



# **IOM REGIONAL COVID-19 SITUATIONAL REPORT**

**STORIES FROM THE FIELD**

**COMPILATION**



**2020 - 2021**

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## HUMAN INTEREST STORY BOOKLET FOREWORD

**CARMELA GODEAU**



From March 2020, the world fundamentally changed. The COVID-19 pandemic presented one of the major challenges to all of humanity in the 21st century. Across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, the pandemic has generated unprecedented impacts on the health and socio-economic condition of millions of people. It has also resulted in the largest reduction in the region's mobility landscape in modern history. Migrants, displaced populations, including internally displaced persons and refugees, and host communities have been among the most vulnerable to the pandemic's deep and evolving consequences.

Against this devastating backdrop of suffering, IOM's Regional Office for MENA has worked to ensure the human dimensions of the crisis are both captured, and publicized. This collection of stories, gathered over the last year and published in IOM MENA Regional COVID-19 Situational Reports, aims to humanize the COVID-19 narrative, illustrating the resilience of migrants and displaced populations across the region, in the face of overwhelming adversity and the positive impact of its response.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, IOM's strong operational footprint across 58 offices and sub-offices in the region, and our community-based approaches, have enabled us to stay and deliver critical assistance and support to the most vulnerable populations. With the second and third wave of the pandemic in full swing across the region, IOM will amplify its efforts to implement an integrated response and recovery effort across the humanitarian, development and peacebuilding nexus. This will build upon the achievements of IOM offices across the region during 2020 under our regional strategic preparedness and response plan (SPRP). Through programming under the IOM MENA regional SPRP, IOM reached more than 800,000 individuals with critical water, hygiene and sanitation supplies and services and provided more than 63,300 people with livelihood support.

IOM also assisted over 7,160 migrants that were residing in the region to return to their countries of origin, including more than 600 unaccompanied and separated migrant children, victims of trafficking and urgent health cases. In addition, more than 2,300 stranded migrants were assisted by IOM to return to the MENA region, including 133 unaccompanied and separated children, victims of trafficking and medical cases. For societies and communities around the region, including migrants and displaced populations in the COVID-19 response and recovery efforts will be key to changing the crisis' trajectory and engendering sustainable recovery for all.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Carmela Godeau".

**Carmela GODEAU**  
Regional Director - MENA







## STORY 1 - TUNISIA

### **IOM response to the diverse and evolving needs of vulnerable migrants in Tunisia**

Across Tunisia, the impact of COVID-19 for migrants has been multifaceted, with deep health and socio-economic consequences. The diversity of migrant profiles throughout the country has created a range of needs that require a flexible and adaptive response. While many migrants have witnessed significant income reductions, some have re-evaluated their mobility intentions as they confront the effects of the pandemic, while others have found themselves separated from loved ones.

Aya\*, a young woman from Mali, was one such individual. After a tragic shipwreck off the Tunisian coast while attempting to migrate to Europe, Aya found herself alone in Tunisia with rapidly dwindling resources.

“This incident made me rethink my life choices and reflect on new ways to rebuild my life”, she reflected, while talking about the event.

A combination of travel restrictions to limit the spread of COVID-19, and decreasing employment opportunities, left Aya with rapidly increasing vulnerabilities and few options. To support Aya, IOM provided multi-purpose cash vouchers to

purchase critical medicine and hygiene products during her time in Tunisia. This assistance was made possible through the EU-IOM Joint Initiative for Migrant Protection and Reintegration.



IOM staff distributing vouchers at the primary school of Laouina, Tunis ©IOM Tunisia

Aya's story is not unique. It speaks of the untold stories of 775 migrants rescued at sea, that have been assisted by IOM in different Tunisian governorates. Since the first case of COVID-19 was reported in Tunisia in February 2020, IOM has been proac-

tive in responding to the unique and exacerbated vulnerabilities of migrants and their hosting communities, playing a leading role in ensuring the inclusion of migrants in Tunisia's national COVID-19 response.

"We have always been in alert to provide humanitarian assistance to vulnerable migrants, while reinforcing the capacity of local authorities", explains an IOM staff member.

Illustrating the diverse range of needs experienced by migrants, Mariam's\* story illustrates the difficulties faced by migrant families due to COVID-19. Mariam, an Ivorian migrant who arrived in Tunisia in 2018, explains that before the pandemic, she worked happily with her husband in a coffee shop in Tunisia, raising her newborn baby. However, since the pandemic, Mariam has struggled to find stable income.

"I am now having difficulties in supporting my family... the expenses have become higher, especially after the baby," she said. To alleviate the additional pressure experienced by Mariam, IOM provided her with health assistance throughout her pregnancy. This included family planning vouchers to alleviate many of the most pressing issues she faced during her pregnancy.

IOM has also facilitated family reunification in a context where border closures have sometimes resulted the separation of children from their parents. Recently, two children of seven (7) and twelve (12), who were temporarily living with relatives in Tunisia, were reunited with their parents after months of separation

thanks to close collaboration with Tunisian Child Protection authorities and authorities from the country of origin.

Concurrently, IOM continues to assist some of the most vulnerable migrants across Tunisia, including victims of trafficking (VoT). To date, IOM has provided support to 712 VoTs through partnership with the Tunisian National Authority against Trafficking in Persons (INLTP).

To ensure a whole-of-society approach, IOM also provides support to migrant hosting communities across Tunisia. To date, IOM Tunisia has assisted more than 134 Tunisians during vouchers distribution days.

While addressing the immediate socio-economic needs of migrants and hosting communities, IOM works to better inform migrants about their rights, and the various social services available.

“I noticed that many migrants remain unaware and reluctant to seek health assistance from public hospitals. For me, sensitization and access to information and establishing new partnerships with local civil society for new outreach activities are priorities”, said one staff member.

This holistic approach has been tailored to respond to the growing needs of different migrant and hosting populations, including stranded migrants, migrants who see Tunisia as their home, VoTs and local Tunisian families. To date, IOM has assisted more than 16,400 beneficiaries in coordination with local municipalities. This includes 13,259 beneficiaries of vouchers, 1,303 beneficiaries of in-kind donation, support to 712 VoTs, 361 beneficiaries of medical assistance, 548 beneficiaries of psychological assistance and 94 legal assistance.





## STORY 2 - ALGERIA

### Acquiring skills in Algeria - Salem aims to launch a poultry breeding business back home

Since the outbreak of COVID-19 and related travel restrictions, many migrants in Algeria have requested IOM's assistance to voluntarily return to their countries of origin with international border closures.

Salam, a 31-year-old Burkinabé man, is one of the individuals who requested IOM's support to return to his country of origin. He left Burkina Faso in 2016 and travelled to Algeria through Niger, looking for new work opportunities. Following his arrival in Algeria, he started working in the constructions sector.

"I worked as a construction worker for eight (8) months, but I was not satisfied with my savings," Salem remarked, when talking about his experience.

Worried that he was not making enough money to support himself and his family back home, he started looking for a new job in a different field through the network that he had built while working in Algiers.

“A good friend of mine with whom I was working in a construction site put me in contact with a chicken farmer, and, although I had no experience in poultry farming, I told him that I am open to learning new skills,” he explained. A few days later, Salem was offered the job.

Over time, he acquired the skills needed to succeed in poultry farming. He spent one year and a half in the countryside, near the capital Algiers, before moving to the north-eastern side of the country, where he worked in turkey breeding.

After nearly three years in Algeria, Salem was planning to return to Burkina Faso to be with his family and start his own business.



Salem at Houari Boumediene Airport with luggage as he prepares to return home ©IOM/Bouguerche

However, due to COVID-19 mobility restrictions, he found himself unable to travel. When he learned about IOM’s Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) programme, Salem contacted IOM and asked for support to return home.

In the past months, IOM has organized various in-person and online outreach campaigns to inform migrants across Algeria about the AVRR programme. Critically, IOM also uses these campaigns as an opportunity to sensitise communities to COVID-19 risks and prevention measures. From July to September 2020, over 43,000 people were reached with these critical messages through IOM Algeria’s Facebook page alone.

