



*The August 4 explosion in Beirut caused widespread damage, leaving hundreds dead, thousands injured and hundreds of thousands homeless. Photo credit: Wall Street Journal / Agence France-Presse*

Last week, an enormous explosion ripped through Beirut, killing at least 220 people, wounding more than 6,000 and leaving approximately 300,000 homeless. Search-and-rescue operations are ongoing, with at least 120 people reported missing. Though the exact cause of the disaster is still unknown, it is believed to have been caused by negligent handling and storing of thousands of tons of ammonium nitrate.

Primary healthcare centers (PHCCs) and hospitals were severely damaged by the blast, leaving the remaining hospitals overwhelmed by the number of casualties. Additionally, many hospitals' intensive-care units (ICUs) were already near capacity before the explosion, due to COVID-19. Over the last month, the seven-day moving average of new COVID-19 cases rose by more than 600%, from 36 per day on July 10 to 233 per day on August 10. The increase in cases and the effects of the explosion are creating a growing concern that hospitals will run short on equipment and supplies to care for patients. Further exacerbating matters, the central medication warehouse of the Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) was damaged in the explosion, destroying large quantities of critical medical supplies and personal protective equipment (PPE).

The explosion has brought immense suffering to a country that is already reeling from a prolonged financial crisis. The COVID-19 outbreak and related containment measures have led to a country-wide lockdown, further exacerbating the country's unemployment rate. The crisis has pushed nearly one out of every three Lebanese into unemployment. At the same time, approximately 20% of the remaining population has seen their salary reduced, and the ongoing financial crisis has led to an 80% devaluation in the national currency.<sup>1</sup>

Additionally, Lebanon has the highest per capita proportion of refugees worldwide, with one refugee for every four nationals. With more than 1.5 million Syrian refugees alone, the large number of vulnerable refugees from across the region has placed enormous pressure on the country. The area surrounding the port, where the explosion occurred, is densely populated, with a high concentration of Syrian, Lebanese and Palestinian households living in some of the most vulnerable neighborhoods.

On August 10, after growing pressure from protests and foreign countries, the Lebanese government resigned.<sup>2</sup> It will likely take months to form a new government, adding even more uncertainty to the situation. On August 9, international

## FAST FACTS

### Our Footprint

- International Medical Corps has partnerships with more than 50 primary healthcare centers (PHCCs) throughout Lebanon, supporting primary healthcare services for Syrian refugees at facilities in Bekaa, Beirut, Mount Lebanon, Akkar and other areas throughout the north and south.

### Our Response

- Since the explosion, International Medical Corps has delivered 15 shipments of medical supplies and personal protective equipment—including masks, gloves and gauze—to 19 primary healthcare centers and eight hospitals in Beirut.
- Through one of its mobile medical units, the team has provided more than 130 healthcare consultations to residents in Bourj Hammoud and Ashrafeih Karm El Zeitoun, where nearly 70% of the homes and dwellings were destroyed or damaged by the blast.

<sup>1</sup> <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/WFP-0000116784.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-53722909>

donors added pressure on the government when they pledged €250 million but demanded government reforms. To avoid corruption, all of the promised money will go through the United Nations or international non-governmental organizations<sup>3</sup>.

## International Medical Corps Response

International Medical Corps has operated in Lebanon since 2006. We have almost 300 staff in the country, with more than 100 in Beirut. In 2011, we were the first health organization to begin providing services for Syrian refugees in north Lebanon, following the surge of Syrian refugees into the country. We continue to support access to primary healthcare services for Syrian refugees at more than 50 facilities across the country (in Bekaa, Beirut and Mount Lebanon, Akkar, and other areas in the north and south), including 34 primary healthcare centers (PHCCs), seven health dispensaries, three community centers, one social development center and five safe spaces.

In the immediate aftermath of the explosion, International Medical Corps' team began supporting urgent and ongoing relief efforts. The team delivered 15 shipments of medical supplies and PPE, including masks, gloves, gauze, alcohol and plaster, to 19 primary healthcare centers and eight hospitals in Beirut. We also delivered PPE to more than 1,000 volunteers who are working to remove debris and repair damaged homes. Furthermore, International Medical Corps' Community Health Team distributed more than 190 hygiene kits to households in Karantina, Geitaoui, Gemmayze, Downtown/Saifi and Ashrafieh.



*International Medical Corps' programs include partnerships with more than 50 facilities across the country, including 34 primary healthcare centers, seven health dispensaries, three community centers, one social development center and five safe spaces.*

The team also deployed one of its mobile medical units (MMUs) to provide services in Bourj Hammoud and Ashrafieh Karm El Zeitoun. Both neighborhoods are home to a high concentration of Syrian refugees and are densely populated. Nearly 70% of houses and dwellings are recorded as destroyed or damaged.<sup>4</sup> As of August 10, our MMU—staffed by a general practitioner, pediatrician and nurse—have provided more than 130 consultations and 45 referrals. Additionally, to support growing mental health needs in affected communities, International Medical Corps has integrated psychological first aid (PFA) as part of our MMUs' offerings. The team has provided mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) to 75 people so far.

International Medical Corps also is conducting refresher trainings on PFA for frontline healthcare workers at clinics and hospitals, to strengthen MHPSS services in response to the disaster. Plans are underway to conduct additional PFA training with healthcare clinics, and the team is coordinating with the National Mental Health Program (NMHP) to identify additional training needs, to increase access to services. In the coming days, International Medical Corps will continue to operate its MMU throughout the Ashrafieh and Bourj Hammoud areas, to provide critical healthcare and MHPSS services to vulnerable populations. Additionally, the team will continue to distribute PPE, medical supplies and medications to PHCCs and hospitals throughout the region, to safeguard healthcare workers and curb the spread of COVID-19.

As the situation continues to evolve, International Medical Corps will continue working closely with the MoPH, as well as with international and local partners, to provide critically needed services in the aftermath of the explosion.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-53710556>

<sup>4</sup> [https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Lebanon\\_Beirut%20Blast\\_Rapid%20Needs%20Assessment%20Report\\_August%202020\\_final.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Lebanon_Beirut%20Blast_Rapid%20Needs%20Assessment%20Report_August%202020_final.pdf)