



Dear reader,

This issue of our newsletter comes at an unprecedented time, during the spread of the Coronavirus pandemic – or what we have come to know as COVID19. At UNODC’s Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa (ROMENA), we have worked daily to support Member States’ response to COVID19 in the region through direct assistance and through examining and addressing the new waves of crime that may be exploiting this pandemic.

In this newsletter, you will read about some of these efforts in parallel to how such actions could push us closer to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to strive forward with the start of the *Decade of Action*.

I hope you enjoy reading this newsletter and to hearing from you on how you may have also taken a step to achieve the SDGs during COVID19.

Cristina Albertin,

UNODC Regional Representative for the Middle East and North Africa

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Leaving No One Behind: UNODC Direct assistance and support in Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Libya, Palestine, Sudan, and Tunisia



Through support from UNODC and the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), the Ministry of Health (MoH) in Algeria and three Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) delivered Personal Protective Equipment (PPEs) and SIM cards. The material will protect 100 Frontliners, namely health and social workers, from COVID-19 as they ensure the continuum of services for approximately 908 people who use drugs for three months in the cities of Oran, Annaba and Algiers.

UNODC supported the Egyptian Forensic Medical Authority with PPEs and necessary sanitary material to prevent the spread of COVID-19 during examinations and operations in Egypt. UNODC also provided the Forensic Medicine Unit of the Charles Nicolle Hospital in Tunisia with PPEs, including shoe-covers, chemical protective coveralls, gloves and filtering facepiece masks (FFP2) through its Forensics Project in Tunisia funded by the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) – USA.

In Jordan, UNODC focused its efforts on standing with families, daily workers, migrant workers and refugees in these challenging times and providing them with medical supplies and food packages.



Furthermore, UNODC provided front-line officers operating in the field in Jordan with necessary medical supplies. Support was provided in coordination with the Ministry of



Justice, Ministry of Social Development, Prosecution Office and the different departments at the Public Security Directorate (PSD) with funding from Austria, the European Union (EU) and Sweden.

People could be at particular risk of infection, especially when they live close together, with a high potential for transmission. Places of deprivation of liberty, for example prisons, undoubtedly constitute high-risk environments for those who live and work there. In Libya, UNODC delivered a COVID-19 awareness workshop to judicial police management at the Centre of Endemic and Infectious Diseases and Prevention, focusing on COVID19 prevention and control measures such as specific risk assessments and contingency plans; enhanced hygiene and infection control measures; the uninterrupted availability of relevant supplies, including PPEs; maintain close linkages with local and national public health authorities; as well as support and capacity building for prison staff and health-care professionals.

To further support law enforcement agencies in continuing their necessary work during and post COVID-19, the Airport Communication Programme (AIRCOP) provided Sudanese law enforcement authorities (Police and Customs) operating at international airports with the necessary PPEs) to safeguard their occupational health and safety. AIRCOP activities in Sudan are funded by the United Kingdom (UK) Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

Echoing the need to support those within closed settings, UNODC in Palestine has worked with the Correction and Rehabilitation



Centres Directorate (CRCD) to utilize and disseminate health awareness posters and flyers within the centres and to allow for the outside time to and the library time to continue through social distancing measures of having fewer inmates at each allotted session. This action was supported by the Doha Declaration Programme.

Prison Health is Public Health: COVID-19 preparedness and responses in prisons in Egypt



Close to 11 million prisoners worldwide — as well as the officers who are charged with ensuring their safe, secure and humane custody — must not be forgotten during the Corona (COVID-19) virus pandemic. Countries should recognize the particular risks which COVID-19 poses to closed settings. Understanding that prison health is public health, UNODC’s Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa (ROMENA) and Office for the Gulf Cooperation Council Region (OGCCR) in coordination with the Egyptian Ministry of Interior (MoI) organized a three-day online training on the International standards for the prevention of infection in the prison environments, including HIV/AIDS, Hepatitis C, viral Tuberculosis and COVID-19.

Discussions between UNODC experts and participants addressed how prisons and other detention settings are an integral part of national health and emergency measures undertaken to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic in line with dedicated guidance developed by the national health authorities and the World Health Organization (WHO). With the measures encompassing specific risk assessments and contingency plans; enhanced hygiene and infection control measures; the uninterrupted availability of relevant supplies, including Personal Protective Equipment (PPE); close linkages with local and national public health authorities; as well as support the capacity building for prison staff and health-care professionals. Furthermore, responses to COVID-19 are properly implemented and integrated into the overall prison health strategies to ensure that continued attention is paid to broader healthcare needs within the prison population, including other prevalent diseases.

Supporting children and youth in juvenile centers during COVID-19 in Egypt and the UAE



Juvenile centres and correctional institutions could face several unique challenges in preventing COVID-19, hence the need for heightened awareness and response. Some of these challenges include the concern of newcomers carrying the virus to the institution or facility, the difficulty of maintaining safe physical distancing when many individuals are living and working within the same closed settings, the dependency of the children and youth on family visits for emotional and mental support which would be restricted due to limiting any external visits and the lack of group-based activities and interactions.

UNODC delivered an online training to officials from correctional institutions and juvenile centres in Egypt and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) aimed at strengthening their response to COVID-19 and protecting the children and youth in these centres from the spread of the virus in accordance with international health and human rights standards.

The training sessions brought 42 participants together, of which 16 participants were female staff members, covering three different cities in Egypt and three different emirates in the UAE. The discussions focused on the international standards for prevention, control and treatment of COVID-19, the methods for people working at the juvenile institutions and correctional centres to protect themselves and those they interact with, the mechanisms for maintaining physical and mental health



during the pandemic, the quarantine for newcomers to ensure they are not carriers before joining the other children and youth, and the vital need to maintain treatment for those who suffer from other medical conditions.

