STRENGTHENING THE ROLE OF MUNICIPALITIES IN LEBANON IN PREVENTING AND CONTAINING COVID-19:
A ROADMAP

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LEBANESE CONTEXT

- On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a pandemic, signaling to the world that continued spread is likely, and that countries should prepare for the possibility of widespread community transmission.
- The first case of COVID-19 in Lebanon was confirmed on 21 February 2020; since then, the number of cases has continued to grow exponentially.
- The total number of COVID-19 cases in Lebanon is likely higher than what is being reported due to inherent difficulties in identifying and counting mild and asymptomatic cases.
- Cases now comprise those that are travel-related and those that are the result of internal spread, including occupational transmission. Most regions in Lebanon have not seen full compliance with social distancing measures.
- COVID-19 might last for some time, therefore there may be surges / a second wave of the virus when the lockdown is eased.

Authors
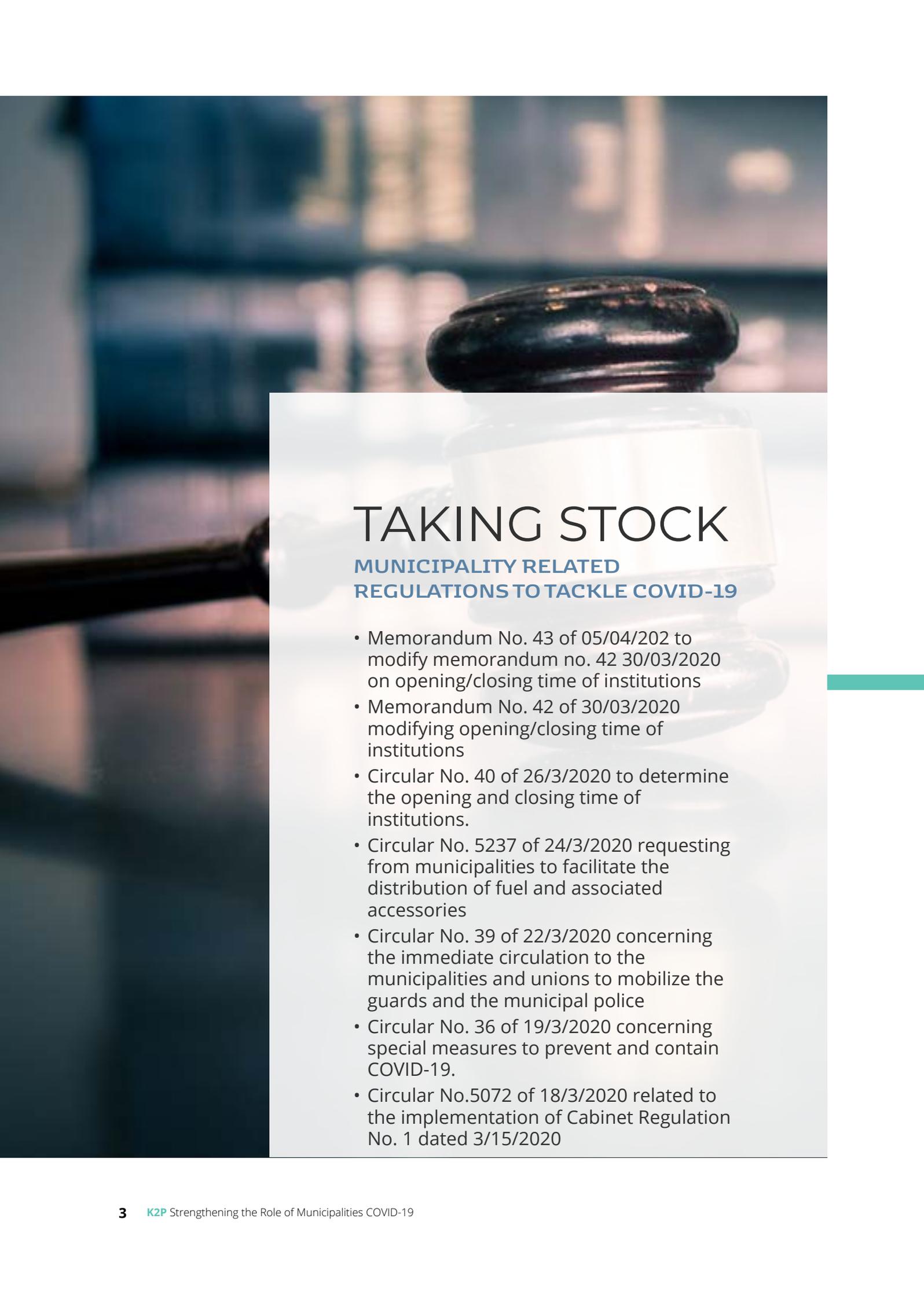
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TAKING STOCK

