

COVID-19: Innovative responses by Dubai Police and the impact on future policy



شرطة دبي
DUBAI POLICE





Foreword

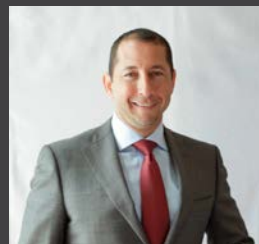
This is a collaborative report with Dubai Police highlighting innovation and best practice by Dubai Police in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the relevance of those changes to wider policing beyond this irregular period.

We also provide a perspective on the different ways in which selected police forces around the world have responded to the unique situations presented by the pandemic, and the extent to which these will be transferable in future.

COVID-19 has presented unprecedented circumstances in almost every aspect of life. National economies have suffered as the world's tourism, hospitality, retail, and travel industries have all experienced a sizable downturn. The impact on families and communities has been significant. We continue to live through a historical moment, a global event of which we have no comparable past experience.

Many aspects of this event have impacted governments, which people naturally look to for leadership and support in times of crisis. Perhaps most visibly, nations' healthcare systems and professionals have borne the brunt of the pandemic. However, it has also required new approaches and creativity from police and law enforcement agencies around the world. Key strides have included but not limited to, the enforcement of lockdowns and curfews, supporting health workers, taking action to restrict the free movement of people and the use of new and unfamiliar powers by police that were, previously, routine and private aspects of citizens' lives.

Working in partnership, we have examined the actions taken by Dubai Police, which combined conventional law enforcement tactics with the creative use of innovative technologies to deliver a highly effective response. We have also looked at some of the initial responses by governments and police to the pandemic in different countries. Taken together, they provide an indication of the difficulties faced by law enforcement professionals worldwide during this unprecedented period.



Rami Nazer

**PwC EMEA
Government and
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Picture provided by Dubai Police

About Dubai Police

Dubai Police was established in 1956, based in Naif Fort (the first police station in the Emirate) with 29 staff. Today, it is a modern and well-established police organisation with more than fifteen thousand employees, delivering services across an area of 4,114 square kilometres to a population of 2.8 million people. The force is chaired by His Highness Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid Al-Maktoum, Vice-President and Prime Minister of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Ruler of Dubai.

Dubai Police is an integral part of the wider UAE policing structure. Its core mission is to improve the quality of life in the country, operating in accordance with its constitutional rights to enforce the law and to maintain the security and safety of the community.

Dubai Police was the first Arab policing institution to use DNA testing in criminal investigations, the first to use electronic fingerprinting, the first to establish a department exclusively for human rights and the first to use Global Positioning System (GPS) technologies to support patrol location techniques.

The force has won many awards for excellence, locally, regionally, and globally. Recognising the challenges involved in delivering policing services in the 21st century, Dubai Police continues to seek innovative and effective approaches that will enable it to maintain its position as a leading policing entity.

Dubai Police, represented by its leaders and employees, has continuously worked to ensure the development of best practices related to crises, disasters and pandemics of various kinds, to tackle issues that may arise both today and in the future.



Lt. General Abdullah Khalifa Al Marri

Commander-in-Chief of Dubai Police

COVID-19 has brought about many challenges, leading Dubai Police to showcase its readiness and preparedness for the pandemic, whilst understanding the short and long-term impact such challenges bring about locally and globally.

This pandemic has evidently placed pressure on front line workers requiring strong multi-agency cooperation and flexible operations. This led Dubai Police to undertake a number of innovative practices whilst utilising those already in place to ensure the safety of citizens and employees was preserved and that they were provided with digitally enabled services.

Dubai Police are happy to issue this joint global report with PwC, to share examples of best practices as well as ensuring transparency in operations and continuous development, helping realise our future vision, "Police Pioneering for a Safe City".



Contents

The impact of COVID-19 on the safety and security sector

05

Dubai Police: Rapid evolution to meet the challenges of COVID-19

08

Global law enforcement initiatives: best practice from around the world

13

PwC's Government and Public Safety Team

14

Dubai Police Team

15

The impact of COVID-19 on the safety and security sector



The impact of COVID-19 on the safety and security sector

COVID-19 is first and foremost a global health emergency, with more than 100 million confirmed cases worldwide and more than 2 million deaths as of the end of January 2021. However, the measures taken by governments to control the spread of the virus have also presented considerable new challenges for police and security forces worldwide.

