

## Ramadan & COVID-19

Ramadan likely to commence on 23 April 2020 will be impacted by COVID-19 and respective restrictive measures in place in many European countries. Muslims, including asylum-seekers and refugees hosted in Europe, may not be able to celebrate their holy month and forthcoming Eid in the usual way, notably as physical distancing requirements, restrictions to movement and gatherings ask to forego celebrations, family visits and communal affairs, such as breaking the fast or charitable activities – all of which are central parts of Ramadan. In congregated environments, such as reception or other accommodation facilities, additional challenges to uphold Ramadan traditions, including fasting, preparing for Iftar and onward meals, prayers, or charitable activities, the usual way may arise.

- WHO's interim guidance on [practical considerations and recommendations for religious leaders and faith-based communities in the context of COVID-19](#) of 7 April, addresses the special role of religious leaders, faith-based organizations and faith-communities. It offers guidance on incorporating public health requirements in the exercise of faith activities, and in notably includes a section on the remote/virtual conduct of faith activities.
- The [Global Multi-Religious Faith-in-Action Covid-19 Initiative](#) was launched on 7 April 2020 by UNICEF and Religions for Peace. This initiative seeks to strengthening multi-religious action and community mobilization, in countering the COVID-19 pandemic. Amongst other this initiative suggests to adapt faith gatherings, rituals and services to respect international and national guidance to curb the transmission of the COVID-19 virus, include related to gatherings and physical distance, for the health and safety of others while developing alternatives.

**Overarching comment:** Reception facilities are typically shared between different religious and other groups. Mutual respect in the exercise of traditions, faith and religious beliefs should therefore underpin any adaptation to the daily running of such facilities that may (temporarily) be taken for particular religious events. While this guidance focuses on considerations for the observance of Ramadan, the needs of other residents should remain in sight when considering applying it in context to ensure a balance of the needs of all residents for a peaceful co-habitation. In particular, those observing Ramadan should also be reminded to remain conscious of the situation of those who don't.

The following are proposed measures to be considered by reception facility authorities for the month of Ramadan:

- **Information about Ramadan:** Reception authorities and providers should receive information about the month of Ramadan, its traditions and particularities that apply, to ensure all reception staff and providers are aware and have sufficient knowledge. Such information could be prepared by the local Muslim community, which can also provide further guidance to authorities on adjustments to be considered in reception facilities for the month of Ramadan.
- **Participation:** Prior to the start of Ramadan, consult with Ramadan-observing individuals staying at reception facility using an AGD-approach to better understand their particular needs for the holy month in order to inform possible adjustments by reception authorities while respecting applicable public health requirements. The participation of non-observing individuals is required as well to ensure their needs remain addressed too. This may also offer opportunities for individuals to support adjustments measures as charitable activity.
- **Information provision:** Reception authorities should inform all persons staying at the centre of adjustments before their implementation and allow for any (confidential) feedback or complaints so as to avoid a disruption of a facility's smooth running.
- **Reconsider room occupation:** Prior to the start of Ramadan, reconsider the occupation of rooms, without prejudice to family unity where applicable. Where spatially possible, consider affording single rooms at least for the month of Ramadan. Where this is not possible, consider

re-arranging the occupation of rooms to ensure Ramadan-observing persons do not share a room with people not observing. Such changes should, as far as possible, be informed by the wishes of the inhabitants and be based on their consent. This can help avoiding mutual disruptions, e.g. regarding food consumption in rooms by those not observing during fasting hours or nightly activities by those who fast. Individuals infected or quarantined should remain separate from others. For those, particular measures should be considered, such as regular phone connections with family or community members e.g. when breaking the fast, so as to avoid that the isolation during Ramadan weighs disproportionately heavy on them.

- **Adjust regular schedule:** For those observing Ramadan, the regular daily schedule for activity and mealtimes in particular. Where the use of wash facilities is regulated, this should be reconsidered to allow for ritual washing prior to prayer times. In particular, adjustments are necessary to allow to adhere to the country-specific timing for breaking the fast, as well as the intake of meals after sunset and before sunrise. The adjustment of mealtimes may support the implementation of health regulations as it may lead to a natural staggering.
- **Meal preparations: (a)** Where individuals purchase their own food/water to prepare their meals, and have access to respective cooking facilities, this should be maintained as an option. Depending on the number of observing individuals in a facility, the use of a common kitchen may need to be regulated and agreed upon together with the concerned individuals. **(b)** Where movement restrictions do not allow for regular food/water purchase, authorities and service providers in the facilities may wish to consider the delivery of required food stuffs based on identified needs. **(c)** Where kitchen facilities are not available or not suitable for individual meal preparation, and meals are provided by the facilities, the meals should be adjusted not only in timing, but also composition to ensure culturally appropriate meals for the month of Ramadan, where possible. Re-hydration and provision of dates at the break of the fast should be ensured.
- **Prayers and faith rituals:** WHO's interim guidance provides practical considerations and recommendations that are applicable to religious gatherings, where health restrictions permit, on the safe exercise of rituals and ceremonies, as well as on alternatives where gatherings are not possible. Where spatially possible and in consideration of the need for physical distancing, gender-separated prayer rooms could be made available. Where this is not possible, individuals should be encouraged to pray in their rooms or other quiet spaces in the centre while keeping with the need for physical distance. Virtual/remote options for faith activities should be explored in country, as this can also help in upholding the communal spirit of such activities. The WHO guidance includes helpful tips for technological as well as low-tech options. The local Islamic Center and Muslim community may offer further localized guidance.

Ramadan Tent Project is one such example. Normally, this project's "[Open Iftar](#)"-Initiative gathers thousands of people for celebrations in many cities. This year, the project decided to go all virtual, seeking to maintain some of the communal and charitable elements of Ramadan.

Step 1: Sign up for your free welcome #MyOpenIftar pack at [www.openiftar.co.uk/my](http://www.openiftar.co.uk/my)

Step 2: Share your pictures, videos & Iftar experiences, food & conversations with [#MyOpenIftar](#) & [@openiftar](#)

Step 3: Join our virtual community every day, on zoom or watch it live-streamed on our social media channels

Step 4: Receive your personalised fundraising link & help us bring the Ramadan community experience to every doorstep!

- **Charitable activities:** Where movement and gathering restrictions and physical distancing requirements may prevent carrying out charitable activities as usual. However, reception authorities may consider and discuss with observing individuals opportunities for charitable activities in the centre itself or in the community (e.g. carrying out grocery shopping for older members of the community). There may also be online options for charitable activities, such

as by the Ramadan Tent Project mentioned above. Such options may also be provided the private sector: In Switzerland for example, an insurance company offers an online platform to connect participating individuals with each other to combat loneliness ([Heroes Against Loneliness](#)). The local Muslim community may offer further guidance.

**Exemptions:** With regards to possible exemptions from fasting (older persons, pregnant, nursing or menstruating women, ill people or travellers), no specific information on COVID-19 related exemptions is available to date. As those who are ill can be exempted, this would presumably include people with COVID-19 symptoms, or those with underlying health conditions, which are an at-risk category. In some countries, such as in Pakistan for example, medical professionals advised that those contracted with the COVID-19 virus may be exempted. Older persons can also be exempted from fasting, and are also considered a particular at-risk category for COVID-19 infection. However, no medical guidance on whether or how fasting impacts on risks of a COVID-19 infection is currently available.