered ARVs quantity will secure ART for one year for a total of 694 PLHIV registered at three (3) ART sites in Aden city, Taizz city and Mukalla city in Hadramaut Governorate.

In Morocco, IOM continues to offer a wide range of protection assistance services to migrants in need, in lieu of continuous care for cases with chronic health conditions as well as services for maternal and childcare. IOM provided 44 psycho-social consultations to beneficiaries, focusing on the most vulnerable as well as on unaccompanied minors and separated children. The consultations were provided through focus group therapy with case-by-case follow-up via phone consultations. In total, 218 beneficiaries also received medical assistance covering five (5) regions of Morocco.

In Lebanon, health assistance related to travel for resettlement and voluntary return, including COVID-19 PCR testing was provided to 178 beneficiaries.
In Libya, IOM handed over medical equipment to Attia Alkasah General Hospital in Benghazi district. Attia Alkasah General Hospital is the largest hospital in the south-east region, providing healthcare for more than 80,000 people in Alkufra and neighbouring towns. The hospital has a capacity of 120 beds as well as ten (10) beds in the intensive care unit (ICU) and two (2) operating theatres. After the outbreak of the pandemic, a new department designated to detecting and isolating patients testing positive for COVID-19 was created in the hospital. The new department has been equipped with PPE, specialized medical devices, chairs, tables, and administrative equipment.

IOM in Tunisia continues its support to the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research to safely receive more than 400 international students amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. During this reporting period, to facilitate the safe reception of international students, IOM provided accommodation to 15 Jordanian, five (5) Zambian and 13 Palestinian students, during the seven (7)-day quarantine period. After the completion of their quarantine period, IOM is scheduling the organization of sensitization session on COVID-19 for students to improve their knowledge of COVID-19 transmission and protective measures, while providing mental and psychological support as well as informing them about coping strategies to deal with stress.

Protection

In Yemen, IOM intensified its efforts to strengthen migrant assistance programs and provide adequate support for the most vulnerable individuals. As migrant arrivals to Aden Governorate seeking to voluntary return to their country of origin but confront international borders closures, IOM continues to provide food, water and other basic humanitarian assistance for vulnerable migrants. In Aden Governorate, more than 300 migrants were registered for voluntary humanitarian return (VHR) since the start of 2021, bringing the total number of migrants registered to over 5,600. IOM has received the first batch of travel documents of the 1,600 Ethiopian migrants that went through the registration and nationality verification exercise with the delegation of Ethiopian officials that visited Aden in December 2020. Once availability of quarantine facilities is confirmed in Ethiopia, IOM Yemen will activate the VHR.

In Jordan, IOM supported construction of a prefab in the premises of Jordanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), which will facilitate access to the public services. It enables Jordanians, migrants, and refugees to obtain necessary permits and conclude paperwork, while respecting health measures to protect from COVID-19.

IOM in Tunisia, as part of its Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) programme, provided assistance to 31 migrants to return from Tunisia to their countries of origin. The assistance and services included pre-departure assistance, including support at airports, and COVID-19 testing prior to departure from Tunisia. The beneficiaries are also eligible for reintegration assistance in countries of origin. IOM’s sub office in Sfax provided different legal, socio-economic and medical assistance to 25 beneficiaries. This includes medical expense coverage for 17 migrants, one (1) PCR test, the distribution of vouchers and non-food items (NFIs) to four (4) migrants and legal counselling and services to three (3) migrants in needs.

Addressing Socio-Economic Needs

IOM in Libya, through its Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM), completed an assessment on social networks for migrant communities during the reporting period. In ‘Closely Knit: An Assessment of Migrants’ Social Networks in Libya’, IOM’s DTM analyses the impacts social networks have on migrant experiences, including employment opportunities, security and information sharing. Social networks appear to be a key coping strategy for unemployed migrants, especially during COVID-19 movement restrictions, who reported reaching out to friends to a greater extent and consistently for all types of assistance than those who were employed. In addition, unemployed migrants reported fewer of their friends reached out to them for economic as well as emotional support, help in finding employment and, to a lesser extent, help in accessing health care.

IOM in Tunisia, in partnership with civil society actors, ensured direct assistance to vulnerable migrants through vouchers distribution actions in Tunis City (29 beneficiaries) and Sfax (27 beneficiaries) migrants. IOM also distributed awareness raising posters and flyers in English, French and Arabic on COVID-19 prevention measures.

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