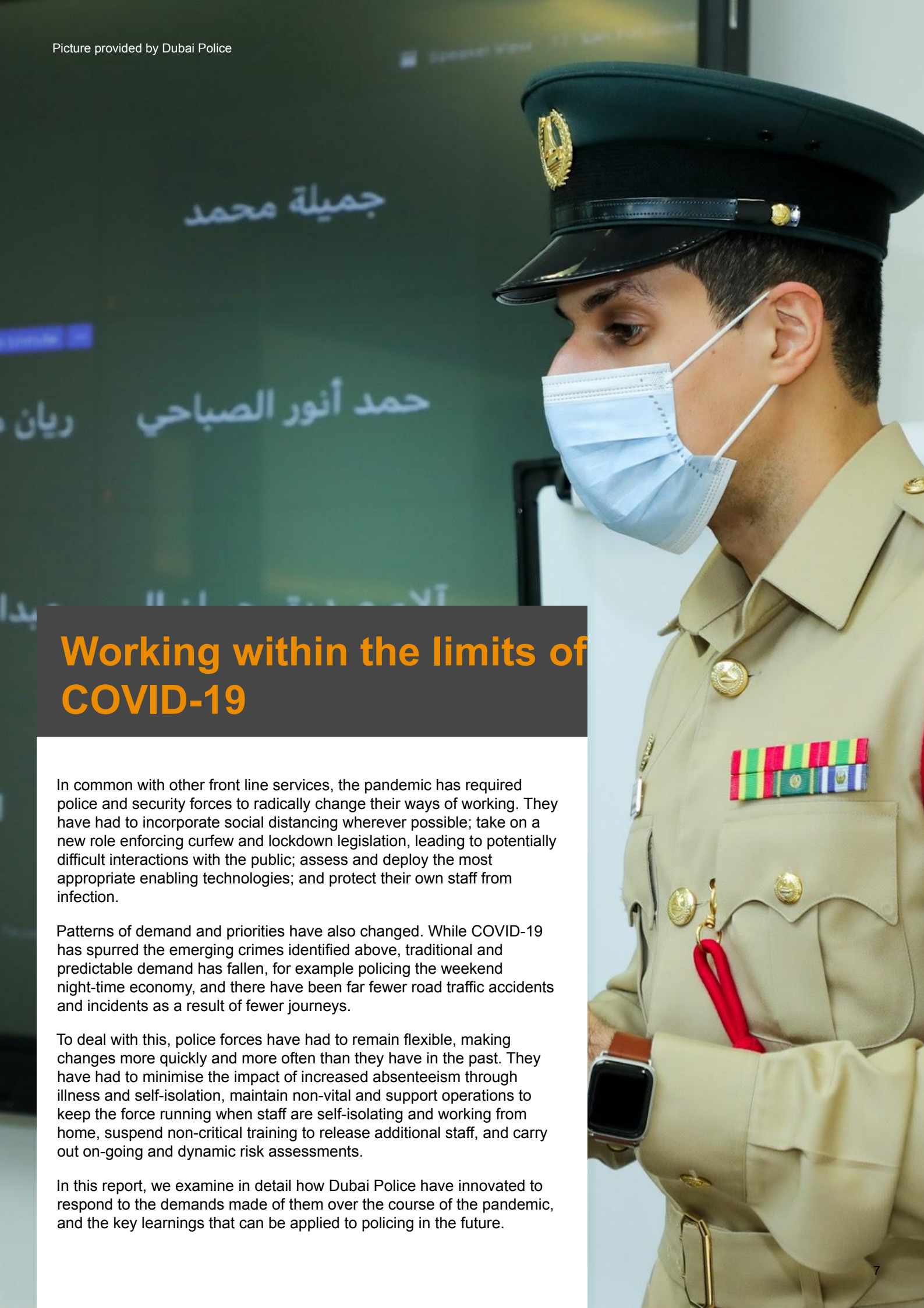
Police officers have been required to enforce government interventions in two key areas: **preventing** the spread of the disease by limiting mass gatherings, controlling entry points into the country, and policing the non-essential use of public transport; and **protecting** citizens by carrying out surveillance to ensure infected people respect quarantine rules, and providing rapid response teams when breaches of the rules occur. In some countries, police forces have also assisted with humanitarian operations, for example at refugee camps. Another key area of focus for law enforcement agencies have focused on is ensuring the continuity of operations and services offered to citizens as well as employees, whether through staffing or the incorporation of technology.

