



Infection prevention and control (IPC) measures at the IOM Migration Health Assessment Centre (MHAC) in Accra, Ghana. © IOM 2020

CONTEXT

Since it was initially reported on 31 December 2019, the novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) causing coronavirus disease (COVID-19) has spread rapidly across the globe, leading the World Health Organization (WHO) to declare it a Public Health Emergency of International Concern on 30 January 2020 and a pandemic on 11 March 2020. The pandemic has affected many countries and forced governments to take unprecedented actions to prevent the spread of COVID-19, as well as to mitigate its impacts in terms of health, society and the economy.

Restrictions on international travel, in-country movement limitations imposed by host governments, temporary cessation of visa application centres and general safety considerations led to the temporary suspension of many of IOM's routine pre-migration health activities. As a result, IOM engaged in discussions with its member states and adjusted its programming to provide support in the COVID-19 response, while continuing to promote the health and well-being of migrants.

CAPACITY TO RESPOND

Since 1951, IOM has delivered [pre-migration health activities](#) (PMHA), through its Global Migration Health Assessment Programme (HAP), on behalf of destination countries and migrants. These activities are undertaken through 69 IOM

Migration Health Assessment Centres (MHACs) located across Africa, Asia, Europe and the Middle East, as well as through mobile teams in remote areas and a large network of partner service providers.

IOM has an experienced health workforce engaged in PMHA, including over 800 physicians, nurses and other health staff specialized in areas such as laboratory, radiology, medical information technology and more.

IOM currently operates 27 laboratories across Africa, Asia and the Middle East and collaborates with external partner laboratories. 18 of IOM's laboratories are equipped with GeneXpert instruments, enabling rapid, real-time reverse transcription polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR)-based COVID-19 testing using the Xpert Xpress SARS-CoV-2 assay (Cepheid, USA). IOM is also establishing another cartridge-based system, the Molbio TrueNat (Molbio, India), with 29 instruments procured. Both cartridge-based systems allow for the rapid testing and detection of COVID-19 to be completed within one hour. Additionally, IOM is implementing the high-throughput semi-automated Thermo Fisher system in several locations where the workload is heavy, enabling up to 500 tests to be performed per day. As the availability of diagnostic testing kits remains limited, this diversification of testing platforms helps to ensure the continuity of COVID-19 testing across multiple settings.

In addition to laboratory services, many of IOM's MHACs are equipped with radiology capacity, as well as treatment capacity for certain conditions. Moreover, IOM has extensive experience and capacity in the delivery of vaccination services, including a robust procurement and distribution framework, a global vaccine inventory management system, technical expertise, and a trained workforce. This capacity may be harnessed to support COVID-19 vaccination efforts.



Loading the Xpert Xpress SARS-CoV-2 cartridge into the GeneXpert instrument at the IOM laboratory in Nairobi, Kenya. © IOM 2020

IOM MIGRATION HEALTH ASSESSMENT PROGRAMME ACTIVITIES IN THE CONTEXT OF COVID-19

DELIVERY OF ESSENTIAL SERVICES

Following the temporary suspension of routine activities in many of IOM's MHACs, IOM continued to provide essential services to beneficiaries. These included maintaining communication with, and responding to queries from beneficiaries through its call centres, providing care for refugees with significant medical conditions, and where requested, providing emergency migration health assessments for urgent humanitarian cases. With the evolution of the COVID-19 pandemic, most MHACs have gradually re-opened where the country context permitted

through the implementation of a series of preventive and control measures to maintain the safety of IOM staff and beneficiaries. These include reduced appointments to avoid crowding, physical distancing, triage to screen for COVID-19, hygiene measures, awareness-raising and health education for migrants, and provision of enhanced personal protective equipment (PPE) for staff.



COVID-19 related health education in Beirut, Lebanon. © IOM 2020

ADDITIONAL PRECAUTIONS DURING MOVEMENTS

Additional measures within the context of PMHA have been implemented to minimize the risk of transmission to beneficiaries during any movements that take place. These include, among others:

- the provision of additional pre-embarkation checks;
- the provision of pre-departure COVID-19 RT-PCR testing and documentation of the results according to receiving country or airline requirements;
- distribution of COVID-19-related health education materials and awareness-raising on prevention measures during travel;
- providing beneficiaries with tissues and hand sanitizer, as well as PPE where required;
- ensuring information sharing for the continuity of cross-border measures, such as completion of arrival forms and arrangements for quarantine when necessary.

GUIDANCE DEVELOPMENT

To ensure that services continue to be delivered safely, IOM subject matter experts have undertaken the development of guidance on topics such as infection prevention and control, COVID-19 triage, remote home monitoring (of suspected and confirmed COVID-19 patients) and laboratory testing. Guidelines and other resources for staff are stored in a central repository for ease of access. This, in combination with procurement of necessary materials, such as PPE and laboratory test kits, and training of staff, will ensure that the necessary conditions are in place to safeguard migrant and staff safety and to allow for the provision of both traditional and new services.



Testing for COVID-19 during a pre-embarkation check in Beirut, Lebanon. © IOM 2020

SUPPORT TO OTHER PROGRAMMES AND PARTNERS

IOM HAP is actively engaging with national and international partners, including by:

- donating PPE and other supplies for the COVID-19 response;
- providing COVID-19-related primary or acute-care services;
- providing technical assistance to Ministries of Health and others;
- supporting screening for COVID-19 at points of entry;
- supporting other migration health programming.

