



International Medical Corps distributes PPE to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 in Lebanon.

Six months after the Beirut port explosion, Lebanon continues to recover from the massive blast that left at least 220 dead, 6,500 injured and 300,000 displaced from their homes. The explosion was one of the largest non-nuclear explosions ever recorded, registering as a 3.5 magnitude earthquake in Beirut and felt as far away as Cyprus—more than 100 miles away. According to the World Bank, the blast caused between \$3.8 billion and \$4.5 billion in damages. The health sector was amongst the most damaged, with 292 facilities damaged—36% of health facilities in the region. The damage to the health sector significantly reduced access to care, especially among the most vulnerable populations.

Even under normal circumstances, the blast would have been incredibly difficult to recover from, but Lebanon is currently struggling through numerous concurrent crises. First, a protracted economic crisis is causing a rise in poverty, high unemployment and massive inflation—the Lebanese pound has lost more than 80% of its value against the dollar since last year. Second, the COVID-19 pandemic continues to be a major concern, with the highest number of daily new cases yet seen in January—before the blast, Lebanon had some 5,000 confirmed cases of COVID-19, with that number rising to more than 328,000 as of February 10. Finally, the country houses the largest concentration of refugees per capita, with considerable unmet needs among Syrian refugees and other vulnerable populations.

The confluence of crises in Lebanon has led to strain on the government, healthcare systems, banks and individuals. There is growing concern about the mental health impacts of the crises on the population. One survivor of the Beirut blast, Joana Dagher, recently said, “I lost my life on August 4. I lost my house, I lost my memory, I lost two friends,” referring to neighbors killed in the explosion. “I lost my mental health, and so I lost everything.”¹

FAST FACTS

Our Footprint

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

Our Response

- Since the explosion, our team provided more than 9,000 consultations and more than 2,000 psychological first-aid (PFA) sessions through mobile medical units that were deployed to affected neighborhoods.
- To date, International Medical Corps has distributed more than 3 million pieces of personal protective equipment (PPE)—including masks, gloves and gowns—and medical supplies to 27 healthcare facilities.
- We have reached a total of more than 145,000 people with health, mental health and protection services.

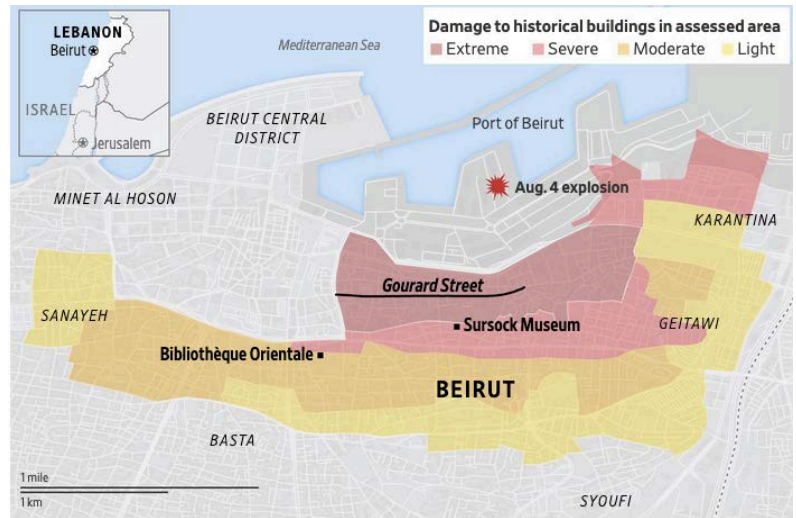
¹ <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/beirut-explosion-survivors-endure-psychological-scars>

The road to recovery for Lebanon and for survivors like Dagher will not be a short one. But there is hope that at least one of the crises will soon be brought under control: the country is planning an extensive COVID-19 vaccine campaign—to start this month—that aims to vaccinate 70% of citizens and non-citizens by the end of 2022.

International Medical Corps Response

With a staff of nearly 300 already in the country, International Medical Corps quickly launched an emergency response after the blast, coordinating efforts with international aid agencies, the Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) and other international non-governmental organizations in the country. Since the start of its response, International Medical Corps has:

- deployed two mobile medical units to address immediate health needs and three psychological first aid (PFA) tents to address mental health and protection needs; and
- distributed 3,707,590 pieces of PPE, including masks, surgical masks, gloves and gowns, and 2,790,344 infection prevention and control (IPC) items, including bandages, gauze and hand sanitizer, as well as 6,489 hygiene kits, to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and other illnesses.



Map of damages from the Beirut port blast.

Image credit: www.wsj.com/graphics/beirut-explosion-recovery

By the start of 2021, International Medical Corps had reached 145,943 people affected by the blast. International Medical Corps continues to address the most critical needs, including health, mental health and gender-based violence (GBV) prevention and response activities, to those affected by this catastrophe.

Addressing Health Needs

With more than one-third of health facilities damaged and cases of COVID-19 rapidly rising, facilities that remain open continue to be overwhelmed by patients affected by the blast and the virus. Extensive damage to medical storage facilities caused acute shortages of vital medicines and supplies. International Medical Corps' mobile medical teams provided immediate support, providing an initial 1,121 health consultations in the first two weeks after the blast. We then turned our focus on supporting existing infrastructure, providing PHCCs within the impacted areas of Beirut/Mount Lebanon with support that included PPE, medical supplies (such as bandages, gauze, alcohol swabs and syringes), medications (including psychotropic medications, antibiotics, anti-allergic drugs and antifungal medicines) and vitamins. International Medical Corps is rehabilitating four PHCCs that suffered structural damage, to render them accessible to beneficiaries. International Medical Corps has also provided 4,105 additional health consultations via our supported PHCCs.