Throughout this period of rapid change, forces worldwide have had to use their resources in creative and innovative ways to uphold the law. In alignment with global trends, here in Dubai the police have supported the government's virus containment measures in the following key ways:



Globally, police forces have also been called on to deal with different forms of crime as a result of the pandemic: cyber attacks against staff have increased five-fold, according to the World Health Organization, while police in the UK have identified other forms of cyber crime including fake coronavirus tracker apps which can infect devices with malware. Another emerging problem is fake and substandard medical products – Interpol reported a 100% increase in seizures in some categories. Police in a number of countries including the UK, the US and Russia, have also had to deal with the very unpleasant and dangerous crime of being spat on by people who claim to be infected with COVID-19.

There has also been a rise in certain other offences. With people required to stay at home, the number of women calling support services as a result of domestic violence has increased by 100% in some countries, according to the United Nations, and the number of break-ins has also increased – police in Ottawa, Canada, reported a 70% increase, for example.




Working within the limits of COVID-19

In common with other front line services, the pandemic has required police and security forces to radically change their ways of working. They have had to incorporate social distancing wherever possible; take on a new role enforcing curfew and lockdown legislation, leading to potentially difficult interactions with the public; assess and deploy the most appropriate enabling technologies; and protect their own staff from infection.

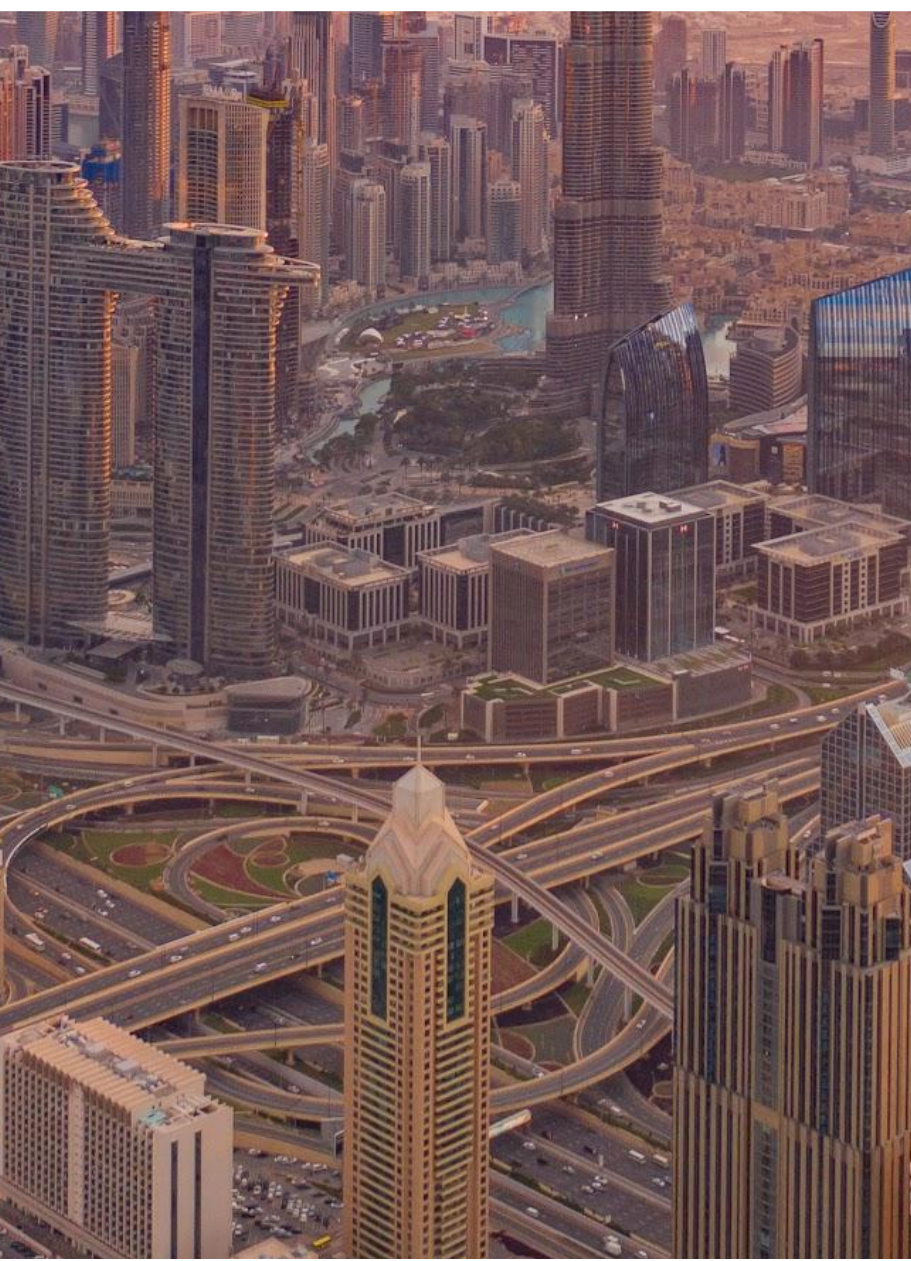
Patterns of demand and priorities have also changed. While COVID-19 has spurred the emerging crimes identified above, traditional and predictable demand has fallen, for example policing the weekend night-time economy, and there have been far fewer road traffic accidents and incidents as a result of fewer journeys.

