



SUMMER 2020

the **IRC** at work

SPECIAL REPORT

Inside Our Response to COVID-19

We provide health care, information on symptoms and prevention, and other critical services worldwide.

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OUR IMPACT

In the first three months of COVID-19, the IRC:

Provided **2,000** people with nutrition, health and hygiene education in southern Yemen.

Distributed **6,000** meals to IRC clients in New York and New Jersey.

Educated **1,076** people in Myanmar on symptoms and prevention.



THE IRC'S EFFICIENCY

Fundraising	5%
Management & General	8%
Program Services	87%

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CO-CHAIRS, BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Eduardo Mestre
CHAIR, BOARD OF ADVISORS

David Miliband
PRESIDENT AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

The IRC at Work is published for friends and supporters of the IRC.

COVER: Edna Gomez is a doctor and refugee from Venezuela. At the IRC's comprehensive community center in Colombia, she helps to reduce the transmission of COVID-19.

INSIDE COVER: People are screened for Ebola symptoms at the IRC-run triage unit at the Kyaka II Refugee Settlement in Uganda.

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FROM DAVID MILIBAND, IRC PRESIDENT AND CEO



COVID-19 Will Hit Refugees the Hardest

Dear Friends,

How can you socially distance when you don't have a home?

How do you keep your family safe from an invisible emergency, when you're already fleeing for your life?

These are among the impossible questions refugees face as COVID-19 rapidly spreads across the globe. In this edition of the IRC at Work, you will see how we have responded to assist them. With agility and teamwork, we have managed to adapt and continue our lifesaving programs—while combating the spread of COVID-19 in 40 countries worldwide.

Our organization has mobilized swiftly. Within days of the pandemic, IRC teams were delivering food, including 5,000 meals a day in NYC, and medicine to refugees and vulnerable communities. Globally, we prepared for a nightmare scenario: outbreaks in refugee camps. We were proactive in sending protective gear, hygiene kits, and vital information about COVID-19, including symptoms and prevention education.

This work is far from easy.

Take Yemen, for example. Families live in cramped conditions, without clean water and sanitation, hiding from airstrikes. Due to underlying health issues and life in camps, Yemenis are five times more likely to contract COVID-19.

You will learn more about the crisis in Yemen and how our team on the ground is working nonstop in our Crisis Watch. You will also learn about our efforts to stop the spread of COVID-19 in places like Bangladesh. The virus has spread to Cox's Bazar, which holds the largest refugee camp in the world. Refugees there are living 40,000 to 70,000 people per square kilometer. Our efforts to ensure their safety are only possible because of you.

As you read the following pages, please know that every picture of supplies delivered, every neighbor helped, every life changed...is thanks to IRC supporters. Your compassion in the midst of this pandemic has been more than a lifeline. It has given refugee families reason to hope.

As always, I welcome your thoughts, ideas and suggestions. Please feel free to email me at David.Miliband@Rescue.org.

All the best,

David Miliband
President and CEO
International Rescue Committee

CRISIS WATCH

Yemen: COVID-19. Hunger. War.

COVID-19 is surging across war-torn Yemen as the ongoing cholera outbreak worsens, food and water shortages increase, and civilians continue to be bombed by various factions vying for control of the country.



TOP: The IRC takes great precautions to mitigate the spread of the coronavirus in northwest Syria.

BOTTOM: Thabit Hassan Qaied's child received nutritional treatment from the IRC in Aden governorate in Yemen.



The IRC provides follow-up care for Nahiba's son who had suffered from severe malnutrition.

Here Are Five Key Facts About the Situation on the Ground in Yemen:

1. Child starvation is rising.

Yemen's economy is collapsing: in the city of Aden alone, the price of food has gone up by 35 percent. UNICEF reports that by the end of 2020, 2.4 million Yemeni children could be on the brink of starvation.

2. Civilians are being bombed.

In May 2020, more than half of bombings by Saudi-led forces, who are battling the Houthis and other parties, hit civilians or civilian infrastructure. As a result of five years of war, Yemen's health system has crumbled. Half of its health facilities are not operational and 18 percent of the country's 333 districts have no doctors.

3. The world is turning its back.

The coronavirus is spreading rapidly in Yemen, in large part due to the lack of a health system. People forced from their homes live in cramped makeshift quarters and the country has almost no testing capacity. The result: a death rate five times higher than the global average.

Even as COVID-19 spreads, humanitarian aid is drying up. The United Nations was forced to slash 75 percent of its programs in Yemen. Donor nations are cutting back funding. A recent appeal for aid fell short by \$1 billion.

Meanwhile, global and regional powers, including the United States, the United Kingdom and France, are supplying weapons to warring parties.

4. The next few months are pivotal.

This summer, 23,000 children are at risk of dying from acute malnutrition without immediate funding for health and nutritional aid. More than 8 million people, including 3 million children, will lose access to water and sanitation services and 2.5 million malnourished children will lose nutrition support.