To enable Salim to be reunited with his family, IOM assisted him to return home through a special voluntary return flight that took off from Houari Boumediene Airport on 30 September 2020. A total of 84 other migrants from Burkina Faso and Benin were aboard the same flight, which was organized thanks to the support of the Algerian authorities that exceptionally lifted the international travel restrictions in place since March 2020. The movement was funded by the European Union (EU).

In Burkina Faso, Salem is hoping to start his own poultry breeding business with IOM's assistance through the EU-IOM Joint Initiative for Migrant Protection and Reintegration (EU-IOM Joint Initiative).

"I think that poultry farming is a profitable sector, in which I would like to invest in my home country and perhaps offer employment opportunities to young people from my community," Salem said.

Under the EU-IOM Joint Initiative, returning migrants like Salem receive reintegration support to enable them to start new lives in their countries of origin. The reintegration assistance addresses returnees' economic, social and psychosocial needs and can include counselling or medical assistance, a reintegration grant to set up a small business, vocational training or job placement, and education for minors as well as follow-up monitoring.

"I am delighted to go back home with skills in hand. Migration taught me a lot," Salem concludes.

Supported by the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa, the EU-IOM Joint Initiative is the first comprehensive programme bringing together 26 African countries of the Sahel and Lake Chad region, the Horn of Africa, and North Africa, the EU and IOM around the shared goal of ensuring that migration is safer, more informed and better governed for both migrants and their communities.

In Algeria, the programme enables migrants who voluntarily decide to return to their countries of origin to do so in a safe and dignified way and offer reintegration support to Algerian returnees. Between July and September 2020, the programme assisted 283 West African migrants to return home from Algeria through three special voluntary return flights. The North Africa window of the programme started in June 2019. It covers Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia.





## STORY 3 - LIBYA

### Colourful prints and bright ideas: The story of Vida Tabo, a Ghanaian migrant in Libya

Vida Tabo is a 30-year-old mother of two who runs an in-house tailor shop in one of the mostly migrant-populated neighbourhoods of Tripoli. In a time where many migrants are struggling with unemployment and loss of livelihoods due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Vida has managed to adapt and survive, albeit not in the same capacity. Once the owner of a flourishing business, now Vida must contend with barely enough customers to keep the shop running.

New data [published](#) by IOM Libya's DTM, estimates the number of migrants in Libya at the end of 2020 has dropped to around 571,000 due to loss of livelihoods, unemployment and mobility restrictions. This decrease of more than 12 per cent compared to the [beginning](#) of the COVID-19 pandemic has seen more than 80,000 migrants leave Libya in the past year, mostly to neighbouring countries.

Vida left her home country of Ghana in 2014 to be reunited with her husband in Libya. To support her husband and family back home, Vida bought a sewing machine and launched her home-based business, first by offering alterations and then by making garments.



As the business began to thrive, Vida's family in Ghana started sending her a variety of fabrics covered in bright, bold patterns and colourful Ghanaian prints. With the extra fabric, Vida started to produce more clothing and incorporate African designs into her work. These exciting new clothes brought her even more customers and Vida was able to buy several more sewing machines and train three assistants from the migrant community to support her.

**“I had to continue supporting my family, so I had to do something. That’s when I started making the masks,”**  
said Vida Tabo.

“Nothing was able to stop my business in those days”, she said, “not even the continuation of conflicts in Libya. I had to work despite the wars and the situation in the country, so I continued, because I have eight (8) family members to support, and they depend on me.”

When the pandemic struck, everything changed for Vida and her tailoring shop. As the number of customers suddenly dropped, she could no longer afford to keep her three assistants. By the end of 2020, Vida was left with only one assistant to continue helping her.

“Because of COVID-19, we are not able to go to church and people are not coming to the shop a lot,” she said. “Everyone is afraid of going out and I’m not making much money now. I’m making just enough to pay the rent and buy some food.”

Despite the pandemic affecting her life and her business, Vida managed to bring back customers with a bright idea. She decided to make COVID-19 preventative cloth masks using the colourful Ghanaian fabric she had in the store. They were fashionable, as well as more sustainable, as they could be washed and re-worn.

“I had to continue supporting my family, so I had to do something. That’s when I started making the masks,” she said.

Ghana, with more than 25,700 migrants in Libya, represents the fourth largest country of origin for sub-Saharan migrants in the country. Although their numbers have also decreased by about 27 per cent compared to January-February 2020 when there were 35,267 Ghanaians living in the country ([DTM Migrant Report round 29](#)).

“After some discussion with my community, I went to the market and bought different textiles to start the work,” Vida said. “Making protective masks was totally new for me. It was never something I could imagine making before.”

“Since starting the work, I have made four different models. I did not like the ones available in the market and many were inadequate for what most of the community needed. We have managed to make so many masks that we even started distributing them to the Ghanaian community in church and to people in need who couldn’t afford to buy them from the shops.”



Talking to her aspirations Vida notes, “I want to open a bigger tailor shop .... to continue supporting my family with the business.” ©IOM Libya



Vida holds many titles: a mother of two, a wife, and a business owner. She hopes to save enough money to return to Ghana © IOM Libya

Vida came into contact with IOM Libya in late 2020, when she received food assistance during the week leading to the celebration of International Migrants Day. Given her business background, IOM asked her to run a mask making workshop for the day for a group of women from different migrant communities. During the workshop, Vida shared her experience of incorporating African designs and textiles from Ghana into her business and how she was overcoming the challenges impacting her work, such as conflict and the pandemic.

While Vida’s ingenuity has kept her business afloat, she dreams of a time when she can collect enough money to go back to Ghana and continue making fashionable clothes.

“I want to open a bigger tailor shop, to make more clothes and support my family with the business,” she said.



## STORY 4 - ALGERIA

### **Aliou, a returnee and business owner raising awareness about the risks of irregular migration in Senegal**

Last year, Aliou, a 30-year-old Senegalese man, was assisted to voluntarily return home from Algeria to Senegal through IOM's Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) programme. Now, after benefiting from reintegration support, he has been able to set up a small farming business and is engaging in a range of activities to raise awareness about the risks of irregular migration.

Back in 2016, Aliou packed the few things he had and left his country looking for a better life in a place where he can work to support himself and his family. He was told by some of his Algiers-based friends that he could find a job in Algeria, so, he decided to give it a try.

"I left Senegal because I didn't have the means to survive. I had no job, no money, I simply had no choice, other than to hit the road," he said.

After walking for several days with a group of fellow migrants, Aliou arrived in the city of Gao in northern Mali – the last point before entering Algeria. "We were stopped in the middle of the desert. Criminals took everything of value that we had before allowing us to continue our journey," he said.

Arriving in Algeria with nothing, Aliou quickly found a job in a construction site with help from his friends. Even though he was not a mason and had no experience in construction, he learned the profession quickly, developing new skills. Soon, he became famous among his colleagues for his good work. “I was so good that they called me Bilal [a name of an Algerian man] the mason.”



Migrants at the check-in desk for a Dakar-bound flight on the day of Aliou's departure ©IOM Algeria

In 2020, following the outbreak of COVID-19, livelihood opportunities became scarce. Aliou lost his job. He heard of the IOM's AVRR programme through some friends and decided to sign up to return home.

A few weeks later, Aliou was invited to a virtual counselling session to determine his eligibility for AVRR assistance. He was then provided with support to voluntarily

return to Senegal in November 2020, through a special return organized thanks to the facilitation of the Algerian authorities, despite the travel restrictions in place since March 2020.

“The reintegration assistance that IOM offers to [eligible returning] migrants convinced me to go back to my country. Thanks to IOM's assistance, I was able to set-up a small farming business,” he said.

Today, Aliou owns around five hundred chickens. He built a small farm and is currently looking to expand his poultry farming business. In addition to being a business owner, Aliou has become an activist, raising awareness among Senegalese youth on the dangers of irregular migration. He has participated in TV shows and wants to create an association that brings together returnees from Algeria.