To deal with this, police forces have had to remain flexible, making changes more quickly and more often than they have in the past. They have had to minimise the impact of increased absenteeism through illness and self-isolation, maintain non-vital and support operations to keep the force running when staff are self-isolating and working from home, suspend non-critical training to release additional staff, and carry out on-going and dynamic risk assessments.

In this report, we examine in detail how Dubai Police have innovated to respond to the demands made of them over the course of the pandemic, and the key learnings that can be applied to policing in the future.



Dubai Police: Rapid evolution to meet the challenges of COVID-19



Dubai Police: Rapid evolution to meet the challenges of COVID-19

The COVID-19 has been a catalyst for innovation and the development of new working practices within Dubai Police, however almost all of these will have a continuing relevance to policing and law enforcement in the Emirate beyond the pandemic and into the future.

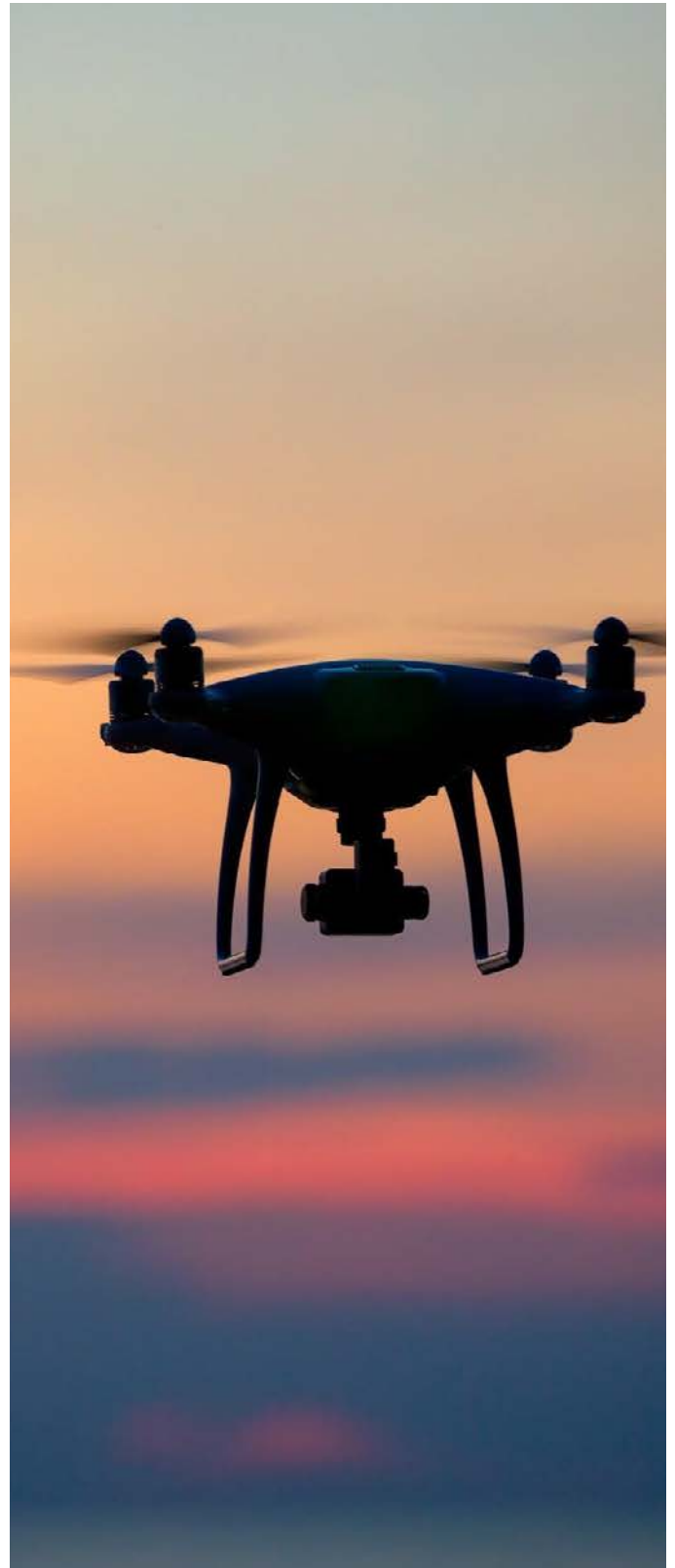
The first initiatives focused on upholding the measures put in place by the government to protect the public and prevent the spread of the virus. As infection rates surged around the world in April 2020, Dubai Police took on a key role administering the movement permit system put in place as Dubai introduced a strict lockdown. All residents, other than those working in essential services such as healthcare, food retail and security, were required to register for a permit to leave home to carry out permissible tasks such as shopping for food or attending medical appointments.

Residents applied online for the permits, supplying their phone number, address, national ID number, reason for leaving the house, destination, date and time expected to leave and return, and license plate number if driving. The permit was valid for 24 hours after the trip was approved.

Dubai Police then worked to uphold the system through a mixture of traditional and technology-enabled policing. The police presence was stepped up, with motorbike patrols used to enforce social distancing requirements, and more than 200 patrol cars added to ensure greater coverage. At the same time, speed cameras were used in combination with AI to identify drivers who had not registered for a movement permit, and to fine them.

Other novel uses of technology included drones with loudspeakers to spread the message that people must stay at home to curb the spread of the disease, and equipping police officers with smart glasses and helmets fitted with thermal cameras to detect people with high temperatures, a common symptom of those infected with COVID-19. Dubai Police were the first in the region to roll out the helmets, which are also equipped with AI-enabled facial and number plate-recognition technology.

More traditional policing methods have paid dividends too - Dubai Police began using trained sniffer dogs to detect cases of COVID-19 in recently arrived passengers by sniffing their luggage. Over 400 tests were conducted in Dubai's airport with an impressive 91% accuracy rate.

