

MIGRATION UPDATE

MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

January – April 2020 / DCPRR Unit – MENA Regional Office



A mural in the IOM - TRC Migration Centre of Medenine, South Tunisia, February 2020 (ph. Credits F. Anzolini).

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KEY UPDATES - NORTH AFRICA¹

With all countries in the region taking measures to stop the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, **most border entry and exit points were closed as of the end of March**, with some exemptions being made for returning and repatriated nationals (IOM).

- Some **2,794 refugees and migrants arrived in Italy by sea** from January 1st to March 29th, which marks a sharp increase from the 506 arrivals reported for the same period in 2019. The **majority of arrivals in Italy continue to depart from Libya (72%)**. The Libyan Coast Guard (LCG) continued to intercept refugees and migrants at sea: 2,677 individuals had been returned to Libya as of April 3rd, reports UNHCR.
- The number of **refugees and migrants who were reported to have died or disappeared along the Central Mediterranean Route (CMR) declined** in the first quarter of 2020 when compared with the same period in 2019 (115 down from 161), according to IOM. The **Western Mediterranean Route (WMR) also saw a decline** in reported deaths and disappearances this quarter (40 down from 130).
- IOM estimates that there are currently **654,081 refugees and migrants residing in Libya** as of March 29th, of which 48,626 individuals are refugees and asylum seekers, representing a **slight increase** compared to figures from the last quarter of 2019.
- On January 30th 2020, UNHCR announced a **suspension of operations from the Gathering and Departure Facility (GDF) in Tripoli**, amid rising safety concerns.
- Due to a closure of Libyan airspace as a preventive measure against the spread of COVID-19, IOM temporarily halted its **Voluntary Humanitarian Return Programme**.
- **Tunisian authorities affirmed having taken all necessary measures to host a potentially large number of displaced Libyans, refugees and migrants** in a designated site close to the Libyan border. As of February 29th, Tunisia hosted 4,288 registered refugees and migrants, as estimated by UNHCR.



Bir Fattnasia, the site designated by the Tunisian Government to establish a migration camp in case of a sudden flux of migrants and IDPs from Libya, South Tunisia, February 2020 (ph. Credits F. Anzolini)

¹ Mixed Migration Centre, *Quarterly Mixed Migration Update: North Africa, QUARTER 1 2020*, www.mixedmigration.org, April 2020.

KEY UPDATES - MIDDLE EAST

- **Arrivals in Turkey:** 45,557 arrivals in Turkey were recorded during this quarter, which is a 68% decrease from the previous quarter when 141,725 arrivals were recorded (-96,168). The majority of arrivals are from Afghanistan (35%), Syria (15%) and Pakistan (11%).²

- **People apprehended/rescued in seas around Turkey:** 9,053 people were apprehended/rescued in all seas surrounding Turkey, whereas the total of the previous quarter was 22,077 (-13,024 or 59% decrease). The 9,053 people were recorded during 259 operations, compared to 648 in the previous quarter (-389 or 60% decrease).³

- **Missing refugees and migrants:** With data up to 18 March, 219 people were reported as having gone missing or died while crossing the Mediterranean Sea. 64 people were recorded missing or dead in the Eastern Mediterranean, which is an abrupt increase compared with 4 people reported in the entire previous quarter and almost the same as the number for all of 2019.⁴

- **Syria:** "The humanitarian situation for people remains alarming across northwest Syria. While active hostilities came to a halt in early March, the impact of recent military operations as well as multiple displacements, economic hardship and years of conflict continue to affect the lives of civilians.

Of the nearly 1 million people in the area who fled their homes to escape from hostilities between December and early March, some 854,000 people reportedly remain in displacement, a figure comprising many vulnerable groups such as the elderly, persons with disabilities, and female- or child-headed households.

Though displacement has largely stopped, the humanitarian needs of the people who have been displaced and the pre-existing needs of the wider community remain extremely high. According to an assessment conducted by a UN partner on 16 April, 106,000 people displaced since 1 December 2019 have voluntarily returned to their areas of origin in Idlib and western Aleppo governorates. An additional 20,000 who had been previously displaced to these areas from other parts of northwest Syria due to hostilities prior to December 2019 also reportedly arrived back to their former place of displacement".⁵

Syria entered its tenth year of conflict this March, after the 6 March ceasefire in relation to Idlib. Large-scale displacement persists, and COVID-19 is adding to needs.