MUNICIPALITY LEVEL INITIATIVES TO TACKLE COVID-19

Municipalities have a crucial role in supporting the government in translating high-level national regulations into practical measures that can be implemented and monitored at the local community level. Municipalities can also act as channels that connect the government with the population.

Since the first case of COVID-19 was confirmed in Lebanon, several initiatives have been implemented in various municipalities to prevent the transmission of COVID-19.

Initiatives include:
- Raising awareness on COVID-19 spread prevention
- Sterilizing the streets and gathering areas in the town
- Distributing food and sterilization materials to the families
- Educating community on home quarantine and isolation
- Developing committees in municipalities to prevent and contain COVID-19
- Enforcing home quarantine and isolation
- Monitoring institutions that are exempted from public mobilization and closure of institutions that are violating the government's decisions
- Telethon to raise funds for local hospitals
- Road closures
- Calling upon volunteers from the community to secure social assistance
- Assisting the community (i.e. food, financial aid, providing the generator for free and vouchers)
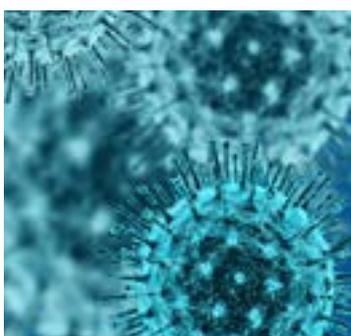
TAKING STOCK

MUNICIPALITY RELATED REGULATIONS TO TACKLE COVID-19

- Memorandum No. 43 of 05/04/202 to modify memorandum no. 42 30/03/2020 on opening/closing time of institutions
- Memorandum No. 42 of 30/03/2020 modifying opening/closing time of institutions
- Circular No. 40 of 26/3/2020 to determine the opening and closing time of institutions.
- Circular No. 5237 of 24/3/2020 requesting from municipalities to facilitate the distribution of fuel and associated accessories
- Circular No. 39 of 22/3/2020 concerning the immediate circulation to the municipalities and unions to mobilize the guards and the municipal police
- Circular No. 36 of 19/3/2020 concerning special measures to prevent and contain COVID-19.
- Circular No.5072 of 18/3/2020 related to the implementation of Cabinet Regulation No. 1 dated 3/15/2020
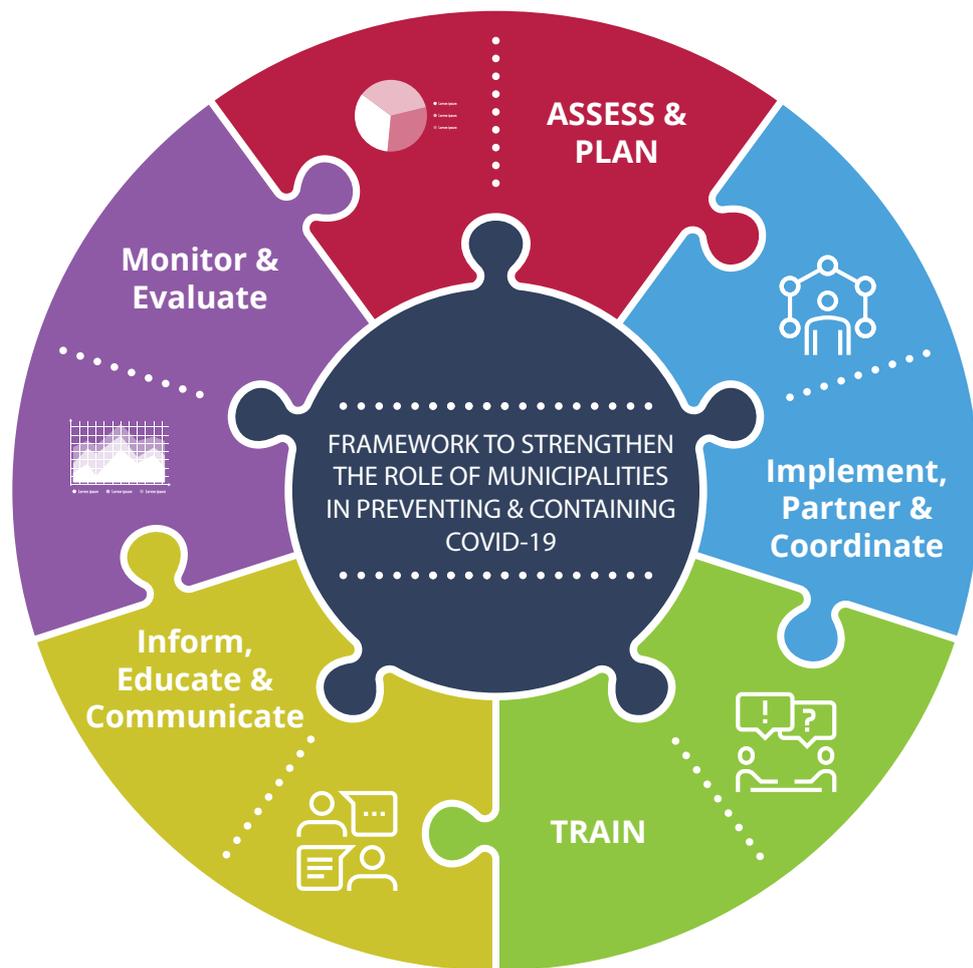
CIRCULAR NO. 36 OF 19/3/2020
Special measures to prevent and contain COVID-19