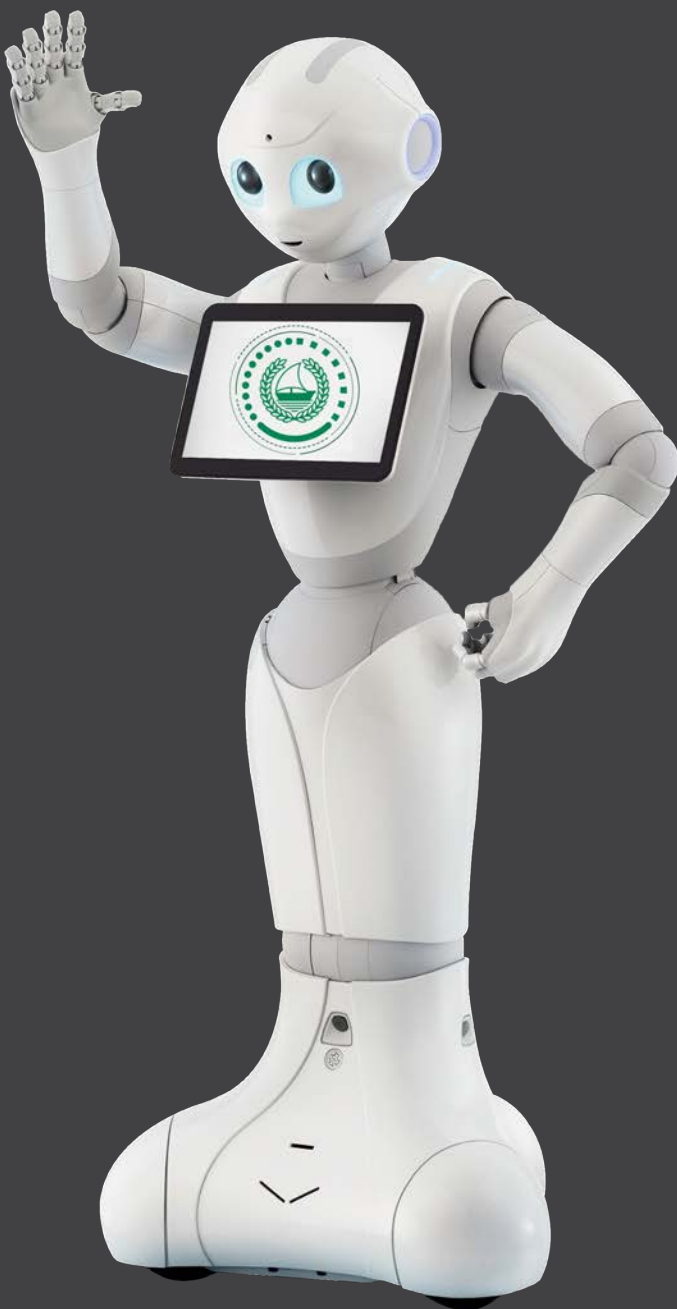


Data-driven decision-making

To ensure clear and unified oversight of the COVID-19 safety initiatives alongside the force's existing responsibilities, Dubai Police put in place an interactive command and control platform. Real-time data from the command and control centre, such as the number of 999 emergency calls and vehicle movement status, is fed into the system and displayed via a dashboard of indicators, and GPS technology allows controllers to see where the nearest resource to the incident is. This gives duty officers a clear picture of the situation across the emirate at any moment in time, and they can use the data to inform their decisions.

The effectiveness of the platform was demonstrated during the first wave of the pandemic (**see case study**), and it will support the work of the force well into the future.

On-going support for virus suppression



After putting in place the immediate measures to support the government in bringing the first wave of the pandemic under control, Dubai Police turned their attention to initiatives that would enable successful policing and support the wider community while social distancing remained in place.

To track cases and monitor adherence to quarantine rules, the force put in place a geospatial system that analyses reports of positive and suspected cases received by the command and control centre, and uses them to create accurate statistics of new confirmed COVID-19 cases, new suspected cases, daily growth rates and the overall growth rate. The capability was added specifically to address COVID-19, however it has many potential future applications in proactive investigations, particularly where covert surveillance is involved.

Keeping the public informed and onside with the continuing restrictions was another important part of Dubai Police's work. The force set up an online game called "Stay Safe", to help people understand the importance of following precautionary measures to limit the spread of infection. This demonstrated the potential of interactive tools as an alternative to passive messaging, and while developing this sort of digital resource can be cost and labour-intensive, there is clearly scope for further use of interactive platforms in public safety campaigns.

