

# THE ICRC'S RESPONSE TO COVID-19 IN EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA



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Ukraine. The ICRC provides food and hygiene items to people affected by the armed conflict and by COVID-19 containment measures.

## COVID-19: ONE MORE THREAT TO PEOPLE AFFECTED BY PAST OR ONGOING CONFLICT

- Even as the COVID-19 pandemic brings daily life to a standstill in many parts of the world, vulnerable people continue to deal with the effects of armed conflict and other situations of violence, whether past or ongoing. The spread of the virus poses an additional threat to the lives of these individuals and communities.
- The ICRC is stepping up its response to the global crisis, integrating COVID-19 as an important new parameter in its operations. Because of its role as a neutral intermediary, it is present in or has access to areas that are generally hard to reach – for example, places where hostilities are ongoing, areas not under government control, and certain detention facilities. In many of the places in Europe and Central Asia where it works, it is one of only a few actors, or the only actor, providing humanitarian assistance.
- ICRC delegations in Europe and Central Asia are in the process of refining and adapting their existing activities to take into account new needs and challenges arising from COVID-19. These activities enable people to meet their basic needs with dignity, help strengthen their resilience, and ensure the delivery of basic services. They constitute the foundation of the ICRC's COVID-19 response today and will be essential to helping communities emerge from this crisis. These activities are carried out in line with national efforts to contain the virus, and in coordination with the authorities, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and other actors, including United Nations (UN) agencies.

# ACTIVITIES IN THE REGION

## Supporting vital health infrastructure

Health services in volatile areas are often overburdened or insufficiently resourced. The ICRC regularly supports health-care facilities across the region to help them remain operational and cope with additional needs during emergencies, including those generated by COVID-19.

The ICRC is:

- donating protective equipment and disinfecting materials to health facilities in **Abkhazia, Armenia, Georgia proper** and **Ukraine**
- delivering medical materials across the administrative boundary line between **Georgia proper** and **Abkhazia** and across the line of contact in **Ukraine**, which separates areas under government control from those not under government control
- providing health facilities on both sides of the line of contact in **Ukraine** with medical equipment and supplies, including oxygen concentrators, which are vital for treating pneumonia caused by COVID-19 and are hard to obtain in the country, and medications for diabetes and other chronic illnesses, which are emerging as aggravating factors for the virus
- building additional handwashing facilities at hospitals in **Ukraine**, including one designated as a centre for COVID-19 diagnosis and treatment; installing generators and carrying out other measures to ensure that hospitals have a continuous supply of electricity and water; helping them build quarantine areas or disinfection facilities
- donating protective equipment to the National Societies in **Armenia, Kyrgyzstan** and **Ukraine**
- making psychosocial support available to staff and volunteers of the National Society in **Georgia**, and helping it run a telephone hotline offering similar support to community members



1. Armenia. Six hospitals in conflict-affected communities near the Armenia–Azerbaijan border receive ICRC donations of protective equipment and cleaning materials.
2. Ukraine. Hot-water taps and boilers have been installed at a hospital designated as a centre for COVID-19 diagnosis and treatment.



1. Kyrgyzstan. Penitentiary officials attend the ICRC's online training on COVID-19 prevention and management.
2. Ukraine. Twenty-eight places of detention receive hygiene items, and National Society posters on preventing COVID-19 transmission, delivered by the ICRC.

## Preventing the spread of disease in places of detention

Detention facilities are often overcrowded, poorly ventilated and with deficient sanitary conditions; health services and washing facilities are not always readily accessible. These factors favour the spread of disease and have catastrophic consequences in such environments, where the rate of transmission is potentially much higher than in other settings. The ICRC visits detainees to check on their well-being, and works with the relevant authorities to help improve their treatment and living conditions, including their access to medical care.

The ICRC is:

- donating protective equipment, disinfecting materials, hygiene items, infrared thermometers and/or posters on preventing COVID-19 transmission to places of detention in **Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia proper, South Ossetia and Ukraine**, and to facilities in **Greece** where migrants are detained
- providing penitentiary officials in **Abkhazia** and **South Ossetia** with advice for COVID-19 prevention and management; conducting online training on the subject for officials in **Kyrgyzstan**; helping the authorities in Ukraine draw up COVID-19 protocols for places of detention
- helping the authorities make video calls available to detainees in **Armenia**, and longer phone calls to detainees in **Georgia proper**, as alternatives to family visits
- donating phone cards to detained migrants in **Greece** so that they can stay in touch with their relatives while ICRC personnel are unable to visit them and facilitate family phone calls for them

## Ensuring communities' access to clean water and reinforcing good hygiene practices

In places affected by conflict and/or violence, essential infrastructure has either been damaged or fallen into disrepair. Together with the authorities and local service providers, the ICRC implements projects to ensure that people have access to clean water and more sanitary surroundings in order to prevent the spread of disease.

The ICRC is:

- providing water companies in **Ukraine** with comprehensive assistance, including donations of water-treatment chemicals, to enable them to maintain the water supply for communities on both sides of the line of contact
- supporting the National Societies in **Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia** and **Kyrgyzstan** in their efforts to increase public awareness about preventing COVID-19 transmission



## Sustaining activities that promote people's resilience

Communities affected by conflict and other violence are forced to cope with an increased strain on their access to basic goods and services, and to sustainable livelihoods. In coordination with the authorities, National Societies and other local partners, the ICRC works to help vulnerable people cover their daily necessities and protect or regain their self-sufficiency.

The ICRC is:

- supplying food and hygiene items, or cash for purchasing them, to conflict-affected people on both sides of the line of contact in **Ukraine**, and to vulnerable people, including the elderly and the disabled, in **Abkhazia, Nagorno-Karabakh, South Ossetia and Ukraine**
- running a 24-hour telephone hotline in **Nagorno-Karabakh** for elderly people living alone, to answer their questions about COVID-19
- supporting the National Societies in providing food to migrants in the **Russian Federation** who have lost their jobs since the beginning of the pandemic, and to elderly people in **Georgia proper** who need to stay home to avoid COVID-19 infection
- ensuring physical distancing and providing masks and gloves for use during distributions of livelihood assistance in **Azerbaijan**
- donating tablet computers to the education ministry in **Armenia** to make distance learning possible for schoolchildren in conflict-affected communities

1. Ukraine. The ICRC provides food and hygiene items to elderly people and other vulnerable individuals who are affected by the conflict and by COVID-19 containment measures.
2. Armenia. These tablet computers are being sent to 60 schoolchildren in conflict-affected communities near the Armenia-Azerbaijan border. The ICRC donated the computers to enable the education ministry to facilitate distance learning for the schoolchildren.

*“Most people receiving our assistance are elderly & persons with disabilities for whom staying at home at times of #COVID19 is lifesaving. @ICRC\_ua refilled stocks of food & hygiene items for the residents of 20 localities near #Donetsk to support them throughout the coming weeks.”*

**ICRC Ukraine**

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**ICRC**

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