Efforts were provided through cooperation between UNODC's Office for the Gulf Cooperation Council Region (OGCCR) and the Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa (ROMENA) and with the technical measures and insight delivered by the Prevention, Treatment and Rehabilitation Section and the Prisons and HIV Section at UNODC Headquarters in Vienna, Austria.

Mental health matters: standing with people who use drugs in the pandemic



Providing efficient support to people who use drugs during COVID19 requires a holistic approach that pays attention to both physical and mental health. UNODC ROMENA and OGCCR provided online training on “Epidemiological considerations and the roles of psychiatrists involved in drug demand reduction during Covid19.”

Stemming from the foundations of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 17 “Partnerships for the Goals,” the training was in collaboration with the Fund for Drug Control and Treatment of Addiction (FDCTA) at the Ministry of Social Solidarity (MoSS) in the Arab Republic of Egypt and the National Rehabilitation Centre (NRC) in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Bringing together 16 doctors, psychologists, and practitioners (8 women and 8 men) from both countries, the sessions allowed experts to learn and exchange thoughts on both the physical and mental considerations part of their role during the pandemic. The physical health discussions focused on the epidemiological indicators, modes of transmission, clinical prevention and control, and the possible vulnerable groups in the general population. The mental health sessions looked at methods of providing mental health care at a distance, known as “Tele-mental health” or “telemedicine.”

E4J's Zorbs help children stay safe from COVID-19 in Lebanon



COVID19 presented a challenge for children as they found themselves suddenly unable to learn in the appropriate settings or to run around outside with their friends. This situation became even more problematic when children are in particularly vulnerable circumstances, in need of humanitarian assistance and with few outlets to help them deal with reality.

Several hundred children in Lebanon were pleasantly surprised when they discovered The Zorbs, the colorful alien characters helping young generations understand the values which help keep the world safe. In different institutions, UNODC delivered useful and entertaining kits, to 500 children through the Municipality of Kornet Chehwan and to over 200 children in an orphanage in Bekaa Governorate. The Zorbs kits included a tote bag featuring the characters, a Zorbs story book in Arabic written by the Lebanese children's book author Rania Zghir, an accompanying colouring book with pencils and stickers, and, appropriately, educational material on hygiene practices and preventive measures to help the children keep the virus away.



“I was getting bored, I’m so excited to read a new story,” said one child, happily opening the book “[Do it like the Zorbs](#)” included in the package. With The Zorbs, the children can not only escape their boredom but also rekindle their creativity and imagination while learning important messages. All the material from The Zorbs, created by [Education for Justice](#) (E4J, a component of [UNODC’s Global Programme for the Implementation of the Doha Declaration](#)), is designed to teach core values of mutual love, respect and acceptance of one another. As they get to know the friendly aliens, children reflect on the importance of dialogue, fairness and empathy, through empowering and positive messages which can impact their behavior.

The manufacturing of these tote bags also relates to one of UNODC’s key areas of work, namely prisoner rehabilitation. The bags were produced by women detainees in Beirut, taking part in the sewing workshop programme which trains and generates income for participants. The female prisoners’ engagement allows to send money to their families during these difficult times, while they gain new skills which add to their self-confidence and positively impact their sense of productivity. Upon release, they will be able to put their skills to good use as they reintegrate society.



Making the world a better place by reading a story? Regional Creative Reading Competition

The pandemic has affected the education and social sectors’ ability to ensure access to learning, especially for children in vulnerable situations. To address such conditions, UNODC launched a regional storyteller competition aimed at actively engaging education and social work professionals, students and youth in community-based activities focused on exploring innovative ways to enable children to have learning experiences and deliver educational messages.



It is in this context that UNODC will enable youth, students and professionals in contact with children throughout the region to participate in a “children storytellers competition” based on the E4J’s book “Do it Like The Zorbs” designed for children from 5 years old.

Through the competition, participants read the “Do It Like The Zorbs” story in their own way, by creating a video, a song, an animation, a dance, or any form of art reflecting the story or their favorite part of it to communicate the E4J messages to children. In these challenging times, the participants will have had the chance to play an active role to convey fundamental values for children such as respect, tolerance, fairness and honesty.



Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) from a gender perspective: Tunisia's post-COVID-19 Priorities



Achieving gender equality and women’s empowerment is integral to each of the 17 goals. Through this vision, the Tunisian Ministry of Women, Family, Children and Elderly Affairs, led by Minister Asma Shiri Laabidi, in collaboration with UNODC, UN Women, UNDP, UNFPA, ILO, and UNOPS organized the international forum "Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) from a gender perspective: Tunisia's post-COVID-19 Priorities" in Tunis, Tunisia.

The forum aimed at showcasing the Tunisian government’s efforts to support women’s rights during COVID19, at shedding light on the COVID19 caused challenges in achieving the SDGs and exploring how to mobilize present knowledge, partnerships and capacities to face these challenges. This aim was actualized by the forum gathering representatives of the various Member States, international and national organizations, Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and experts from different fields, who worked together to draft a set of recommendations on priorities concerning the SDGs from a gender point of view.

Amongst other interventions, UNODC led the session on “Criminal justice responses to Violence Against Women and Girls (VAW&G) in times of the pandemic” during the panel focused on COVID19 and VAW&G. During the event, Selim Azzabi, Minister of Development, Investment and International Cooperation added that in 2016 Tunisia adopted the law on the elimination of all forms of VAW&G, which is an important achievement for Tunisian women. Such discussions paved the way to one of the main results of the forum, which is the creation of the national observatory of VAW&G.



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