“I'm looking for some support to develop the association. Most returnees who were not able to build sustainable projects will try to leave the country despite the dangers,” he concluded.

Aliou is one of over 1,000 migrants that have been assisted by IOM to voluntarily and safely return to their countries of origin from Algeria since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The safe and dignified return assistance was organized in



the framework of the European Union (EU)-IOM Joint Initiative for Migrant Protection and Reintegration, with support from the Government of Algeria and the EU.

To ensure the sustainable reintegration of returnees into their communities of origin, eligible returnees like Aliou receive reintegration assistance, which may include economic, social and psycho-social support following the development of tailored reintegration assistance plans based on their needs.



Aliou has set up a small poultry farm as part of his reintegration project ©IOM Algeria

Launched in December 2016, with support from the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa, the EU-IOM Joint Initiative for Migrant Protection and Reintegration brings together 26 African countries of the Sahel and Lake Chad region, the Horn of Africa, and North Africa, the EU and IOM around the shared goal of ensuring that migration is safer, more informed and better governed for both migrants and their communities.



## STORY 5 - YEMEN

### Supporting Yemeni communities stay healthy during the pandemic

“COVID-19 has touched the whole world. It has affected developed countries, so what impact do you think it has had on Yemen?” asked Ahmed, a pharmacy student at the University of Hadramaut.

Infection prevention and control measures are desperately needed across the country, while communities require the right information to fight the spread of the virus. In Hadramaut, IOM partnered with 60 pharmacy students eager to respond to the pandemic.

“We are producing hand sanitizer, in line with World Health Organization (WHO) standards. It is now well known that sanitizers are one of the most important substances that can prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus,” said Fatima, a fellow classmate of Ahmed, explaining why they are producing 10,000 bottles of sanitizers.

“First, we start by mixing the substances: ethanol, hydrogen peroxide, glycerine and distilled water. We fill the bottles and seal them. Then it’s on to delivery with the finished product,” added Ahmed, commenting on the process the student’s follow, with IOM support.

The bottles were distributed to communities in Hadramaut, the governorate where the university is located. Before working on the project, Fatima and Ahmed were waiting for the university to re-open.

“COVID-19 has affected us badly. It stopped all aspects of life and now our lives are paralyzed. As for us students, the university was shut, just like schools and mosques,” said Fatima.

Despite the difficulties, Fatima, Ahmed and their classmates were happy to be a part of their community’s fight against COVID-19. They also received financial incentives for their work. This activity fell under IOM’s transition and recovery work, which also includes, among other interventions, risk communications activities.

Complementing this, IOM’s water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) team in Yemen have been long working on hygiene promotion. Their methods of how to promote key hygiene messages in local communities has become a vital part of first the cholera response and now the COVID-19.

“I love the work that we do because it connects us to our own humanity. Regardless of who you are and what you do, this work shows you that we are all human before anything else,” said Mohammed, a hygiene promoter with the team in Aden Governorate.

Mohammed visits displacement sites throughout Lahj, Abyan and Taizz governorates to train community leaders on awareness raising campaigns. He shares his knowledge and experience on message delivery and recording their work. Before COVID-19, when disease outbreaks would occur like cholera, he would voluntarily train committees in displacement sites with less access to support.

“We used to meet committees and people in our free time to educate them about cholera and dengue fever, but today my work has become even more urgent due to the COVID-19 outbreak,” he explained.

Despite movement restrictions and limited contact with people, Mohammed and his colleagues have incorporated infection prevention and control measures into their work, helping spreading lifesaving messages and not the virus.

“We have to support each other so that we can all get through this safely,” Mohammed concluded.





## STORY 6 - IRAQ

### **IOM educational games help keep children safe during the COVID-19 pandemic**

Years of conflict across Iraq have increased vulnerability to the COVID-19 pandemic. Weakened healthcare infrastructure, as well as socio-economic challenges making it difficult to enforce public health safety measures, have led to a steady rise in COVID-19 cases.

Since the start of the pandemic, IOM Iraq has collaborated with the Government of Iraq (GoI) and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) to address healthcare and socio-economic issues. IOM also provides humanitarian assistance, particularly to the 1.3 million Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) living in informal settlements or camps.

IDPs often have different vulnerabilities compared to the general public. For example, in situations where families live in close quarters, such as in tents in camp and camp like settings, it is difficult to impose quarantine measures if suspected cases arise. These vulnerabilities are further heightened by the lack of adequate health, water, and sanitation facilities.

This October, IOM's Communications with Communities (CwC) team distributed 1,000 COVID-19 awareness-raising games to the children living in Sharia Camp for IDPs in Dohuk Governorate.

**“The games we’ve designed are easy to play. It’s a good way for children to have fun while increasing their knowledge of the precautions [to take so they can] stay protected,”**  
said Nashwan, IOM Iraq CwC project assistant.

“The games we’ve designed are easy to play. It’s a good way for children to have fun while increasing their knowledge of the precautions [to take so they can] stay protected,” said Nashwan, IOM Iraq CwC project assistant.

The games feature illustrations that teach children how to stay safe during the pandemic. They also help them understand the importance of social distancing and hand washing.

Snakes and ladders, the classic board game, has been redesigned to fit the context with players climbing up the ladder and advance to victory if they manage to avoid the squares with the virus. IOM Iraq's CwC team has also developed a twist on a memory game with players tasked with pairing 12 cards showing the correct protective measures with 12 cards showing the opposite, incorrect steps to take. Each deck also included a list of COVID-19 safety precautions, so that children can learn to play at home safely.

In addition to games, colouring books with illustrations of children following the correct protective measures were also distributed to 1,000 children in the camp. “It’s harder for children to stay protected as compared to adult; it takes time to fully imprint the precautions in their minds. That is why I think these games are good; the illustration would jog their memory every time they played,” said Kherya, who has lived in Sharia Camp for more than five years. Kherya is one of several community mobilizers who work with IOM and other NGOs to implement activities in the camp. They have strong relationships within their communities and are trained to support the international community's work.

“Children can most easily transfer the virus inside the camp; it is huge and crowded, and the children always play in groups of five (5) or six (6),” said one of the camp residents, during an IOM-led community session focused on teaching children to stay safe.

In addition to the games, IOM has conducted many awareness raising sessions in the community and displayed informational posters in key locations throughout the camp. To respect social distancing measures, IOM ensures the number of session participants does not exceed ten (10).



Educational games can help children learn how to stay safe during the pandemic.  
©IOM Iraq / Yad Abdulqader

Reliable information about COVID-19 and preventive measures is essential to slowing the spread of the disease, but it is only one piece of the puzzle. IOM Iraq has also been providing IDP families with hygiene kits and other supplies; providing essential items for families who have lost their primary source of income due to the pandemic; and working with Gol and KRG authorities to strengthen the national response to the pandemic. This programme is implemented with funding from the German Government.



## STORY 7 - LIBYA

### **IOM provides much needed support to migrants in Libya with food distributions**

Mobility restrictions across Libya to curb the spread of COVID-19 has reduced the income of tens of thousands of migrants reliant on casual daily labour. Deteriorating security conditions have compounded this, with the combination resulting in a sharp increase in food and basic commodity prices. This has deepened pre-existing vulnerabilities for many migrants across the country.

Talking to the difficulties faced, Mohammed, a 45-year-old from Bangladesh, said, “Working conditions were very good until this pandemic put everything on hold. Since then, my life has been tremendously changed as I had to stay home and stop working for the first two months.” Mohammed, who came to Libya in 2016 in search of a living wage installing ceramic tiles, is one of hundreds of migrants who received food rations from IOM Libya in the past month.

The downturn in economic activity because of COVID-19 has significantly affected the Libyan job market for migrants, who are often employed in the construction and agricultural sectors. Many have lost their source of income and are now on the verge of slipping into food insecurity if they do not receive critical food supplies.