The blast also reduced the ability of people with disabilities (PWDs) to access assistive devices and proper services. As the only international non-governmental organization in the area to provide physical therapy, occupational therapy and assistive devices to individuals that sustained physical disabilities and to those with pre-existing conditions, International Medical Corps surged these services to reach the most vulnerable PWDs, providing 425 rehabilitation consultations and 203 devices.

Even with ongoing assistance, occupancy levels of hospital beds have reached maximum capacity, and COVID-19 patients with mild, moderate and terminal diseases are being mostly isolated at home, without access to basic medical or palliative care. Consequently, International Medical Corps is piloting a community-based home care model to provide healthcare services to confirmed/suspected COVID-19 cases, working with the medical outreach teams (doctors and nurses) of International Medical Corps-supported PHCCs in the areas of Beirut/Mount Lebanon affected by the blast. Teams are evaluating the home settings of isolated COVID-19 patients and their contacts, and conducting clinical assessments and follow up with patients. Care includes symptomatic treatment and medication, providing IPC and PPE items to patients and caregivers, and education on COVID-19 and home-isolation guidelines. To further build self-reliance and increase local capacity, International Medical Corps is training health outreach volunteers (HOVs) to deliver awareness sessions and conduct household visits, helping to enhance the knowledge of available services and critical healthcare in areas affected by the blast.

Mental Health and Psychosocial Support

People affected by the blast are facing multiple socioeconomic challenges, including unemployment, poor living conditions and the inability to cover the cost of the mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) services required to treat their mental health disorders as they recover from the effects of the port explosion. In the immediate response, International Medical Corps set up tents where staff provided 2,567 PFA consultations to individuals, providing them with non-intrusive practical care and support, assessing needs and concerns, comforting those in distress, and helping them connect to information, social support and services, and loved ones. As relief turned toward recovery, International Medical Corps' team of roving social workers provided 823 consultation sessions to people most affected by the explosion, while the MHPSS case management team provided 174 consultations to those affected by the blast, addressing clinical mental health needs such as depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). International Medical Corps' MHPSS case management team and roving social workers are continuing to provide services through August, to ensure sustainable treatment plans for people affected by the Beirut blast and other stressors in the country. Roving social workers specifically reach individuals in need who are unable to reach health centers for care.

To further increase the awareness of mental health, combat stigma and help people find out where to seek resources and clinical care as needed, International Medical Corps has launched awareness-raising sessions that so far have reached more than 800 participants in Beirut communities. During the sessions, we provided educational resources for attendees and caregivers to help address their MHPSS needs, including how to manage symptoms, what medications are available and how to seek care. We continue to provide mental health consultations, build awareness through community sessions and media, and provide psychosocial support for those in need.

Across our response, International Medical Corps is also training health workers and frontline workers in PFA, providing guidance on how to be supportive, do no harm, communicate effectively, connect people to needed services and engage in self-care, as well as training MHPSS case managers on topics that include interpersonal psychotherapy, a structured, time-limited and widely used evidence-based therapy for common mental disorders that has been tested in clinical trials and shown to be effective with trauma-exposed populations and depressed people exposed to chronic adversity (such as extreme poverty, high mortality rates, etc.).

Protection Against Gender-Based Violence

The disruptive situation in Lebanon has increased existing gender inequalities and exacerbated the risks of gender-based violence (GBV) faced by women and girls from the host, refugee and migrant populations. Slightly more than half of the population affected by the Beirut blast identify as female-headed households (FHHs)—a figure of FHHs that is much higher than the best available national average of 18% for both Lebanese and Syrian refugee households²—with 8% identifying as elderly women living alone. Risks created by the destruction of people's homes and shelter go beyond infrastructural damage—they include protection risks, including an increased risk of gender-based violence, and the mental health impact of the different layers of loss resulting from the explosion.

In response, International Medical Corps continues to provide case management services to reach vulnerable women and girls, and survivors of GBV, so far providing almost 500 consultations, 169 non-focused psychosocial support sessions and 657 awareness sessions. Case workers help survivors assess their needs, develop action plans to improve their safety and wellbeing, and access essential—and sometimes lifesaving—services offered by International Medical Corps or other providers. Complementing these efforts, International Medical Corps has been providing dignity kits and psychosocial support supplies that aim to restore a sense of dignity, safety and wellbeing at a time when community members are displaced, living in crowded settings or unsafe environments, and might lack essential hygiene items. This includes such materials as shampoo, washcloths, razors, flashlights, sanitary napkins, hijabs and deodorant. We have so far distributed 1,100 dignity kits and 326 psychosocial support kits.

International Medical Corps also is piloting entrepreneurship training, helping female-business owners build skills on business planning, feasibility studies and marketing, to increase their income-generation opportunities.

² UN Women, CARE, UN ESCWA, ABAAD, UNFPA, Rapid Gender Analysis of the August 2020 Beirut Port Explosion: An Intersectional Examination (October 2020)