5. The IRC is calling for immediate action.

The IRC is working around the clock to stop the spread of the coronavirus in Yemen. We are providing protective gear, clean water, and sanitation services, as well as lifesaving information about COVID-19's symptoms and prevention practices. And we are calling for an immediate nationwide ceasefire to allow a humanitarian response to COVID-19 and other deadly diseases.



Four Innovative Ways We're Fighting COVID-19

The IRC's response goes beyond health care.

As COVID-19 engulfs the world, refugees find themselves facing a "double emergency," their lives first disrupted by conflict or natural disaster, then by an unprecedented health crisis. From Bangladesh to Venezuela, the IRC is responding not only with treatment and prevention programs, but also with innovative initiatives that support and empower refugees.

Below are a few of the ways our holistic humanitarian response saves lives:

Helping families make ends meet

"People are living in poor conditions in camps," says Samya Rasam, an IRC midwife in Yemen. "They need basics like flour and water." One of the most effective ways the IRC helps struggling families: we give them money. Cash distributions not only are fast and efficient, they contribute to local economies and allow people to purchase what they need most for their families. In Yemen, IRC cash distributions are aiding 281 internally displaced families. Similar programs have reached families in Sierra Leone, Lebanon, Colombia and other countries.

Supporting victims of gender-based violence

"Women and adolescent girls, many of whom were already experiencing forms of violence, are now taking on double and triple responsibilities, all in confined spaces, 24 hours of the day," says Meghan Lopez, the IRC's regional director for Latin America.

Right from the outset of the pandemic, the IRC recognized the urgency of its commitment to victims of violence. In Uganda, IRC partner organizations found an innovative way to reach women forced into quarantine: verbal passwords. If a victim of abuse repeats the agreed-upon password to her IRC caseworker, the caseworker knows it is not a safe time to talk and re-directs the conversation until the client can speak freely. Similarly, a new "phone-beep system" allows abuse victims to communicate discreetly with their caseworkers.

Getting out the facts about COVID-19

Accurate information is one of our best weapons when it comes to combating the coronavirus. "We teach people how to stay safe from the coronavirus," says Yasmin Ara,



a refugee volunteer residing in the world's largest refugee camp in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, "that people must wash their hands, avoid crowded places, and go to the hospital if they get sick."

In Pakistan, the IRC has worked with other agencies to support local education programs, including putting up posters and even billboards that have reached an impressive 3,663,396 people.

In Uganda, the IRC hired boda bodas (a local term for motorcycle taxis) to broadcast coronavirus messages over a loudspeaker as they drove through villages.

Giving people the tools—and space—to protect themselves

The IRC's country director in Colombia describes meeting a group of 200 Venezuelans camping next to a gas station while they attempted to reenter their home country during the pandemic. The IRC was able to help these people by providing them with kits containing soap, toothpaste and toothbrushes, toilet paper and towels. We also distributed hygiene supplies to asylum seekers sheltering in El Salvador and Mexico.

The IRC implemented another creative solution to keep asylum seekers safe in Mexico: a "triage hotel" where they can



OPPOSITE PAGE: IRC midwife Lovely Akter gives a patient her regular check-up.

TOP: IRC Colombia adapted its health programming due to COVID-19. Our efforts include ensuring medical staff have the appropriate protective equipment.

BOTTOM: IRC hygiene promotor Sohalia Khaliqi provides training and information about COVID-19 in Herat province, Afghanistan.

access COVID-19 testing and treatment, as well as isolate for 14 days before moving into shelters.

Refugees Help Their New Neighbors

During the pandemic, these refugees are changing lives.

In the battle against COVID-19 and beyond, refugees are essential to keeping communities safe, making society stronger and rebuilding our world.

When you have gone without care, you make it your mission to heal. When you know what it's like to go hungry, you feed people. When you've been without a place to call home, you work to give others the safety of one.

Meet some of the essential workers who are also refugees.



Rania Abou distributes meals to people experiencing food insecurity during the COVID-19 pandemic in Elizabeth, N.J.



Rania Refugee. Food Distributor. Frontline Worker.

Rania Abou is a 19-year-old refugee from Syria who was resettled in the United States with her father and three brothers. An artist who dreams of becoming an engineer, she is currently working for the IRC and World Central Kitchen in Elizabeth, N.J., distributing food to people in need.

"If we can help others, we should help others," she says. "In the future, somebody will help me. It's like a circle. I help somebody and somebody helps me."

Rania finds hope during this challenging time in her family and the children she meets while working with the IRC. "When I see the kids smiling, I feel happy. And that's given me hope."



Dr. Edna Refugee. Doctor. Humanitarian Hero.

Dr. Edna Patricia Gomez left Venezuela in 2018 as the country spiraled into crisis, and her medical practice was targeted by robbers and extortionists. Today, she works as a gynecologist with the IRC in Cúcuta, Colombia, helping other Venezuelans with screenings and treatment for the coronavirus. She also continues to provide women with health services, including prenatal care for expectant mothers.