Aisha, a 43-year-old from Mali, echoes the concerns that many other migrants have voiced during this period. “I have four children and my sister and mother live with me. Since the Coronavirus curfew and restrictions happened in Tripoli, I have been unable to get a job, and most families who I used to work for are now afraid of even letting me in their homes,” she said. Ongoing mobility restrictions have made it almost impossible to know how many mi-



IOM staff distributing food baskets for vulnerable migrants in urban centres across Libya  
© IOM Libya 2020

grants, who were previously daily workers, are now dependent on aid for survival. However, even before COVID-19, IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) revealed that many migrants could only afford to eat one meal a day.

To better understand the situation, IOM in coordination with the World Food Program (WFP), conducted food security assessments in migrant communities. Concurrently, both agencies ramped up operation to deliver food items to vulnerable migrants in response to growing needs.

To date, over 1,000 migrants have been assisted on a weekly basis with Ready-To-Eat (RTE) food kits, with each kit designed to provide a month's support. While the targeted recipients of RTE kits are migrants located along the main migration routes in the west, east and south of Libya, IOM has also designed special food basket assistance to reach approximately 12,400 migrants who are affected by COVID-19 restrictions in urban areas. Between mid-March and the end of May, more than 4,000 vulnerable migrants in Tripoli, Azzawiya and Misrata were reached with this assistance.



IOM staff distributing food baskets for vulnerable migrants in urban centres across Libya  
© IOM Libya 2020

COVID-19 and its impacts alongside the ongoing conflict in Libya have amplified the feeling of longing for home among many migrants. “I do keep caring about my personal hygiene and washing hands to prevent getting this virus. If the war ends, I will stay in Libya to collect more money and then I will go back to Bangladesh, but if it does not stop then it is impossible to stay,” said Mohammed.





## STORY 8 - SUDAN

### **IOM adopts a comprehensive response to COVID-19 in Sudan**

Across Sudan, the COVID-19 pandemic has compounded the impacts of multiple ongoing crises. Decades of conflict, combined with recurrent disasters, such as flooding and drought, has resulted in one of the world's largest protracted humanitarian crisis. Approximately 9.3 million people are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance, including 1.8 million internally displaced people (IDPs), 300,000 returnees and 1.1 million refugees. Responding to COVID-19 in this complex context requires a multi-layered approach that addresses the pandemic's health impacts alongside its socio-economic fallout to prevent vulnerable communities from being left behind.

Decades of inadequate investment in health care systems, poor infrastructure, and limited access to medicine has impacted efforts to prevent, contain and treat COVID-19. The disease surveillance system does not cover the entire country, while high levels of out-of-pocket health care costs inhibit access to needed treatment.

“We are working closely with our governmental and community partners to identify the most acutely vulnerable groups and will target our immediate response for their benefit,” said Catherine Northing, Chief of Mission, IOM Sudan.

To support the Transitional Government of Sudan in responding to the health implications of COVID-19, IOM has focused its response, among others, on rehabilitating and expanding Water, Health and Sanitation (WASH) services in isolation centres, health facilities and points of entry (PoE) across the country. To this end, and in close coordination with the private sector, IOM secured a donation and installation of 20 air conditioners (AC) and two generators for Jabra Hospital. Located in the west of Khartoum City, Jabra is one of the best equipped hospitals in Khartoum, with access to an oxygen centre network and the necessary COVID-19 testing equipment. The facility is the primary centre to receive and isolate individuals infected with COVID-19.

Prior to beginning the rehabilitation work, IOM’s medical team conducted a training for workers at the hospital. IOM also distributed personal protective equipment (PPE) materials to ensure the safety of the workers, medical teams and patients. IOM continues to liaise with government counterparts to ensure that front-line workers are covered under the National Health Insurance Fund (NHIF) and that safe PPE protocols are being followed.

**“We are working closely with our governmental and community partners to identify the most acutely vulnerable groups and will target our immediate response for their benefit,”**  
said Catherine Northing,  
Chief of Mission, IOM Sudan

“Migrants, despite their status, should be protected from COVID-19. IOM efforts is to reach most of the migrants to get the needed support to be able to protect themselves and their beloved ones,” said Salih Idress, Coordinator of IOM’s Migrant Response and Resource Centre (MRRC).

Beyond the pandemic’s health impacts, COVID-19 has rapidly evolved into a socio-economic crisis, pushing already vulnerable people into more precarious situations. In recent years, Sudan’s economy has spiralled, with GDP halving between 2011 and 2019, and a currency fallout impacting purchasing power. Many of the international migrants residing across Sudan have lost key sources of income or become stranded due to mobility restrictions.



In response to this spike in vulnerability, IOM provided emergency food support to more than 2,440 migrants from the Ethiopian, Eritrean, Filipino, Nigerian, Nigerien and Chadian communities in Khartoum and Gedaref states.

Talking to the impact of the assistance, Fatima\*, a 25-year-old mother of three, currently stranded in Sudan alone with her children, said, “Now I am jobless due to the COVID-19 lockdown, such support means a lot to me and my little children, I appreciated the support provided by IOM.”



A disabled migrant mother of three receives food support through IOM's Migrant Resource Centre (MRC) in Gederef, Sudan ©IOM Sudan

Additional support has been given to un-accompanied children and youth stranded in religious schools due to mobility restrictions. To date, IOM has provided food support, hygiene kits and PPE to a total of 184 students across 19 schools in Khartoum and five schools in Gedaref.

“I deeply appreciate the Migrant Resource Centre (MRC) team for visiting the school and distributing PPE, which

mean a lot for us as Chadian migrants living away from our relatives and needing support in this difficult health situation,” said a 17 years-old Chadian student.

In-line with the belief that COVID-19 can only be stopped through a comprehensive approach that addresses root vulnerabilities, as well as the health impacts of the pandemic, IOM continues to implement protection activities through its Migrant Resource Response Centre (MRRC) in Khartoum State and MRC in Gedaref State to reduce the impacts of COVID-19 on vulnerable migrants. Activities include outreach to migrant communities through a help line and SMS messages on COVID-19 awareness, phone-based medical information, and psycho-social support counselling; provision of medicine; and provision of food and non-food items (NFIs).



## STORY 9 - ALGERIA

### **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 as 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.





## STORY 10 - YEMEN

### How sewing face masks is helping displaced women in Yemen

Six years of conflict, disease outbreaks and extreme weather conditions have crippled Yemen's economy. Most people in the country are now struggling to meet their daily needs.

Among those suffering the fallout of the economic decline are displaced populations, millions of whom are in dire need of all forms of critical humanitarian assistance.

“My younger brother has a genetic red blood cell disorder called haemolytic anaemia and my family cannot afford his medicine. So, I am always looking for ways to help them financially,” said Asmaa Mohammed.

The 20-year-old was originally from Jabal Sabar in Yemen's Taizz Governorate and is now displaced. “I live with my elderly parents, my 14-year-old brother (he's the one who is sick) and my little sister in Al Waqeer displacement site in Ibb Governorate. We have no source of income except whatever humanitarian organizations provide us with,” Asmaa explained.

After COVID-19 broke out, job opportunities—particularly casual labour—began disappearing. To survive, families have often resorted to sharing responsibility among members

to meet basic household needs, with collective responsibility across all members to provide for the household.

Seeking to support displaced women's ability to earn an income, IOM launched a face-mask-making project in 37 displacement sites across Ibb and Marib Governorates.

"We received a lot of requests from displaced women asking for support to start small projects," explained Sabah Al Qubati, IOM Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM) team member in Marib Governorate. "IOM responded to the call and taught them how to make masks, helping them to earn an income while preventing the spread of COVID-19."

Around 45 women in Ibb and 165 women in Marib took part in this initiative. The women received training, as well as the tools and materials needed to make the masks and generate income.

IOM camp coordinators asked each woman to make as many masks as she could. So far, the total across the two governorates is more than 150,760. Upon completion of the masks, IOM provided the women with financial incentives for participating.