² Mixed Migration Centre, *Quarterly Mixed Migration Update: Middle East, QUARTER 1 2020*, www.mixedmigration.org, April 2020.

³ *ibidem*

⁴ *ibidem*

⁵ According to the situation [updates from OCHA in Syria](#).

IFRC MENA REGIONAL OFFICE

During the first quarter of 2020, the IFRC MENA Regional Office has actively supported the North Africa Surge Delegate seconded by the Swedish Red Cross to draft and deliver the Tunisian Red Crescent Society Contingency Plan on migration.

A mission to the South of Tunisia took place for a migration assessment.

The mission team visited the TRCS Regional Committee of Tatouine, the TRCS local branch of Remada, the TRCS local branch of Medenine, the IOM-TRCS reception centre of Medenine, the TRCS local branch of Zarzis and the area of Bir Fattnasia, which is near the city of Remada and not far from the border between Libya and Tunisia. The Surge Delegate Emma van Rij, the IFRC Regional Migration Coordinator Fabrizio Anzolini, the IFRC local staff BenAissa Haddou and Yassine Chagrani Head of TRCS/IOM program on migration, composed the team visit.



The IFRC mission to the South of Tunisia, Governorate of Tatouine, February 2020 (ph. Credits F. Anzolini).

At the same time, during January and February 2020, the Regional Office have supported the IFRC North Africa Country Cluster attending the meetings organized by UNHCR Tunisia, IOM Tunisia and the Government of Tunisia for developing an Inter-Agency Contingency Plan in case of a sudden flow of migrants and IDPs from Libya.

Since 2019, the Regional Migration Coordinator is constantly supporting the migration activities of the IFRC Country Office for Libya.

COVID-19 PANDEMIC, MIGRATION AND DISPLACEMENT IN MENA

To support the IFRC Country Offices and National Societies in their response to COVID19, the Regional Office has developed the guidance document *"COVID-19 - Including migrants and displaced people in preparedness and response activities. Guidance for MENA National societies"*, available in English and Arabic.

Updates have been produced on CoViD-19 and its impact on migration and displacement, providing useful analysis and resources for the IFRC Representatives in the MENA region.

OTHER ACTIVITIES ON CoViD-19:

- Migration and Displacement technical support to IFRC Country Clusters and Country Offices for the development of MENA National societies contingency plans and of the regional Emergency Plan of Action (EPoA);



Video capture from the awareness video on CoViD-19

- A short video message on CoViD-19 and preventing measures in English, Arabic and French has been developed and shared through social media (mainly Facebook and Twitter).
- External engagement with WHO Eastern Africa Office on CoViD-19 and people movements.
- Monitoring of movement restrictions at international borders (like hundreds of Tunisian citizens stranded at the border between Libya and Tunisia);
- Technical support during weekly calls and virtual meetings of the COVID-19 Regional Task Force.
- Supporting MENA National Societies humanitarian diplomacy efforts to persuade “decision-makers and opinion leaders to act, at

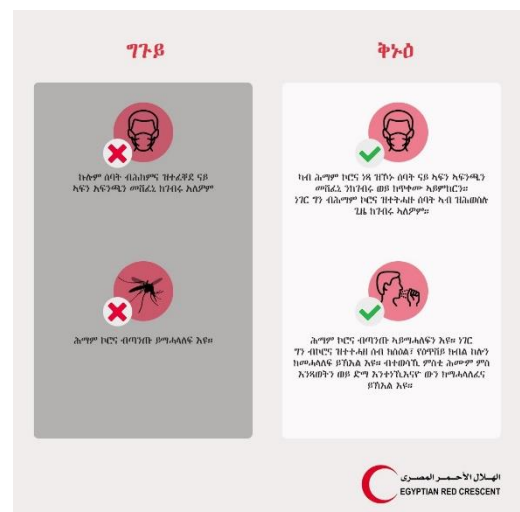
all times, in the interests of vulnerable people, and with full respect for fundamental humanitarian principles”.