"Medicine is the best," she says of her profession. "It's hopeful. It's positive. I don't think there's anything more perfect than the moment of creation of life, of birth. Of delivering a baby and seeing the look of satisfaction on its mother's face."



Jonathan Refugee. Mask Maker. Frontline Worker.

Jonathan Amissa is a refugee from Cameroon and a certified EMT who runs a medical transport business in Boise, Idaho. When COVID-19 hit, he and his team needed protective gear to do their job safely. But in the early days of the pandemic it was hard to come by.

Jonathan improvised and used sewing skills he had developed tailoring used clothes in Cameroon to make masks for his team. He then distributed them to his community, including other refugees with frontline jobs—all for free.

"For me, this is not a moment where you want to make money," says Jonathan. "The way to be is to love the people that you love, take care of your neighbors, and take care of your community."

Learning Under Lockdown

Tutors, parents and the IRC team up for remote learning.

Education is a lifeline for children during a crisis, providing them the academic and social skills they need to heal and thrive. This is especially true for refugee children who are resettling in unfamiliar locations.

"We know that school and a regular routine are key factors in helping students who have experienced trauma," says Rachel Stephens, IRC youth program coordinator in Seattle, where the IRC has introduced innovative programs for children at all educational levels. "We also know that school closures disproportionately impact students with low English levels and low income levels, which is the majority of the families that we work with."

Over 500 books...and counting!

The IRC's Ready to Read program helps elementary and middle school students who are still learning English advance their skills. Students use Raz-Plus, an online literacy program, to access a library of books categorized by reading level. They join tutors in weekly 45-minute Zoom sessions to read books together, build literacy skills, and practice conversational English.

Siblings Kudus, 5, and Delina, 8, whose

family resettled in Seattle from Eritrea last year, are two of the program's top readers. Together they have read over 500 books during the pandemic.

"I was surprised with several of my kids, once I started meeting with them over Zoom, just how much more confident they were with their reading than when I had last seen them," says Emily Hagen, one of 19 IRC tutors in the program. "This was all from them taking the initiative and reading on their own."

Parents included

In addition to making sure students have learning materials in hand, the IRC team does weekly check-ins to make sure parents understand learning expectations and have access to school meals. "We wanted to support parents as they took on this new task of learning from home," says Stephens.

Because parents as well as children often struggle with English, virtual tutoring provides students with a space to practice their new language. "Giving children the opportunity to continue conversing in English is really critical, along with that social connection," Stephens says. "We've found that kids have really been wanting to talk more. They're lonely and they are opening up and just wanting to have conversations."

School districts in the Seattle area have asked the IRC to continue and expand its virtual programming over the summer. The IRC is set to reach 230 students with online tutoring and remote learning kits.



A child practices writing and reading in Moria refugee camp in Lesbos, Greece.



Meals prepared by IRC partner World Central Kitchen wait to be distributed in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn.

IRC and World Central Kitchen Feed Thousands

While refugees have played a large role as essential workers, they have also been disproportionately affected by the pandemic.

"When COVID-19 hit, our clients—like many Americans—started losing employment," says Brittany O'Neill, development director for the IRC in New York. "We knew that one of their biggest concerns would be getting food on the table."

The IRC in New York and New Jersey found an answer in a partnership with World Central Kitchen, the organization founded by noted chef José Andrés. Together, the two nonprofits built distribution centers that provide IRC clients and the broader community with nourishing meals—and give jobs to local refugees at the quickly growing centers.

Mike Bloomberg Commits to IRC's COVID-19 Response

Bloomberg Philanthropies announced a \$10 million contribution to support the IRC's efforts to mitigate COVID-19's impact on vulnerable populations around the world.

The flexible funding allows the IRC to quickly pivot its coronavirus response to where it's needed most, ensuring the effective delivery of aid.

This support for the IRC is part of the Bloomberg Philanthropies' COVID-19 Response Initiatives launched in March to give health professionals and local leaders the tools to protect the public and address the economic and social damage caused by the virus.

IN FOCUS

COVID-19 Response in the World's Largest Refugee Camp

When Sakera Akter felt as if she were coming down with flu, the 22 year old set out for the IRC's primary health care center with her two sons. Open 24/7, the center is part of the vital health network we provide to refugees in Cox's Bazar, home to more than 1 million displaced Rohingya.

Fortunately, Sakera and her family tested negative for COVID-19. "We are maintaining hygiene as we've been told and trying to stay at home as much as possible," she says. IRC volunteers are trying to reach as many people like Sakera as they can with information about COVID-19 symptoms and prevention. All of the IRC's services are free.

As part of our COVID-19 mitigation efforts, IRC paramedics check the temperature of our clients.

Become a Partner for Freedom



Designate the IRC as a beneficiary of your will or living trust and help tomorrow's refugees.

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