Asmaa really wanted to help her sick brother, Osama, who is not able to study because of his illness and, who sadly, but not uncommon for Yemen, works as well.

"I spent nearly eight full days making masks and I was able to produce 150. When I finished, I received an incentive from IOM and bought some goods for my brother so that he can sell them in his kiosk and earn money for his medicine," added Asmaa.

After receiving the masks from the women, IOM distributed them to displaced families who are at greater risk of being infected with COVID-19 due to their living conditions and limited access to services.

During the distributions, IOM teams conducted COVID-19 awareness sessions to share important information with displaced communities on protection and infection prevention and control measures, and on how to properly wear the masks.

Asmaa is just one of the women who participated in this project. All of them wish to have a sustained and stable source of income to continue to provide for their families.

This activity comes in addition to another mask making project that IOM worked on in Marib and Hadramaut Governorates, through which, more than 50,000 masks were produced, bringing the total number of masks made with both projects' support to over 200,750.



## STORY 11 - EGYPT

### **IOM helps hundreds of vulnerable migrants in Egypt amid COVID-19 pandemic**

COVID-19 has generated various socio-economic impacts on the estimated 6.3 million migrants currently hosted in Egypt. Many migrants have lost key sources of income, while others, who were waiting to return to their countries of origin, remained stranded due to travel restrictions that were put in place to curb the spread of the virus.

Ding\*, a South Sudanese national and a father of seven, previously worked as an English teacher in private school in Alexandria. Due to the prevention measures that were adopted to slow the spread of COVID-19, the school where he used to work was closed and he lost his job.

“I am doing my best to provide for my family. Besides my job as a teacher, I used to work as a security guard and sometimes at construction sites. Now, I cannot find a job in any of these sectors,” he explains.

Ding is considered by IOM to be one of 600,000 vulnerable migrants in Egypt who encounter a wide range of challenges, including inadequate access to food, health, and education services in addition to limited access to socio-economic opportunities.

To address Ding's emergent needs, IOM provided food boxes, and financial support to Ding, while he searched for a job to support his family. IOM continues to follow up on his situation to offer more support when needed in coordination with Ding and his community leaders.

In response to requests for support received from migrants, community leaders, partner organisations and embassies, IOM in Egypt has procured and distributed more than 2,500 food and hygiene kits in different cities across Egypt, with support from the European Union through the EU-IOM Joint Initiative for Migrant Protection and Reintegration. This includes Alexandria, Cairo, Hurghada and Al-Fayoum. Since the start of the pandemic, IOM has worked closely with community leaders to identify and assist the most vulnerable migrants in Egypt, like Ding.

"Thanks to the collaboration with IOM, we managed to help many people in our community to cope with the pandemic and raise their awareness about COVID-19 prevention measures," said Ali Abdulrahman, the Eritrean Refugees Community Leader in Egypt. "IOM's support to the Eritrean Refugee Committee in Egypt is helpful during the challenging COVID-19 times."

To ensure adequate information sharing on COVID-19, IOM also increased its awareness raising activities through community leaders. To do this, information tools with guidance from the World Health Organization (WHO) are provided to community leaders who these circulate more broadly.

In addition to the distribution of the food and hygiene boxes, IOM provided socio-economic and medical assistance to 57 vulnerable migrants in Egypt. Housing assistance was also provided to 14 migrants that experienced delays in voluntarily returning to their countries of origin because of travel restrictions.

Despite the closure of the airport for a period of time, IOM also facilitated the voluntary and safe return of two stranded female migrants from Egypt to Kenya. The two migrants were flown back home through a repatriation flight that was organized by the Embassy of Kenya in Egypt on 21 June 2020.

This assistance was made possible thanks to the European Union funding through the EU-IOM Joint Initiative for Migrant Protection and Reintegration, a comprehensive programme that aims to save lives, protect and assist migrants along key migration routes in Africa. The programme was launched in December 2016 with funding from the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF).





## STORY 12 - MOROCCO

### **IOM responds to the urgent needs of Vulnerable Migrants in Morocco**

The state of emergency declared in Morocco on 20 March 2020 to limit the spread of COVID-19 has profoundly impacted marginalized social groups, including migrant communities. Working mostly in the informal sector, and on a day-to-day basis, many migrants, including those stranded and hoping to cross to European shores, found themselves excluded from traditional support systems and saw their daily income disappear overnight.

This is the case for Ange, a young, single Cameroonian woman who lives in Salé, a town bordering Morocco's capital city, Rabat. "I am sorry, I am a bit moved..." she says in an emotional voice when asked to talk about her living conditions during the period of confinement. Ange's journey to Morocco was long and arduous. She left home in Cameroon to Equatorial Guinea. Then to Benin and, thereafter, to Niger to cross over to Algeria before arriving in Morocco, completely exhausted, in 2017. "I was between life and death...my only hope throughout my journey was to stay alive."

Ange lost loved ones who embarked on this dangerous journey alongside her, with the sadness of not seeing her families back home, a recurrent nightmare. "Many of my loved ones who were traveling with me died during this journey. They succumbed to the difficulties faced," she explains bitterly, before continuing in dismay.

“They were tired...they died out of hunger and thirst. Those who were sick died due to lack of healthcare...”

Ange paused a bit and let out a deep sigh before continuing. “It’s God’s grace, I am here today!” A way to remind us of the strength and resilience of migrants despite all the challenges they may face.

Ange is among the beneficiaries of medical services, critically including psychosocial support, provided by IOM Morocco implementing partner, the Association for the Fight against AIDS (in French “Association de Lutte Contre le Sida – ALCS”). Services and support are provided through the framework of the sub-regional project, “Fostering the health and protection of vulnerable migrants transiting through Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt Libya, and Yemen” funded supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland.

“When the state of emergency was declared in Morocco due to COVID-19, I was worried for my health. Like everyone else, I had never experienced such a crisis.” Due to her poor physical and mental health conditions, Ange was even more worried when she learnt about the confinement measures and national curfew in place nationwide as of 17 April 2020. “I asked myself how am going to cope on my own!” She continues, “A few days later, ALCS called me. I was so relieved when I received my first food basket at the beginning of the confinement. And delivered at home! I did not even have to move or make any effort. The basket included, food items, gel sanitizers, disinfectants, and bleach. I was so relieved knowing that the association did not forget us, especially, during a period where this virus is a threat to the world.”

In addition to food basket distributions, IOM’s implementing partners in Morocco other than ALCS provide psychosocial support, medical assistance and sensitization on public health measures enforced by the Ministry of Health. Talking to the impact of this, Ange explains, “I learned from ALCS about hand washing and disinfection of households. By receiving the food basket, I understood that I was not alone, and this reduced my stress. It cheered me up and felt a bit more reassured for my health. It really struck me and that’s why I am talking about it.”

To urgently respond to the needs of vulnerable migrants in distress, IOM collaborated with active civil society partners in Morocco and other institutional partners, in coordination with local and national authorities. This collaboration was to provide assistance from 1 April to 14 June 2020, to more than 10,708 beneficiaries, including 3,235 women and 1,431 unaccompanied and separated children. More information on the results of the activity can be found [here](#). IOM in Morocco also continues to contribute to the WHO-led United Nations working groups in line with the national response plan on COVID-19.



## STORY 13 - ALGERIA

### **Stranded in Algeria amid the COVID-19 crisis, Mariam wishes to build a new life back home**

To contain the spread of the COVID-19, many governments, including the Government of Algeria, have imposed several restrictions, including border closures. These lockdowns have impacted the hopes of many migrants to return home.

During this time, IOM has been coordinating with host governments and governments in countries of origin to open humanitarian corridors to allow for the voluntary return of stranded migrants.

Thanks to an agreement between Algerian and Malian authorities to temporarily lift travel restrictions, IOM has facilitated the safe and voluntary return of stranded migrants in mid-July from Algiers to Bamako. To date, eighty-four Malians were able to return safely home.

