

## New FIND partnerships make COVID-19 rapid tests available to refugees and internally displaced people in the Middle East

- Millions displaced by conflict and other humanitarian crises have limited or no access to COVID-19 testing, leaving them vulnerable to the virus
- FIND is partnering with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the International Rescue Committee (IRC) to implement rapid antigen tests in Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria
- Through two projects designed to increase access to testing for COVID-19, evidence will also be generated around the optimal use of diagnostic tests in complex humanitarian emergencies to tackle other diseases and efficiently respond to future health crises

**GENEVA, SWITZERLAND – 17 March 2022.** FIND, the global alliance for diagnostics, has formed two new partnerships to implement rapid antigen tests (Ag RDTs) for COVID-19 among vulnerable displaced people in the Middle East region. In partnership with the International Organization for Migration (IOM), FIND will focus on conflict-affected regions of Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and north-west Syria. In collaboration with the International Rescue Committee (IRC), FIND will work to increase access to testing for those in need, including internally displaced people (IDPs) and healthcare workers in northern Syria.

Ag RDTs have proven to be a vital tool in controlling the spread of COVID-19 due to their ease of use, fast results, low cost, and suitability for decentralized approaches that remove barriers to testing. And yet, access to these tests has not been equitable across the world and is particularly low in regions that have seen significant population displacement caused by conflict and humanitarian emergencies.

Since it began more than a decade ago, the Syrian crisis has forced 6.9 million people from their homes within the country<sup>1</sup> and created 5.7 million refugees in the wider region, over 1.5 million of whom are now hosted by Jordan and Lebanon.<sup>2</sup> As many as 2.5 million people are also in need of humanitarian aid in Iraq.<sup>3</sup> These populations are particularly vulnerable to disease due to precarious living conditions and limited access to healthcare. Their fragile situation has been compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic, with a heightened risk of illness and mortality caused in part by low testing capacity that makes it difficult to stop disease transmission in already-challenging contexts.

---

<sup>1</sup> OCHA. 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic. [2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic | HumanitarianResponse](#) (accessed 16 March 2022)

<sup>2</sup> UNHCR. Operational Data Portal, Refugee Situations. [https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria#\\_ga=2.219968607.757535626.1643378035-1974033830.1643378035](https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria#_ga=2.219968607.757535626.1643378035-1974033830.1643378035) (accessed 16 March 2022).

<sup>3</sup> OCHA. [Iraq | Global Humanitarian Overview \(unocha.org\)](#) (accessed 16 March 2022)

Access to Ag RDTs is urgently needed to widen access to testing, help control the pandemic and reduce the burden of COVID-19 among refugees and internally displaced people.

The partnership between FIND and the IOM will see the two organizations procure and deploy 100,000 COVID-19 Ag RDTs to conflict-affected regions of Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and northern Syria. The project will work to build local capacity to use the tests effectively, combining training of healthcare and community workers and the development of innovative testing algorithms and strategies that respond to context-specific need. Operational research will also be conducted with a view to expand the use of Ag RDTs.

**Nevin Wilson**, IOM Jordan Senior Regional Project Coordinator for IOM’s Middle East Response grant, funded by The Global Fund, said: “This innovative project will provide access to rapid testing for COVID-19 to the most vulnerable communities in places where testing is already very scarce. It will add to the evidence for large scale expansion of testing in these settings.”

FIND and the IRC will support the delivery of training, testing facility readiness, test distribution, and quality assurance needed to ensure access to Ag RDTs and appropriate referral of positive cases in the north of Syria. In north-east Syria, the project hopes to serve IDPs living in camps, who are thought to be most at risk due to high population densities. Meanwhile, in north-west Syria, the focus will be on healthcare workers, and will support two hospitals and eight primary healthcare centres to enable around 400 staff members to be tested 2–3 times weekly.

**Issack Hussein**, a Health Coordinator from IRC Syria Country Programme, said: “The COVID-19 pandemic remains one of the biggest health challenges in Syria. What is equally challenging is the lack of adequate testing facilities in the region. Introducing Ag RDTs at health facility levels will open an opportunity for the most vulnerable segments of the community access to testing services in a timely manner. IRC is happy to collaborate with FIND, introduce this new technology and contribute to finding a solution to the testing services challenges in Syria.”

Together, these projects represent a unique opportunity to develop understanding of how Ag RDTs can be safely and effectively introduced in crisis-hit regions to better control the spread of diseases. And with climate change and other crises set to cause further population displacements in the future, the lessons we learn today will prove invaluable in shaping diagnostic responses to the health challenges of tomorrow.

**Sanjay Sarin**, Vice President, Access, at FIND, said: “Solving the testing needs of the world’s most vulnerable populations is fundamental to democratizing access to testing for all. In collaboration with the IOM and IRC, we will not only contribute to easing the burden of COVID-19 in these regions but will also develop new tools, strategies, and evidence that can be repurposed to deliver on a central component of our overall mission: to ensure everyone who needs a test is able to get one.”

# # #

The International Organization for Migration is the leading inter-governmental organization promoting humane and orderly migration for the benefit of all, with a presence in over 100 countries, and supporting 174 member states to improve migration management. In 2019, IOM provided support to 30 million persons, including 23 million persons on the move (internally displaced persons, migrants and refugees) and 7 million host community members. IOM is dedicated to promoting humane and orderly migration for the benefit of all. It does so by providing services and advice to governments and migrants. [www.iom.int](http://www.iom.int)  
IOM Jordan hosts the regional project management unit for the Middle East Response funded by The Global Fund and covering Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestinian Territories, Syria and Yemen.

#### **About the International Rescue Committee**

The International Rescue Committee responds to the world's worst humanitarian crises, helping to restore health, safety, education, economic wellbeing, and power to people devastated by conflict and disaster. Founded in 1933 at the call of Albert Einstein, the IRC is at work in over 40 countries and over 20 U.S. cities helping people to survive, reclaim control of their future, and strengthen their communities. Learn more at [www.rescue.org](http://www.rescue.org) and follow the IRC on [Twitter](#) & [Facebook](#).

#### **About FIND**

FIND, the global alliance for diagnostics, seeks to ensure equitable access to reliable diagnosis around the world. We connect countries and communities, funders, decision-makers, healthcare providers and developers to spur diagnostic innovation and make testing an integral part of sustainable, resilient health systems. We are working to save 1 million lives through accessible, quality diagnosis, and save US\$1 billion in healthcare costs to patients and health systems. We are co-convenor of the Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT) Accelerator diagnostics pillar, and a WHO Collaborating Centre for Laboratory Strengthening and Diagnostic Technology Evaluation. For more information, please visit [www.finddx.org](http://www.finddx.org)

#### **Media contacts**

##### *IOM:*

Fedza Lukovac, IOM Jordan, Media and Communications Officer  
[flukovac@iom.int](mailto:flukovac@iom.int)

##### *IRC:*

Matt Amaral, Communications Officer, Global Partnerships  
[matt.amaral@rescue.org](mailto:matt.amaral@rescue.org)  
[communications@rescue.org](mailto:communications@rescue.org)

##### *FIND:*

Sarah-Jane Loveday, Director, Communications  
M: +41 79 431 62 44  
[media@finddx.org](mailto:media@finddx.org)

# # #