RED CROSS RED CRESCENT NATIONAL SOCIETIES ACTIVITIES RELATED TO COVID-19 AND MIGRATION

EGYPT

The **Egyptian Red Crescent** has implemented activities to avoid the spreading of CoViD-19 among migrants, IDPS and host communities. These include:

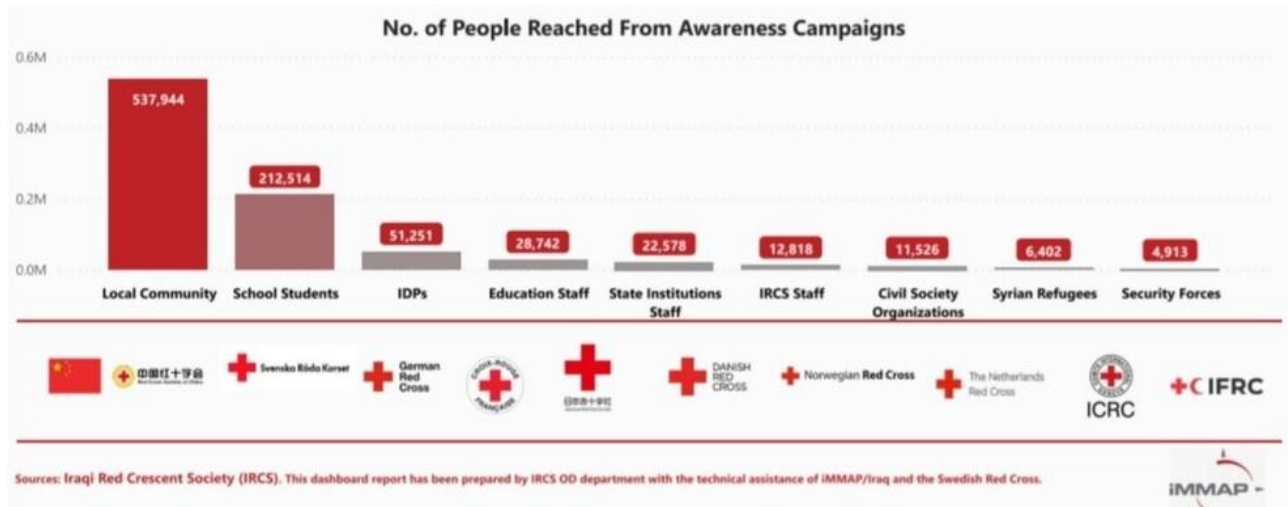
- Translation of health promotion and PSS messages in languages most widely spoken by migrants in Egypt (IEC materials on CoViD-19 has already been translated in Amharic, Somali, Tigrinya, Arabic and for individuals with low literacy).
- Dissemination of these messages through social platforms.
- Engagement of over 200 migrant volunteers in the COVID-19 response to support migrant communities and provide support in local languages.



Credits: Egyptian Red Crescent Society.

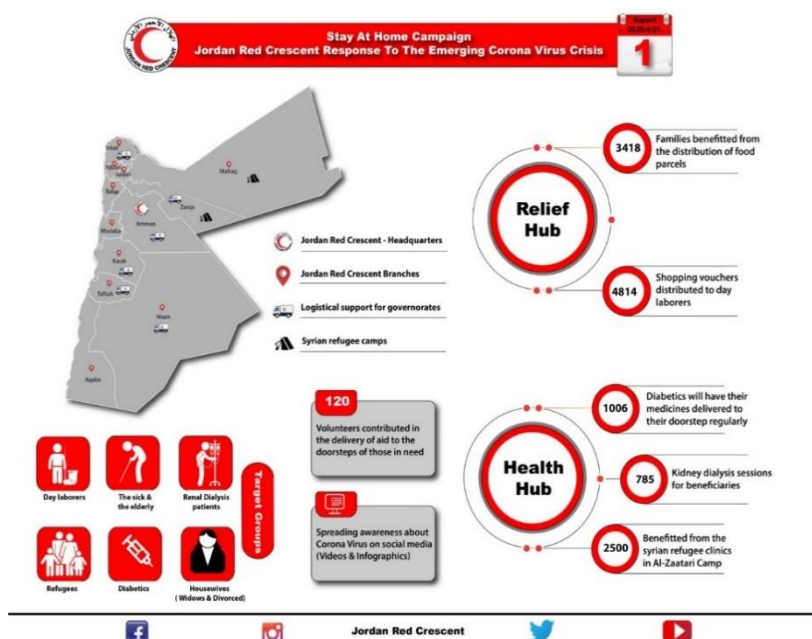
IRAQ

The Iraqi Red Crescent Society, with its activities to avoid the spreading of CoViD-19 among migrants, IDPs and host communities, has reached more than 50,000 people on the move and more than 6,000 Syrian Refugees with health awareness sessions on CoViD-19. More than 50 camps have been reached in total.