Mariam is one of them. Mariam, a 26-year-old Malian woman, travelled to Algeria in 2015 to start a bachelor's degree in computer science, thanks to a scholarship she received from the Malian Government.

The award came at the right time for her since she was having some family issues after getting married to a man from a different ethnic group.

“I travelled to Algeria alone and pregnant, and my husband joined me after a few months,” she says. In Algeria, Mariam started her studies and had two children while her husband worked on construction sites.

As a single mother of two children, she asked an Algerian family that she knew for support. They took care of her kids while she was in school. “The family accommodated and supported me. Thanks to them, I managed to finish my studies and to complete my university degree,” she said.

Following her graduation, Mariam searched for a job to stay in Algeria, but she could not find one. She then decided to return to Mali, but her plans were interrupted by the unprecedented global health crisis of COVID-19. Travel and movement restrictions were adopted in Algeria and she had to wait for restrictions to be lifted to return home.

A few weeks into lockdown, Mariam started to struggle to pay for basic needs and afford rent. Moreover, she feared for her and her children’s health during the COVID-19 pandemic. Having already been registered with IOM, she contacted the Algiers office and asked for support. Subsequently, she was offered accommodation and food assistance at IOM run transit facilities (DARV), a government structure that accommodates migrants waiting to return to their country of origin.

During her two months stay, the family benefitted from psycho-social support sessions and the distribution of non-food items (NFIs), including hygiene kits. “Before being taken care of by IOM, I felt lonely and isolated. I was alone with my children and I was afraid that they would get infected or something bad would happen to them,” says Mariam.

Mariam and her two children returned home on 14 July 2020. Upon her arrival in Mali, with the group of returnees, she underwent 14-days of mandatory quarantine in a government-managed facility.

She is also receiving reintegration assistance provided by IOM with support from the European Union through the EU-IOM Joint Initiative for Migrant Protection and Reintegration.

Reintegration assistance can include counselling or medical assistance for returnees, a reintegration grant to set up a small business, vocational training or job placement, and education for minors, as well as follow-up monitoring. In addition to her degree in computer science, she also obtained a bachelor’s degree in business management. She hopes these two degrees will give her a better chance of finding a job soon enough in Mali.

“Through my stay here [in Algeria], I learned to be autonomous and free, I learned what are my rights and what are my duties, I learned that a woman can accomplish a lot on their own. I also learned to have my own thoughts and opinions, and it is completely normal if they are different or they are opposed to those who surround me,” Mariam concluded.

This assistance was made possible thanks to the EU-IOM Joint Initiative for Migrant Protection and Reintegration through the European Union Emergency Trust Fund for Africa. The hygiene kits distributed to migrants in Algeria were provided under the African Regional Migration Program and funding from the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) of the U.S. Department of State.





## STORY 14 - TUNISIA

### **IOM supports the Ministry of Higher Education and scientific research in Tunisia to safely receive over 400 international students amidst the COVID-19 Crisis**

At Carthage airport, IOM staff welcomes a new cohort of international students, who would start their university studies in different Universities in Tunisia for the 2020-2021 academic year. Each year, Tunisia offers a number of scholarships to students from various countries to pursue their university degrees in Tunisia.

As the number of international students has increased worldwide from 2 million in 2000 to 5.3 million in 2017, so has the number of international students in Tunisia. The increase reflects Tunisia's national strategy to position itself as an international hub of higher education in North Africa, offering modern and advanced curricula to increasing numbers of international students.

IOM is in close partnership with the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (MESRS) through various joint projects, aiming to strengthen national capacity to attract and retain international students and widening the array of academic actors for enhanced evidence-based research on migration.

With MESRS, IOM has developed a welcome guide for international students to help them settle into their host country. IOM is also providing technical and financial support to different student-led initiatives aiming to facilitate reception and integration of international students in Tunisia.

To facilitate the safe reception of these international students during COVID-19 pandemic, IOM has provided accommodation to over 400 international students, from different countries, during the 7-day quarantine period required by national COVID-19 protocol.

For this year, following the tragic explosion in the port of Beirut, Tunisia decided to grant additional scholarships to Lebanese students as an act of solidarity with the Lebanese people, enabling them to undertake university studies in different disciplines. Ahmed\*, a freshmen Bachelor's Degree student from Lebanon, was one of these students who proudly spoke about his arrival to Tunisia.

"I applied for this scholarship after the tragic incident that happened in Beirut. After some time, I was informed that I had been selected to study in the city of Sfax. I am excited to be studying in a leading university in Tunisia. I am proud of this achievement because I have always been told that Tunisian educational system is well-known, and has a strong reputation."

Reflecting on the strained political and economic situation in Lebanon, Ahmed's story confirms the complex and various driving factors that motivates mobility of international students, who seek better quality of education, the acquisition of new talents and skills, and better socio-economic perspectives in their host countries.

International scholarship demonstrates the transnational links that international students can create between their countries of origins, host countries and third countries, in which they might seek additional skills, knowledge and professional experiences. "I am convinced that I would succeed in my studies, would subsequently be able to work in many other countries. It is true that, in the end, I would come back to my country, but I believe such a decision would only be once I learn about other countries, equip myself with strong professional skills and once I have secured my future".

After the students completed their quarantine period, IOM organized information sessions to prepare the students to settle into Tunisia. The sessions include a brief overview of the cultural, social and historical background of Tunisia along with a session on the prevention measures of COVID-19 and information on available mental and psychological support.

At the official welcome ceremony of the students, MESRS highlighted the newly-implemented strategies to adapt to the new circumstances imposed by COVID-19 and the inclusion of international students in the national response to the-19 pandemic and stressed the importance of the joint partnership with IOM.



## STORY 15 - LEBANON

### **Teams bring tuberculosis (TB) treatment to patients' doors in aftermath of Beirut explosions**

When an explosion rocked the Port of Beirut on 04 August 2020, Hamido had one main concern: what had happened to the medicine that kept his Tuberculosis (TB) under control and to the clinic where he had a check-up scheduled in the following days?

The health centre in the Beirut's Karantina neighbourhood that he relied on for treatment and the warehouse that stored his medicine was heavily damaged by the blast.

Any interruption to his treatment, he knew, would compromise the ability to fight the bacteria and overcome TB, which had left him sick for the past two months.

“We were luckily able to salvage the medicine stored in the severely damaged central warehouse and move it to a safe location in a hospital on the other side of the city,” said Dr. Nada Najem, an IOM doctor who oversees a joint programme with the Lebanese Ministry of Health (MoH).

Through the programme, Lebanese, migrant and refugee populations receive free testing and treatment for TB and HIV in nine centres across Lebanon.

In the days following the blast, staff of the programme and other volunteers came from as far as the Bekkaa Valley to help clean-up the damaged centre in Karantina.

“The first thing we did after cleaning up the centre was to meet with all the staff on the premises and figure out a way that we can continue serving our patients,” Dr. Najem continued.

The team quickly adapted to transform the clinic-based services into a mobile response that ensured patients remained on the path to recovery.

**“I was so relieved to learn that people will be coming to my home to bring me my medicine,”**  
said Hamido, one of the Lebanese patients receiving treatment.

“It typically takes six months for someone to recover from TB. During that time, patients must take drugs that ensure the TB will not become active. If there are any disruptions to the treatment, however, the disease remains in the body and can re-emerge, become active again and more resistant to drugs and then spread to others.

Ensuring people can continue their treatment is crucial so that people do not develop resistance to the medicine, weaken their immune system and disrupt their body’s ability to overcome the disease,” explained Dr. Najem.

“I was so relieved to learn that people will be coming to my home to bring me my medicine,” said Hamido, one of the Lebanese patients receiving treatment.

To strengthen outreach, health workers are accompanied by community health volunteers – members of diverse communities who are attune to cultural backgrounds and sensitivities of each patient. Most of the volunteers have themselves recovered from TB as part of the programme.

Yacoub is one of dozens of community health volunteers working with Syrian and Sudanese patients. Originally from Sudan, he came to Lebanon to work as a cleaner.



