UNFPA ASRO Newsletter - March 2020

Message on behalf of LAW Shahid: UNFPA Regional Director ASRO

Dear Colleagues,

I am pleased to share with you below the March 2020 edition of the ASRO Newsletter.

The newsletter highlights the great achievement by UNFPA Country Offices and the UNFPA Regional Office in the Arab States Region for the month of March 2020.

Many thanks for the continued hard work and commitment of UNFPA colleagues in ASRO and all our Country Offices, especially in these very difficult times of COVID-19.

Best Regards,

Law

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ASRO MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

Issue March 2020

ASRO

Shaping public opinion

The Arab States Regional Office published two op-eds penned by the regional director to mark International Women’s Day: "The specifics: ‘Voice needed by and women need a platform’ and ‘Let’s make 2020 the year women’s voices are heard’" were published on Al Arabiya and Al Bayan news websites on 7 and 8 March respectively.

On 26 March, UNFPA placed two more op-eds with the Al Arabiya and Al Bayan newspapers under the title "The conversation continues: not enough women’s voices - we take care of men", on Arab News website. The op-eds aimed to highlight the impact of COVID-19 on the lives of women and girls and call to action to help all those affected by the crisis. - UNFPA News

A Women Even Here: Awareness and fundraising campaign

On 6 March, UNFPA ASRO marked International Women’s Day by launching a digital awareness and fundraising campaign: "Women even here". The campaign highlights the resilience of six women and their struggles during humanitarian crises, each of the six women endured hardships and experience that can break most, but they survived to tell their stories. The campaign was launched in cooperation with France 24 Arabic with hashtag #AWomenEvenHere. - UNFPA News

Funds raised from the campaign will be used to support women and girls in humanitarian settings. There are three different donations: $2 for 2 DONITY KITs; each kit will contain: underwear, sanitary pads, soap, toothpaste, and toothbrush to meet the personal hygiene needs of one displaced woman or girl for one month. $10 for 10 SAPA BIRTH KITs; each kit contains: soap, bag hand wash, bath towel, sheet, toothbrush, sanitary napkins.
UNFPA launches its Journalist’s Handbook

In an effort to promote more ethical and professional reporting on gender-based violence, UNFPA launched its second edition of ‘The Journalist’s Handbook’, a detailed guidebook on the principles of reporting on this essential subject. Developed by UNFPA’s Gender-based Violence (GBV) Unit, it offers guidance, tips and insights on the fundamentals of GBV, its root causes, and the principles of reporting on it. It was launched to mark International Women’s Day and encourage media organizations to increase and strengthen their coverage of GBV and other issues impacting the lives of women and girls in humanitarian settings throughout the region.

HR Corner: Mental wellbeing and staying focused when working from home

These are testing times and many of us are feeling a myriad of emotions. The most important is to take care of ourselves to the limit of our abilities. Staff counselors have typically provided simple tips to create a wellbeing plan for ourselves and our families. Stick to routines. Get dressed, exercise, do your daily chores, sleep at your regular time.

• Stay connected, open up about your feelings and ask others, check in with those who are alone.
• Engage in hobbies you enjoy.
• Give yourself permission to acknowledge your worries.
• Engage in well-being practices like meditation, yoga, reading, family time.

At the same time, we need to continue to deliver on the UNFPA programme mandate. Please do take a moment to read this piece from Muna Al slid Business Review on how to stay focused when you’re working from home.

GCC

Strengthening the sexual reproductive health and rights

On 24 March, UNFPA organized a three-day workshop as part of its partnership with the Bahrain Human Rights Commission (BHRC). This partnership comes to pave the way for Bahrain’s submission of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) in November 2020 — a unique mechanism of the Human Rights Council (HRC) to improve human rights. The workshop aimed at strengthening the technical capacity of the ERMC staff, and included several interactive modules to ensure mainstreaming and addressing the sexual reproductive health and rights in the context of human rights.