- Municipalities to circulate the instructions and directives issued by the authorities including, Presidency of the Council of Ministers, Ministry of Public Health, Ministry of Interior and Municipalities via the area communication channels

- Formulate a committee that is composed of representatives of the municipal council, the mayor(s), the civil, scout and health associations, and other active community representatives.

- Coordinate with religious leaders and implement the guidance of religious references.

- Communicate with the commercial institutions of foodstuff, bakeries, pharmacies, and other essential services in implementing prevention and hygiene measures to prevent transmission of COVID-19.

- Circulate the instruction proper for safe behavior in households and the local hotline number of the municipality to report a suspected case of COVID-19.

- Inform the townspeople on the need to only leave the house in cases of necessity,through amplifiers installed in houses of worship and communication portals.

- The citizens should immediately inform the municipality of any suspected case of COVID-19, any person who was on travel or moved from one town to another.

- Recruit volunteers to help with outreach work and community assistance.

- Foster a spirit of social solidarity by urging families to provide financial and material support for the poorest families or those who may be affected by the continued closure of businesses.

- Coordinate with other municipalities and Ministries.

- Monitor institutions compliance with regulations

- Continue providing public services such as solid waste management and maintaining the infrastructure.

- Municipalities and union of municipalities shall inform the governors, of the measures taken, to implement the above mentioned within one week at most of its date.

When it comes to COVID-19, several initiatives have been implemented to regulate the role of municipalities and to launch initiatives at the municipality level in Lebanon; however, these initiatives vary across regions and towns with no systematic and standardized measures implemented across all municipalities. This document provides an evidence-informed roadmap tailored to the Lebanese context to strengthen and guide municipalities to prevent and contain COVID-19 in Lebanon.

— ROADMAP FOR MUNICIPALITIES
TO PREVENT AND CONTAIN COVID-19

Circular puzzle diagram. Center: **FRAMEWORK TO STRENGTHEN THE ROLE OF MUNICIPALITIES IN PREVENTING & CONTAINING COVID-19**

Segments:
- **ASSESS & PLAN**
- **Implement, Partner & Coordinate**
- **TRAIN**
- **Inform, Educate & Communicate**
- **Monitor & Evaluate**

The roadmap builds on the regulations and initiatives developed by the government and various municipalities, respectively and complements it with international best practices to strengthen the role of municipalities in preventing and contain COVID-19 and ensure coherence across all municipalities.

Assess and Plan

- Develop a community committee led by the municipality and consists of municipality council, the mayor(s), the civil, scout and health associations, and other active community representatives to develop and implement an emergency operations plan in the community specifically for COVID-19 [2] and outline the role and responsibility of community committee [4,6].

- Assess available resources (i.e. human resources, volunteers, financial, isolation areas [20].