A few years ago, he fell sick with TB and was treated at the clinic.

“I’m able to help them because I understand their culture and I understand what it means to be sick with TB. When I tell them why they need to take their medication and listen to the doctor, they trust us,” said Yacoub.

Before contracting TB, Hamido sold vegetables in the local market to provide for his family. “About two months ago, I began to experience pain in my lungs. I could not eat anything, and I began to lose a lot of weight. I went to the hospital because I thought I had COVID-19. After I tested negative for COVID, they referred me to the clinic in Karantina... the doctors there diagnosed me with TB.”

**“Most TB patients come from less privileged backgrounds. They live in overcrowded homes – sometimes with two or three families in one room - where the hygienic state is inadequate.”**  
said Dr. Najem.

I went on medication for two months while I stayed isolated away from others. My sister and children also tested positive for TB but theirs is latent. We are all thankful now on medication. Now I must be very careful not to go out or spread it to others,” said Hamido.

This is no small challenge. He shares a bedroom with two children and his sister who has a disability.

“Most TB patients come from less privileged backgrounds. They live in overcrowded homes – sometimes with two or three families in one room - where the hygienic state is inadequate. Some are living in unfinished buildings. These conditions put people at a really high risk of contracting and spreading diseases like TB and COVID-19,” said Dr. Najem.

Many have no choice but to live in closed quarters with others. Those who come from high TB burden countries, like Ethiopia, are at an even higher risk.

For patients like Hamido, a mobile medical response means they do not have to risk infecting others, but it also reduces the risk of contracting COVID-19, which would

severely compromise their health.

To raise awareness on the dangers of COVID-19, program staff have also started to spread vital awareness materials on COVID-19 infection control on social media platforms and via WhatsApp to community health volunteers, who subsequently share with their network.



Yacoub rides a bike around Beirut to reach the homes of migrants and refugees who need treatment for tuberculosis.

©IOM Lebanon

IOM hopes that a new clinic will be ready to serve patients in the next two weeks, where diagnostics and treatment for drop-in patients can continue.

The Middle East Response programme has run in partnership with the Lebanese MoH since 2015.

Teams currently serve 750 people under the TB program. The project also spans five countries throughout the region with funding from the Global Fund.



## STORY 16 - MOROCCO

### **He walked for many days chasing the European dream, now he is back to Morocco doing business: Zakaria's story**

Morocco - Unable to support his family and provide for himself, Zakaria, a 23-year-old Moroccan man, embarked on a journey to Greece through Turkey hoping to build a better life in Europe. Now, he is back in Morocco doing business.

Prior to his departure, Zakaria used to work as a receptionist in a luxury hotel in Marrakech but he was not happy with the working conditions.

“I studied very hard to get the job and I left my family home to settle in Marrakech, but I wasn’t making enough money”, he explained. “I had to send money back home and pay for my daily expenses, which left me little or no money at all.”

“When I started seeing how happy young European people are when they were coming to the hotel, the dream of going to Europe started to grow fast. I resigned and decided to travel to Turkey,” Zakaria said.

After convincing his parents of the plans that he had in mind, Zakaria flew to Istanbul. “Before deciding to go to Turkey, I asked a few people and did some research to learn about the best and easiest roads to Europe,” he explained.

From Istanbul, he travelled to another coastal city where he found a temporary job in a Spanish restaurant. “I worked for three months to collect more money for my journey. Before the end of my legal stay in Turkey [90 days for Moroccan citizens], I asked my employer for support to get a work permit, but he refused,” Zakaria recalled.

Five days before the end of his legal stay in Turkey, Zakaria travelled back to Istanbul and then took a train to a city near the Turkish-Greek border where he met three Algerian people who had similar plans. They accepted him to join the group.

“We spent the night in a hotel near the border and the following day, we bought food and flashlights and headed towards the Turkish-Greek border during the night”, he recalled.

“We walked for 17 nights in a row. We slept during the day and walked during the night until we reached the Greek city of Thessaloniki. It was a tiring journey. My family thought I died.”

Once in Greece, Zakaria encountered many challenges. “I used to sleep in the streets, plus my mother had some health problems, so I decided to return to Morocco,” he said. Having no means to return home, Zakaria contacted IOM Greece and was assisted to voluntarily return to Morocco through the Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) programme.

Upon his arrival in Morocco, Zakaria attended several counselling and mentorship sessions organized by IOM and received reintegration assistance to set up a sheep farming business in the rural area of Beni Mellal.

“Although it is difficult to accept the fact that I failed to achieve my dream, IOM’s reintegration assistance enabled me to have a source of income once again and to help my family,” he concludes.

Zakaria is one of the 23 Moroccan returnees who have been supported towards a sustainable reintegration under the EU-IOM Joint Initiative for Migrant Protection and Reintegration in North Africa since June 2019.

The EU-IOM Joint Initiative for Migrant Protection and Reintegration was launched in December 2016, with support from the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa. It is the first comprehensive programme bringing together 26 African partner countries, the EU and IOM around the shared goal of ensuring that migration is safer, more informed, and better governed for both migrants and their communities.





## STORY 17 - YEMEN

### The importance of awareness raising during Yemen's COVID-19 outbreak

“I have a headache and I feel like I have the flu so I came here to get treatment but I had no idea!” said Muna, a displaced and pregnant Yemeni woman, discussing COVID-19 transmission during her visit to Abdulakawi, a health centre supported by IOM in Aden city. Although Muna was COVID-19 negative, she learned a lot about the virus and the ways it can be transmitted during her visit to the IOM-supported centre.

“I went to greet the doctor when I arrived in her office, but she said that physical contact is not allowed. She also explained to me why not. Now, I understand COVID-19 and its symptoms. I had seen videos about it on the TV, but I did not really understand. They just showed images without really explaining the symptoms and how it can be spread,” she added.

Muna came to Abdulakawi worried about what affect the headache and flu symptoms she was suffering from might be having on her baby. Although, she knew that COVID-19 was present in Aden, she was not aware that avoiding physical contact and keeping your distance from others, in addition to handwashing, are two key means of protecting yourself from the virus. “We are in an environment of poverty and lack of awareness,” said Dr. Bushra, a doctor at Abdulakawi health centre. “I have to give every patient that visits our health centre the correct information on COVID-19 prevention and its symptoms because many of them don’t know

much about the virus or how it spreads. We have to ensure that people living in this area, particularly displaced people who lack access to information, know how to protect themselves and their community,” she explained.

Verbal and visual information about how to avoid contracting COVID-19 have been shared throughout Aden, and other governorates, with different information-sharing techniques being tested constantly to ensure these messages reach the entire community, including people like Muna.

Since COVID-19 was first confirmed in Yemen in April 2020, cases have steadily risen in Aden, and while the official figures remain low given the lack of testing capacity across the country, humanitarians and health professionals are working under the assumption that the virus is now widespread. In a country where only 50 per cent of health facilities are fully functional,



Muna at Abdulakawi health centre, listens closely to Dr. Bushra's advice on COVID-19 prevention, protection, and response © IOM Yemen 2020

stories of illness and death from the local community are sadly confirming this assumption.

Like many families affected by Yemen's nearly six years of conflict, Muna, along with her husband and five children, was displaced multiple times before settling in Aden. Fleeing Taizz at the start of conflict, they went from a comfortable and peaceful life to joining the millions of displaced families across Yemen living in

harsh conditions with little access to essential services, such as healthcare.

“My life before the war was beautiful. We had enough to eat, drink and clothe ourselves. We had a house and we could even socialize easily. Now with this situation, it is extremely difficult. We have rent to pay with no salaries. And without any income, it is hard to care for our children when they become ill,” said Muna.

IOM supports 32 fixed health facilities across Yemen through the provision of medical supplies, including personal protective equipment (PPE), incentives and, when needed, rehabilitation of buildings. IOM has also been conducting COVID-19 awareness sessions, not just in these facilities, but in displacement sites, on key migrant routes and online. To help displaced Yemenis combat the spread of COVID-19, the Organization has also scaled up its distribution of hygiene kits as well as its water provision to displacement sites.

