



07 May 2020

Dear Friends:

Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) MENA continues monitor the ongoing crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects on our programmes even as modifications are being made to the strict lockdown in all the countries where we work. As we prepare for a slow shift to something new, we remain very grateful to our staff who have demonstrated rapid ingenuity and deep concern for those we accompany, and to our donors for their flexibility as we respond to this crisis together.

Most of our education and psycho-social support programmes continue remotely. It remains our realistic assessment that in-person programmes will not resume before the summer. We continue to rely on the guidance of WHO and local public health officials to determine the “return” date, and nothing is clear now. With this possibility, we continue deliberate planning.

Hygiene kits and food and rent assistance has begun to be distributed in a safe way in some of our programmes, and we are seeking funding in others. We are working with local government requirements and following WHO guidelines in all distribution activities. This pandemic will continue to require flexibility and ingenuity from us all.

Below we share information (data from 06 May 2020) on five different areas:

- Regional office
- Iraq
- Jordan
- Lebanon
- Syria.

Thank you for your flexibility and continued support of those we accompany.

Regional office

- Financial transfers to JRS MENA projects may be delayed because of the ongoing economic instability in Lebanon and the impact on the banking sector. JRS Regional office may not be able to transfer /withdraw any money. We are monitoring this and are working on to resolve these disruptions on

money. We are monitoring this and are working on to resolve these disruptions on our programmes.

- In accordance with the GoL 5-step plan for return to work, the Regional office has developed a work plan that provides for social distancing and safe practice for welcoming staff back to the office gradually.
- All trainings, field visits, or donor visits have been cancelled, or postponed.

Iraq

Country

- 2480 confirmed cases with 102 deaths.
- Travel ban continues with no firm end date. NGOs have been exempted from the travel ban but it is still very difficult to operate as enforcement is strict and cautious. All travel remains prohibited even for NGOs between KRI and GoI.
- Baghdad and Erbil airports remain closed to commercial flights.
- From 19 March lockdown in all governorates.
- All banks remain closed which limits access to funds.

Country office

- Some staff have been able to return to the office. Gradual return within WHO guidelines.
- Regular staff meetings continue remotely.

Projects

- (IRQ05) Lead psychologist & project director Firas Sulaiman on call for urgent psychiatric cases during the entire period.
- (IRQ05) Purchased and distributed psychiatric medication for 248 cases.
- (IRQ05) Provided transportation for all MHPSS cases in JRS vehicles while applying social distancing rules.
- Individual medical follow-up consultations and distribution of psychiatric medication for all cases in Qaraqosh.
- Shared COVID-19 prevention information to project beneficiaries with access to smartphones.
- Shared links to online education resources for teenage IDP children who have smartphones.
- 75% of beneficiaries have smart phones but all list cost of internet connection as a limiting factor.
- Provided remote child protection training for child protection focal points.
- (IRQ10) Shared links to online education resources for teenage IDP children who have smartphones.

Jordan

Country

- Confirmed cases: 473 with 9 deaths
- GoJ has closed all borders until at least the end of Ramadan (approx. 23 May 2020).
- General lockdown and curfews in effect for the entire country.
- GoJ coordinating the humanitarian cash assistance and in-kind distributions.
- No permissions of movement for the NGOs outside camps.

Country office

- As GoJ restrictions become less strict, developing ways in which staff can return to the office. Maintaining WHO recommendations within work space.
- All reporting, monitoring, and recruitment process (on-line only), will continue.
- Most staff continues to work remotely.
- Social media awareness campaign on COVID –19 continues.
- Regular staff meetings (CO and projects) occur remotely.

Projects

- Remote Education program basic survey lists over 50% of respondents list access to internet as the single biggest problem with continuing education of their children
- Edu programs continue to use and improve through Google and WhatsApp platforms for remote learning
- A task force of three members from the projects is being formed to ensure that JRS response meets the needs of the people, also to train the staff and prepare for the next stage after reopening.
- Educational and psychosocial programmes of J02 and J03 remain suspended. This includes the suspension of home visits.
- J03 PPSE program are utilizing Google classrooms for all levels and for Case Management course: 60% of the materials are going well, still working on the 40%.
- J02 teachers are available for the students through hotlines and utilizing virtual WhatsApp classrooms; responsiveness level is 60% for the ages 9 -12 years and 40% for 13- 16 years. We have shared the links for the online learning channels produced by the MoE.
- Teachers have been trained in Online teaching.
- MHPSS hotline is open for those who need psychosocial support.
- The Home Visits teams have established a phone line that is open every day from 9 am – 5 pm to receive calls for any emergency cases for referral or medical assistance.
- Coordinators and project directors are attending the sector working groups
- Staff care meetings online; spaces to enjoy time together to break isolation.