JORDAN

The Jordan Red Crescent Society have launched an awareness campaign on CoViD-19 with video and info-graphic through social media, targeting the host communities and Syrian refugees. At the same time, the National Society is supporting the Syrian refugees living in Al-Zaatari Camp, one of the most populated refugee camp in the world in cooperation with the Qatar Red Crescent. During the period, more than 2,500 services has been provided in JRCS clinics in the Camp. JRCS in providing Renal Dialysis services for Syrian refugees. Food parcels and vouchers distribution is planned.



QATAR

Qatar Red Crescent Society is providing food to labour migrants and vulnerable communities affected by the COVID19 outbreak and subsequent lockdown measures. QRCS has distributed baskets, respectively 6,000 to families and 1,500 to foreign workers.

Qatar Red Crescent is actively supporting many initiatives targeting refugees across the Region.



(Ph. Credits: Qatar Red Crescent Society)

LEBANON

The Lebanese Red Cross is articulating its CoViD-19 response around strategic objectives, which include migrants and displaced population:

- Risk communication, community engagement, and public awareness.
- Identification and detection of COVID19 cases.
- Transportation of suspected and confirmed cases.
- Shelter management for refugees/displaced people requiring quarantine.
- Providing basic assistance for refugees/displaced people and Lebanese citizens in quarantine requiring support.

LIBYA



(Ph. Credits: Libyan Red Crescent Society)

The Libyan Red Crescent Society is facilitating awareness sessions for migrants and displaced communities across the country. The Libyan Red Crescent Society has started an awareness campaign on CoViD19 reaching IDPs and migrants outside and inside the detention centres. LRCS volunteers have reached hundreds of migrants only in Tripoli and Benghazi, during the reporting period. The LRCS is also engaged in supporting Tunisian migrant workers stranded at the border between Libya and Tunisia with food and non-food items.

SYRIA

Syrian Arab Red Crescent continues to be the main humanitarian actor in Syria through its network of staff and volunteers. SARC priorities that also target displaced populations include:

- First responders' safety through providing training, and securing safety equipment while delivering First Aid, health, and sterilization services to the vulnerable people.
- Raising awareness about COVID-19 across the Syrian communities via suitable communication channels.
- Community engagement in countering the spread of the virus.
- Access to clean water and distribution of hygiene items and sterilize public facilities.
- Ensure the continuity of providing Health services to the people in need.
- Monitoring food security challenges.

TUNISIA

Since February 2020, the Tunisian Red Crescent has been conducting an awareness campaign on CoViD19 in the three migrant centres managed together with IOM (the TRC-IOM centres host around 150 migrants). The National Society is also engaged in supporting the public authorities in the quarantine facilities for Tunisian citizens coming back to the country. Local branches in the South are engaged in supporting Libyan citizens stranded at the border between Libya and Tunisia with food and no-food items (mainly Libyan truck drivers or workers).

SECONDARY IMPACTS

A consequence of a pandemic could be a rapid population migration before or after a lockdown. Migrants could start to move before the lockdown to return to their home, in other regions of the country or in other countries. *"For example, an outbreak of plague in 1994 in Surat, India, led to roughly 20% of the city's population (around 500,000 people) fleeing their homes, as the lack of accurate information and trust in the authorities led to heightened panic (Madhav et al, 2018, p. 325; Brahmbhatt & Dutta, 2008, p. 6). Such sudden population movements can have 'destabilizing effects and migrants face elevated health risks arising from poor sanitation, poor nutrition, and other stressors' (Madhav et al, 2018, p. 325). Population movements also risk spreading the disease further (Madhav et al, 2018, p. 325)"*¹. On the other hand, labour migrants could try to move after the lockdown due to the heavy consequences of the pandemic in term of loss of jobs. As well, the pandemic can contribute to stigma against migrant populations: migrants can be accused of bringing the virus to the host communities as well as local communities may consider refugees, migrants and IDPs spreading the virus due to the difficult hygiene condition in which they are obliged to live in some circumstances.

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