- Assess the community members or groups that may be most vulnerable and/or can be severely affected by COVID-19 or the strict measures implemented and develop plans to support them (such as community-wide fundraisers to provide them with financial support) [2,6,7].

Recommendations were identified using a systematic search strategy on PubMed. Reports from local laws and regulations, WHO, CDC and other health authorities were utilized to inform the development of the recommendations

Implement, Partner and Coordinate

- Interpret and implement measures identified by the government [1] including social distancing measures, mass gatherings, curfew, and transportation measures [11].

- Support in contact tracing of suspected/ confirmed COVID-19 cases by, deploying community members and community health workers (CHWs) as "contact tracers" searching for contacts associated with an identified case, for isolation and monitoring of signs and symptoms, report the case to municipality and authorities, and refer them to a health facility [7,9,14].

- Identify a list of people that will act as contact persons between the person with COVID-19 and the municipality for a regular update on their condition [9, 14].

- Cancel gatherings that may risk virus transmission and close areas where there is or expected high traffic of people [3].

- Ensure the closure of sports clubs, cafes and other entertainment institutions [6].

- Intensify cleaning and disinfecting efforts in the community houses of worship, municipality building, and areas that were previously used for social events [4,6].

- Ensure availability of the community-level program to assist persons with COVID-19 and their family who need to stay at home due to isolation recommendations (i.e. food, medication) [4].

- Identify a place where the suspected/ confirmed case can safely stay in the community, that meet isolation standards [6,7,9,14].

Implement, Partner and Coordinate (cont'd)

- Supervise the provision of food security, and distribute all in-kind and non-in-kind assistance from the concerned authorities [6].

- Build partnerships with neighboring municipalities to align and coordinate plans [4].

- Leverage on networks with experts, activist, faith leaders, local businesses, schools, hospitals, primary healthcare centers and community leaders to support the community (transmitting messages, providing spiritual and emotional care, supporting plans etc.) during lockdown/ quarantine or if there are any suspected COVID-19 cases in the community [4,12].

- Coordinate with development services centers (Ministry of Social Affairs) and concerned associations to provide psychosocial support to the families of people tested positive on COVID-19 [6].

- Coordinate with representatives of UNICEF, UNDP, UNHCR to ensure all preventive and precautionary measures are implemented in the Syrian Refugee Camps [6].

Train

- Train community committee, municipal police, volunteers, activists and professionals to support in implementing measures indicated by the municipality [6,9].

- Identify and train volunteers to support those who are quarantined to overcome daily challenges such as buying food and medication and child care [18].

Inform, Educate and Communicate

- Proactively communicate with the community using known municipality channels (i.e. social media, messages, places of worship amplifiers, etc.) [12,17,21] and test communication methods regularly to ensure messages and information are received by the community widely [4].

- Develop an emergency communication plan and platform to communicate timely and accurate information within the community [4].

- Provide transparent and accurate information regularly to the community on the number of infected people, measures taken, important information, etc. [5,15,17].

- Identify multiple methods to ensure that the community members can contact the municipality (i.e. hotline, email, social media) [4].

- Develop a local hotline number of the municipality to report a suspected case of COVID-19 [6] and designate an experienced person to take the calls [4].

- Develop methods and means to communicate information with governmental authorities and report suspected COVID-19 cases [4].

- Provide public education and awareness through social media or WhatsApp on COVID-19 symptoms, safe behavior in households, addressing stigma, prevention, and management measures (i.e. hand hygiene, cough and sneezing etiquette, voluntary home isolation, proper utilization of precaution measures when visiting public places, areas of possible gatherings, or closed areas and social distancing) [8,12,13,16,17,21].

- Identify rumors or misinformation and communicate with the community to clarify misinformation or rumors [7,12,17,21].

- Communicate with the commercial institutions of foodstuff, bakeries, pharmacies, and other essential services in implementing prevention and hygiene measures to prevent transmission of COVID-19 [6].

- Regularly report and communicate with governor and district commissioner on updates and measures implemented [6].

Monitor and Evaluate

- Monitor information provided by authorities on COVID-19 [3]

- Monitor and evaluate the efficacy of and compliance to measures delignated by the municipality including social distancing measures to prevent and control COVID-19 [9,10,12,17]

- Monitor compliance to quarintine measures for those with suspected/confirmed COVID-19 and those that have traveled from other regions of countries [18,19]

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