The force also set up a "share your thoughts" platform to encourage public engagement on the COVID-19 protection measures, and put in place a "Safe Home" awareness campaign on protecting children from dangerous content on the internet, as well as from domestic abuse.

An information campaign was also used to recruit volunteers to monitor movement restrictions and government-mandated isolation in specified areas and at set times.

So that citizens can still access the police services they need and maintain social distancing, (for example reporting a crime or paying a fine), 96% of Dubai Police's services have been digitised and can be accessed via smart screens in the police station.

Reaching all parts of society

Picture provided by Dubai Police

To ensure labourers coming in from overseas were not carrying COVID-19 and cause an outbreak within close living quarters, the police supported the health service by providing isolation rooms and buildings specifically for labourers. This was supplemented with dedicated personnel to remind workers to stick to face mask rules, including an information campaign titled “We Are All Responsible”.

Within the justice system, Dubai Police established a telemedicine service allowing prison inmates to have a remote doctor's appointment, so the doctor could diagnose the condition and prescribe and dispense medication without having to go into prisons. This initiative also has long-term potential, offering a more efficient way of providing medical support to prisoners, reducing physician time and - by reducing face-to-face contact - improving physician safety.

Dubai Police also helped vulnerable groups including the elderly and people with chronic and immune diseases to organise online doctor consultations.



New skills, new ways of learning

In common with public and private sector organisations worldwide, Dubai Police turned to video calling services such as Skype to ensure business continuity, carrying out meetings with staff and first responders remotely. The force also used these tools to carry on its training programme, and more than 400 employees have successfully passed courses via distance learning during the pandemic.

E-learning tutorials were also used to train police staff in the new COVID-19 control measures, and teams have used virtual learning experiences and simulations to increase their expertise in areas such as crisis and disaster management and public safety. The pandemic has accelerated the adoption of these new modes of learning, which will all have a place in future police training programmes.



Dubai Police has also made it a priority to keep up with best practices from around the world as the COVID-19 situation has evolved, incorporating learnings from research studies covering policing safety and practices, curfew enforcement, technical and technological solutions as well as scenarios, strategies and tactical planning for the second wave of the virus. Global horizon scanning, benchmarking and analysis will support Dubai Police's ambitions to be a leader in law enforcement innovation and practice.

Case study: Managing a COVID-19 outbreak in a highly populated district

In April 2020, medical authorities in Dubai identified a localised, but concentrated, outbreak of COVID-19 cases in a highly populated district of the City, which is home to around 75,000 people. Although this was primarily a medical issue, the Dubai Police General Command had a clear role to play in preventing the spread of the virus to other areas. The force's investment in digitally enabled, interactive command and control facilities meant that police officers were well positioned to contain the outbreak effectively and efficiently.

The strategic objectives for Dubai Police were to manage all aspects of the operation to contain the spread in the district; manage the isolation process for positive cases and their contacts, and support the other people living in the area including migrant labourers; manage interventions with partner organisations; and ultimately, to reduce the number of COVID-19 infections in the district.

Managing the outbreak involved partners from the health sector, including ambulances and nutrition services; Civil Defence; Dubai Municipality; Dubai Electricity and Water Authority; the Roads & Transport Authority, and the National Emergency and Crisis and Disasters Management Authority.



A dedicated, integrated crew was deployed to the district and the area was sealed off, both with barriers and through the physical presence of police staff. Movement in and out of the controlled area was managed by teams that also oversaw and facilitated welfare support for all the residents. Dubai Police provided 10 operating rooms with all the necessary equipment and personnel within a tight time frame, and in accordance with the requirements of all stakeholders. The force also used drones with loudspeakers to make all residents aware of the situation.

The district was the first area in the UAE to be locked down and sealed off in this way, and all the entities involved learned a lot from the operation. The intervention was successful - infection rates stopped increasing and began to fall, so that it was no longer the area with the highest concentration of cases in the Emirate.

