

The Arab situation Room

The 'second wave' of Coronavirus outbreak August and September

A steep rise in cases continued through August and September countrywide, particularly among the Arab society in Israel. The Morbidity rate among Arab society, in this period, has reached a record high of approximately 18% active cases of all patients in the country. This situation has led to imposing a partial closure that included 40 red-localities with high morbidity rates, 29 of them were Arab localities, later on, in med-September, the government imposed a general lockdown for three weeks.

As of October 11th, 5044 active patients have been registered among the Arab society, representing 13.2% of total patients in the country. In addition, there was a significant decrease in the number of new cases among Arab society, that has reached 569 new cases.

In early August, the government established the coronavirus headquarters for the Arab society led by Mr Ayman Saif. The Arab situation room (ASR) has contributed to the development of the headquarters' work plan. It continues in full cooperation with Mr Ayman Saif and with Prof. Gamzo - the national coronavirus chief.

Prof. Gamzo's "Traffic light plan" went into effect on 06/09/20, the plan relies on cooperation between the central government and the local government and the expansion of local authority powers with government budgetary support and workforce reinforcement. According to the plan, financial assistance will be provided to local authorities for the benefit of establishing information systems, strengthening local emergency committees, welfare assistance, assistance in cutting infection chains, assistance in enforcement and more. The ASR will closely monitor budget allocations and implementation in Arab local authorities.

During this period, the ASR has acted on several levels to strengthen the Arab local authorities' struggle against the increasing morbidity. It led a national information and awareness-raising campaign. The ASR has also dealt with several issues, such

as local Emergency budgets, reinforcement of Professional workforce, education, police enforcement and non-compliance with public safety directives.

The needs of Arab local authorities: The ASR has conducted a mapping of the needs of Arab local authorities. The following are the main recommendations:

1. To establish a civilian unit in local authorities to support the efforts of the local emergency units, including a budget for additional inspectors and the purchase of vehicles.
2. To appoint a local Coronavirus chief in local authorities.
3. To establish a local communication mechanism Provided with a professional workforce, technological abilities, developed Internet infrastructure.
4. To establish an epidemiological investigation unit, including appointing an epidemiological inquiry supervisor for monitoring patients and individuals in quarantine.
5. To allocate a budget for local emergency committees. Finance the establishment of a call center, operation team including an information coordinator and a coordinator of public complaints.
6. To allocate a budget for expanding and upgrading the systems of public information in local authorities.
7. To assign a budget for welfare needs, adding a professional workforce and providing solutions to support families in need.
8. To support the local educational system.
9. To assist in setting up mass testing centers.
10. To Increase police enforcement to raise the level of compliance.

These recommendations were submitted to the Prime Minister, the Ministers of Finance and Interior Affairs and presented to Prof. Gamzo, who has adopted the recommendations and called for their implementation.

Challenges facing the education system: During August and towards the opening of the school year, the ASR conducted a survey to assess the readiness of schools to open in terms of the educational staff, Teaching Assistants, distance learning both in the "regular" education system and in the special needs education system. Here are some of the main findings:

The level of the physical conditions in kindergartens, special education, middle schools and high schools in regular education, in most local authorities, was found satisfactory. Primary schools reported a low level of readiness in most local authorities due to the shortage of classrooms created by the outline of the Ministry of Education. Moreover, Arab local authorities have reported that this year's budgets for the renovation of educational institutions were not received.

The need to regulate the role of the teaching assistants has been raised. Most Local authorities raised concerns regarding the quality of teaching assistants, their adaptation in the system, meeting of goals and the educational benefit.

As for distance learning, the majority of Arab Local authorities reported a deficient level of readiness in all respects, such as the lack of computers, lacking infrastructure, as well as insufficient training for the Educational staff in this method of education.

Heads of education departments in Arab localities believe that the lack of classrooms and the ineffectiveness of distance learning can be overcome by introducing a model of learning in shifts in schools. This model was communicated to the relevant authorities to examine it further and consider its implementation.

The ASR held many consultations with the Arab Education Committee, the National Parents' Committee and others, and decided to open the school year on time according to the outline of the Ministry of Education while working with the Ministry to remove barriers and obstacles. Most Schools have opened on September 1st until the lockdown.

Compensations for isolation periods: A phenomenon of uncooperativeness with epidemiological investigations has been identified, in which vital information about the identities of people who came in contact with verified patients is not submitted, a matter that contributes significantly to the chain of infections. The ASR conducted analyzes of the issue and presented a position paper to various government ministries. It was found that The main motive behind this behaviour is a general concern about causing economic harm to people who have been in contact with patients, given that entering isolation does not entitle the isolated to adequate compensation for lost workdays.

According to the arrangement in the law, the payment for isolation days comes at the expense of the employee's sick leave. Quarantine days that exceed the employee's quota of sick days do not get compensated. Moreover, this arrangement has expired on 30/09/20, according to which the isolation days from this date are at the expense of the employees. Also, self-employed workers are not entitled to any payment for the isolation periods.

We believe that formulating a new arrangement is necessary to encourage the public to cooperate with epidemiological investigation is needed, in a way that offers full compensation for days of isolation. Also, this arrangement should include compensation for self-employed workers as well, and consider shortening the period of isolation as far as medically acceptable.

Promoting an immediate response to a lack of food security: In light of the deteriorating economic situation, and the fact that more and more families in the Arab society are joining the cycle of poverty, the ASR has conducted a mapping of food security in Arab localities. About 300,000 households were surveyed. It was found that 25% of households are defined as "in need".

During this period, support was provided from various sources to one-third of the households "in need". However, two-thirds of the households, which constitutes about 50,000 households, remained unanswered. The situation room submitted a request to the Ministries of the Interior, Labor and Welfare for the distribution of food baskets in Arab localities.