Lebanon

Country

- Confirmed cases: 750 with 25 deaths
- GoL has developed a 5 step plan for return of various sectors of the economy.
- GoL has announced a “Lockdown” restricting movement outside of the house for everyone until April 26.
- Travel ban restricting all non-emergency arrivals by air, land or sea is also in place until June 8.
- Protests over the economic and political situation have resumed in late April. There has been one death and many injuries.
- Major currency fluctuations affect the value of staff salary and the security of banking system.
- 22 April was the first confirmed case of a person with COVID-19 in a camp setting. This was in Jalil camp in the Bekaa.

Country office

- JRS Country Office continues to work remotely but has begun plans for measured return to office in line with the 5 step plan of the GoL.
- Regular staff meeting for CO and projects with updates and planning for the future.
- Social media and poster campaigns on social distancing, hygiene, protection resources continue to be shared on JRS Lebanon Facebook page videos and posters which are produced by MOH and WHO.

Projects

- Planning and Training based on WHO guidelines has begun remotely as we see some possibility of some projects opening in modified capacity in the summer. Principals, teachers, and bus drivers are all working to develop safety plans for education programmes.
- Social workers have developed games and distribute via WhatsApp that increase social interaction and teach about violence reduction in the household.
- JRS continues WhatsApp groups for distance learning for children. Lessons are short, approx. 1 minute, followed by an exercise. This seems to be working for despite limited internet access for many families.
- Continued decreased participation of students in remote learning in poorest areas. Access to internet (for family or for women and children in a family) is most likely the reason. We will continue to investigate.
- Home visits team phone contact families daily.
- Medicine for urgent cases is still provided in a safe way. However, because of the economic difficulties in Lebanon all medicine is becoming more difficult to find and purchase. This is already a significant issue.

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- JRS has begun safe distribution of hygiene related supplies to be available in our projects (soap, bleach, paper towels, sanitizers...) following the instructions provided by WHO, MOH, and MEHE.
- Social workers continue sending weekly family conversation topics on how to deal with certain cases/behaviors at home (anger, depression, fear, etc.)
- Psychosocial support groups continue every week via WhatsApp; each group session lasts 2 hours.
- Social Center English classes for adult men level 1 and 2 and Arabic for women level 1, 2, & 3 continue to be very interactive on the WhatsApp groups for these classes and reviewing the material with the students via and will be moving forward with the curriculum via WhatsApp as well
- Planning for a structure to care for social workers and psychologists who have carried additional burdens during this time of added stress for all beneficiaries.
- Developing remote support groups for teachers.

Syria

Country

- Confirmed cases: 45 with 3 deaths
- Continued increases in cost of basic food materials and PPE.
- Syrian Government has ordered that all schools, and universities remain closed. GoS has ordered the suspension of all activities and gathering held by organizations, churches, mosques, etc. through at least the end of Ramadan.

Country office

- JRS Syria staff have begun a safe process of return to office. Hygiene and social distancing procedures are in place.
- Regular staff meetings remain via internet.
- Finance, M&E and IS teams remain especially busy with grants, proposals, reports, and questions from donors.

Projects

- All activities remain suspended in Jeramana, AlKafrun and AlSakhour.
- JRS has re-opened the Health Project in Aleppo after developing a plan for service that provided for the safety of beneficiaries as well as staff. Staff of this project report a great sense of joy at being able to return to the work (safely) that is so necessary in this crisis.
- All programme teams have now established a COVID19 Task force to prepare for the next steps in their circumstances.

- Teams in all projects have established a system of phone check ins with families.
- Remote/ on-line learning not possible in Syria. Families do not have mobile phones. Education team has developed and safely distributed a learning packet for children.
- PSS materials for Social distancing support amid Corona distributed with education materials.