Global law
enforcement
initiatives: best
practice from
around the world



Global law enforcement initiatives: best practice from around the world

Law enforcement agencies have been forced into innovative ways of working by COVID-19, but many have application and relevance beyond the pandemic. Here, we consider some of the most promising:



Singapore: Understanding new and emerging demand profiles and responding quickly

In Singapore, the Trace Together app incorporates GPS and Bluetooth to track citizens' proximity to others and will alert those who have come into close contact with someone who has contracted COVID-19. Although the pandemic was the driver of this innovation, the app has demonstrated how innovative use of technology can focus and support law enforcement activity and deliver efficiency.



Spain: Collaborating with partners to tackle a rapid change in the nature of crime as a result of the pandemic

In Spain, as in the rest of the world, there has been a spike in domestic violence during periods of lockdown. Victims of domestic violence there are able to access police or agency support through pharmacies by using a simple code word: Mask 19.



US and UK: Managing existing resources to ensure that front line staff are always in the right place at the right time

- Police in Washington state were receiving a number of calls that citizens were breaking lockdown rules, adding pressure to their capacity to respond to emergencies. An add-on to an already existing app was created in order for complaints to be reported through that technology instead.
- The UK has more than 10,000 volunteer Special Constables, who can be released by their employers when necessary to support the police during the pandemic. This has helped to highlight the potential of this large reserve force and how it could be used in other emergency situations.



France and the UAE: Expanding the use of innovative tools and platforms to reach out to all communities

French police used drones to reinforce coronavirus precautionary measures and raise awareness about the importance of staying at home. This also happened in the emirate of Sharjah.



UK and the Netherlands: Making business continuity plans more flexible

- In the UK, public messaging highlighted that police may no longer attend certain types of incidents, helping to manage public expectations and demand.
- In the Netherlands, the police service took advantage of reduced global air travel to renegotiate annual leave during the pandemic.



Poland, Taiwan, the UK and Singapore: Using technology to make the most of police time

- In Poland, an app has been developed to help enforce quarantine measures, and Taiwan rolled out an "electronic fence" strategy that uses location-tracking services in mobile phones to ensure people who are quarantined stay in their homes. In both countries, police are advised where suspected breaches are identified, ensuring officers are checking up in the right places.
- In the UK and Singapore, the police have used drones to monitor use of public spaces and ensure that social distancing rules are being observed. While this was controversial in the UK (there were claims that it was too intrusive a form of policing), the technology enables oversight of much greater areas than can be achieved by police on the ground.



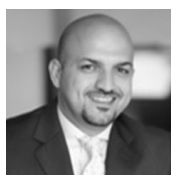
US and Russia: Integrating technologies, including facial recognition, vehicle registration recognition and mobile phones, to make policing more targeted

- In order to mitigate the risk of passing on COVID-19, Iowa County has implemented e-kiosks that can be used in place of riskier face-to-face meetings, with electronic check-ins for newly released prisoners and those on probation. The system will notify prison officers if, for example, an individual misses a scheduled check-in.
- Russia built an AI-driven COVID-19 control centre, and used Moscow's network of 100,000 cameras equipped with facial recognition technology to ensure that anyone placed under quarantine stayed off the streets. AI is also being used to track international arrivals and monitor social media for misinformation.



Facial recognition technology has clear policing applications beyond the pandemic, however there are concerns around widespread public-space surveillance that need to be addressed.

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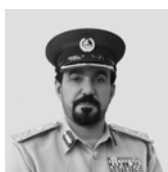


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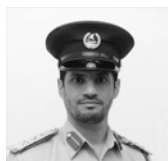
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Conclusion

Nearly a year on, the pandemic is still with us. Although world - and media - attention has shifted to focus on vaccination programmes and their likely impact on future infection and death rates, governments around the world still face the challenge of managing COVID-19 on a daily basis. For now, this is likely to involve a continuation of the measures which have proved to be successful to date - lockdowns, restrictions on movement and assembly, and encouraging citizens to follow basic precautions such as social distancing and wearing masks in public areas.

Much of the practical implementation of these measures will fall to policing and law enforcement entities. As we have highlighted, the pandemic has proved to be a catalyst for innovative thinking - both in Dubai and other police organisations worldwide - which we hope will offer inspiration to others looking to tackle these challenges. Equally, PwC stands ready to assist the police as they continue this journey, in keeping with our core mission: to build trust in society and solve important problems.



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