“Now the doctor made me aware, I will share information on COVID-19 with my children and husband, and even with my friends, sisters and aunts,” Muna concluded.



## STORY 18 - IRAQ

### Support for marginalized groups crucial in COVID-19 response

Socially disadvantaged and marginalized populations are disproportionately affected by ill-health. The WHO states that “certain populations, such as those with disability, may be impacted more significantly by COVID-19.” When these individuals are members of the large Internally Displaced Person (IDP), refugee, returnee and migrant communities in Iraq, that already face challenges accessing health care and relevant information, the impact is more acute.

On May 12, the Iraqi Alliance of Disability Organizations (IADO) distributed packages containing hand sanitizer, face masks, gloves and soap to members of the alliance with disabilities living in and around Baghdad. The packages were destined for individuals who have difficulties accessing these items, that are essential for protecting against and slowing the spread of COVID-19. The items were provided to IADO by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) as an in-kind donation, which was made possible with generous support from the Government of Australia’s Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. The Government of Australia continues to be a strong supporter of disability inclusion in IOM Iraq’s programming.

“During this pandemic, the suffering of people with disabilities has multiplied due to isolation; hiatus of many service institutions; and limited transportation options,” said Mowafaq Al Khafajy, Head of IADO. “There should be a plan to respond to the challenges faced by people with disabilities, and to psychological crises. Hotlines must be set up to help people with disabilities and awareness campaigns should be done in sign language too.”

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“Through cycles of conflict and economic hardship in Iraq, people with disabilities have faced acute challenges,” said IOM Iraq Chief of Mission Gerard Waite. “The needs of people with disabilities must be fully considered across our projects and programming, including our COVID-19 response plan in support of vulnerable host communities, IDPs, returnees, migrants and refugees.”





## STORY 19 - TUNISIA

### **IOM providing much needed support to migrants in Tunisia**

Since the outbreak of COVID-19, life in Tunisia has changed fundamentally. Tunisians are now living with exceptional home-confinement measures that have altered their work, personal life and stability. Similarly, migrants across the country have confronted new and unprecedented circumstances, often leaving them in difficult and fragile situations. A recent IOM study on the impacts of COVID-19 in Tunisia showed that the proportion of migrants working has dropped from 66 per cent before the pandemic, to just 9 per cent today. This loss of livelihoods has been driven by the mobility restrictions put in place to curb the spread of the virus and their knock-on economic effects. These migrants come from all walks of life including international students pursuing higher education, professional apprentices and workers actively contributing to different sectors of the Tunisian economy.

To combat this, IOM supports the Government of Tunisia to successfully ensure the non-discriminatory treatment of migrants in terms of access to healthcare during the COVID-19 response. IOM and its partners have also been working to reach the most vulnerable migrants across the country to respond to their unique needs through the distribution of food and hygiene kits. To date, IOM in Tunisia has supported over 9,060 migrants with direct assistance since the beginning of the pandemic.

Talking to the impact of this support alongside the difficulties faced by migrants, one beneficiary of IOM's food voucher distribution program, residing in Tunis said, "With the current situation, I cannot even afford to pay the rent of my accommodation. But, at least with this distribution of vouchers, I can do basic groceries to feed my family, my niece and my sisters. It is thanks to IOM that I will be able to overcome this period"..

Other migrants have echoed the same concerns and fears. A single male Comorian living in Tunisia, told IOM, "I used to work in the tourism sector in Tozeur, in the south of Tunisia, but due to the Coronavirus I have lost my job and I am finding myself in a very complicated situation without any financial support and confined at my home". IOM, in response to this, continued to provide food vouchers to vulnerable migrants since the beginning of the pandemic.

These testimonies highlight just some examples of the difficulties that many migrants continue to face, often alone and without family or community support. In addition to those working in Tunisia, international students are also confronted with unique challenges in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. With many international money transfer agencies closed, students have no access to their remittances and are facing significant financial losses. One Comorian student mentioned that although she has been living in Tunisia for the last two years for her master's degree, she is now unable to access her monthly allowance, which was a key source of income. While IOM assistance was able to meet her most urgent needs, such as food and hygiene, she mentioned that many other migrants from the Comorian community face much more challenging times and they are in need for further support.

As the leading agency on migration, many IOM staff are at the front line to respond to the urgent needs of migrants and vulnerable populations in a rapidly changing environment. Through being on the ground, IOM has been able to provide critical medical, economic and legal assistance to affected populations across Tunisia. One IOM staff member mentioned, "Our work is very essential to provide much needed help to migrants, who are finding themselves in unusual and vulnerable situations, affecting the different aspects of their life". She explains that, before the pandemic, IOM had ongoing collaborations with a variety of partners such as community associations and public health professionals, enabling them to identify migrants in need for psychological and physical health assistance. Given the confinement measures, she explains that IOM's free toll number has provided a critical avenue for many vulnerable migrants seeking urgent and critical health assistance. Noting the importance of strong relationships with local partners, she added, "[...] for a long time, IOM has been working to develop outreach activities and training for the agents of different local municipalities. Such actions have enabled IOM to be known and trusted at the local level and has enabled the organisation to learn more, among others, about the health needs of many vulnerable migrants."



## STORY 20 - Jordan

### Behind the Jordanian COVID-19 national response plan

Amman, Jordan - Nurse Raja Abu Trabeh had 30 years of work experience with the Infection Prevention and Control in Jordan. In the beginning of COVID-19 outbreak, she, together with nurse Sultan, were seconded by IOM to the Jordanian Ministry of Health (MoH) to join their teams and support in developing a COVID-19 National Response Plan. They were among the first responders to the pandemic in Jordan.

“Where one can begin, when you have to find the solution to a global pandemic that you didn’t had much information about?” Raja asked herself. “Information was crucial! So, we started by researching about the virus, consulting with our partners and assessing the existing capacities of our health facilities in order to design a plan that will help reduce the spread of the virus.” Raja explained. “You have to understand that it was a learning process that required time. Lockdowns were the most logical way to start with. They minimized the spread of the virus while we were simultaneously learning more about it and increasing our capacities to respond to the challenges.”



Mrs. Abu Trabeh continued: “UN agencies played an important role in providing the latest information regarding the virus, but also the much-needed logistic support when the demands increased”. IOM’s logistical support to MoH, included distribution of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), donation of laptops and tablets for data collection of infected patients as well as a system for conducting rapid tests among other equipment.

The Deputy Secretary General for Primary Health Care at MoH Dr. Ghazi Sharkas said: “The immediate action that one country should undertake to prevent the virus from entering is to close all the Points of Entry (PoE) and build the capacity to respond to the virus.



IOM seconded nurse Raja to MoH at the beginning of the pandemic © IOM Jordan 2021

In that case, IOM played an important role in supporting us with the assessment of all PoEs, contributing to the enhancement of the border capacities and taking subsequent actions to keep the borders under control,” including upgrading the infrastructure.

Dr. Sharkas continued: “Now, one of the main challenges we face is time, as in, getting the vaccines on time and distribute them on time. Our systems are under pressure to procure the vaccines and make them available to everyone in the country, including refugees and migrants. We welcome the efforts of the international community in supporting Jordan to facilitate the distribution of vaccines.”

IOM made available to MoH several cars, which have been and are currently used for COVID-19 vaccination. The IOM medical team distributed essential medicines to Syrian refugees and Jordanians who are residing in remote areas. They kept regular monitoring of TB patients to make sure they continued with their treatment despite the lockdowns and movement restrictions.

Nurse Raja hopes that a “big number of people will be receiving their vaccines and inshallah by the end of the year the situation will get back as close as possible to normal,” but still emphasizing on the importance to adhering to the preventive measures. “Over the past year we have witnessed a rapid change in people’s behavior, where keeping the distance, washing hands and wearing masks became the norm, and it is important to keep it up.”