SUPPORT TO THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM

As part of its COVID-19 response, IOM contributes to the United Nations (UN) systemwide efforts in ensuring that UN personnel are adequately protected with regard to medical needs so that they can continue to fulfill their vital duties across the world – often at the frontline of humanitarian emergencies.

This framework, called the “[First Line of Defence](#)” (FLoD), entails the engagement of IOM HAP medical capacities and infrastructure to provide reliable and high-quality medical services to eligible UN personnel and their dependents. Implemented in 18 countries in the first phase, it includes the delivery of a range of services which vary according to context, such as:

- Laboratory services, including testing for COVID-19 and other laboratory tests;
- Clinical services, including clinical visits, isolation, quarantine and referral for a higher-level of care, such as hospitalization and medical evacuation, where needed;
- Tele-health and home monitoring services;
- Medical movement support.

To support this, a series of standard operating procedures and technical guidance documents have been developed, based on documentation from WHO and the UN Medical Directors Network. To ensure effective implementation of the guidelines, comprehensive staff training is delivered through webinars, interactive discussions and online trainings. This ensures that international standards and best practices are followed and national standards of care are respected as required.

IOM has also further enhanced its capacity to deliver through:

- Additional health staff credentialing to ensure required skills and competencies;
- The establishment of isolation facilities;
- Refurbishment of clinical and laboratory facilities; procurement of COVID-19 testing instruments and kits;
- Adaptation of medical software for secure data entry and inventory management.

In addition, the IOM migration health informatics team has established several tools and platforms to facilitate programme activities. These include:

- A call and query registry tool;
- An online appointment system;
- A feedback management system;
- A telemedicine solution, which incorporates appointment booking, a virtual waiting room, and recording and transmitting self-observations, in addition to video- and audio-conferencing features (under development).

All data are collected, processed and stored in accordance with IOM Data Protection Principles.



Infection prevention and control (IPC) training for staff in Accra, Ghana. © IOM 2020

IOM CAPACITY FOR DELIVERY OF THE FLOD PROGRAMME AS OF JANUARY 2021



Services available in **18** countries*



Isolation facilities established and equipped in **3** countries; Burundi (30 beds), Nepal (2 beds) and United Republic of Tanzania (12 beds)



9 sites providing remote home monitoring services



16 sites providing SARS-CoV-2 testing services



62,000 cartridge-based tests (Cepheid and Molbio) procured with **12** sites now equipped with both GeneXpert and Molbio test platforms. The Thermo Fisher system is being implemented in **3** sites.



262 health staff accredited to provide FLoD services

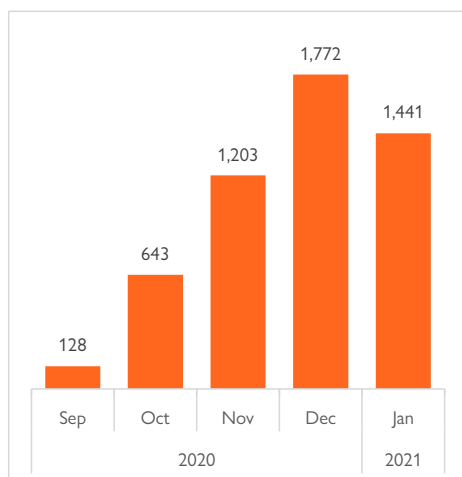
*Burundi, Cambodia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Ghana, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Nepal, Nigeria, Philippines, Rwanda, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Uganda, Ukraine, United Republic of Tanzania

Over 6,500 UN staff and dependents received at least one service under the IOM FLoD programme as of January 2021. Selected services delivered are highlighted in the graphs below. In addition, several locations also provided psychosocial support and ensured that beneficiaries were kept well-informed

through the delivery of COVID-19 information sessions and webinars. By taking care of the health needs of its personnel, the UN system, including IOM, is responding to their due diligence responsibility to their staff and is contributing to the protection of public health in the host country.

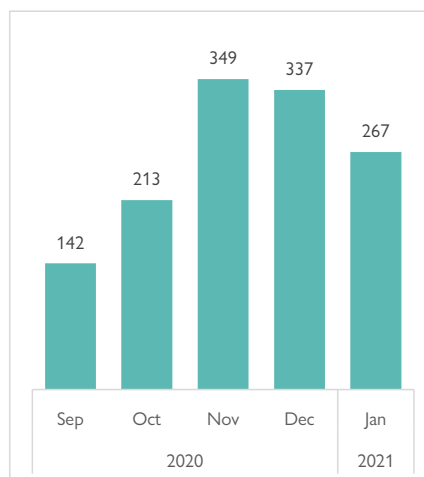
IOM FLOD DELIVERY OF SELECTED SERVICES, SEPTEMBER 2020 – JANUARY 2021

Number of COVID-19 tests for clinical purposes by month*



*Data reflects tests performed in Burundi, Cambodia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Ghana, Jordan, Kenya, Nepal, Nigeria, Philippines, Rwanda, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Uganda, as of 17 March 2021.

Number of beneficiaries receiving home monitoring services by month*



*Data reflects home monitoring services delivered in Burundi, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Nepal, Uganda, Ukraine, as of 17 March 2021.

For more information on the above activities, please contact the IOM Migration Health Division (MHD) at mhddpt@iom.int.