ALGERIA

Marketing IWD

UNFPA and the Canadian Embassy marked together International Women’s Day in an event held on 4 March. The event was an opportunity to explore potential partnership with donors and NGOs. On this occasion, UNFPA produced a radio spot in three languages (Arabic, Persian, and English) to reach audiences in a larger way.
LEBANON

New agreements addressing GBV and enhancing RH services

UNFPA, Lebanon signed agreements with eight partners targeting the most vulnerable Syrian and Lebanese in host communities, with special attention to persons with disabilities through funding from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency. The partnerships is aimed to mitigate and respond to gender-based violence, and enhance access to reproductive health services across the country while engaging men and boys, adopting a peer-to-peer approach, involving non-traditional stakeholders, and developing the capacity of partners and their local counterparts. UNFPA Lebanon

Responding to pregnancy during COVID-19

UNFPA, partnered with the Ministry of Public Health to establish a technical committee in response to pregnancy during COVID-19. The committee includes representatives from the medical community, particularly obstetricians and gynecologists, as well as the Lebanon Order of Midwives. The role of the committee is to establish a surveillance system to monitor pregnant women's health and their risk of infection of COVID-19, elaborate standard operating procedures and protocols for service providers, develop training resources, enhance capacities for health care frontliners, and produce awareness material and messages for pregnant women, in close liaison

YEMEN

Frontline respond to COVID-19

UNFPA is one of the frontline responders to mitigate the risk of transmission of COVID-19 in Yemen by supporting the Reproductive Health Department at Al Amali hospital, the main referral hospital for the treatment of identified cases in Sana'a Governorate. The support includes pre-positioning equipment, including 40 ventilators for ICUs ready for immediate deployment in case of an outbreak. The UNFPA-led Rapid Response Mechanism is assisting those in quarantine. As of 29 March, a total of 424 individuals have been assisted through 25 distribution teams. A kit includes, ready to eat food provided by WFP, hygiene kits by UNICEF, and women dignity kits by UNFPA. Women and girls safe spaces and other women's protection platforms continue to provide key awareness messages on COVID-19 via dedicated hotlines and information leaflets. UNFPA Yemen

Expanding women's protection services
The Governments of Sweden, the Netherlands and Switzerland contributed US$ 1.25 million to support the most vulnerable women and girls in Yemen over the next two years. This funding will help UNFPA continue the provision of life-saving contraception services, and expand services in areas where vulnerabilities of women and girls have grown due to increased fighting and conflict. This includes increasing the number of women shelters, safe spaces, and community networks, and engaging more women in livelihood activities to help them support their families. Since 2017, UNFPA has been able to establish nine women and Girls’ Safe Spaces, build two new women shelters, maintain the services in four existing shelters, and help over 150 women start their own businesses through the financial support of the Governments of Sweden, Netherlands and Switzerland.

Emergency response as displacement soars in northern parts of Yemen

The upsurge in hostilities that began mid-January in Makkah, Al Jawf and Sa’dah governorates resulted in heavy displacement. On 1 March, intense clashes broke out in Al Hira district, Al Jawf Governorate, causing massive displacement of civilians—over 12,000 people estimated to be displaced within 24 hours. Fighting across the three governorates has led to an estimated 40,000 people fleeing every ten days between 19 January and 18 March 2020. UNFPA, as lead of the UN’s Rapid Response Mechanism through its RH/P partners, is responding to 100 households per day with an average response time between 60 to 75 hours from the start of displacement. As of 18 March, 38,000 individuals received RH/P kits. More than 6,000 displaced persons were provided with essential reproductive health services through mobile reproductive health teams, while 21 UNFPA-supported health facilities provided emergency obstetric care services within the three governorates. UNFPA deployed mobile protection teams to provide psychological first aid and transit kits, assisting 2,144 women between January and March 2020.

PALESTINE

Responding to COVID-19

UNFPA Palestine responded to the needs of its partners, notably the Ministry of Health, by providing personal protection equipment (PPE) for health workers in primary health care centres and maternity hospitals. In Gaza, UNFPA and the Ministry distributed 3,800 leaflets on safety measures for those returning from quarantine, including pregnant and lactating women. The DGB sub-cluster, led by UNFPA, established a COVID-19 emergency service directory and provided psychological consultations support remotely, organized social media, radio and TV campaigns, and established toll-free helpline services. UNFPA rolled out its "#StaySafe" social media campaign with COVID-19 related messages, and worked closely with the health cluster and the Humanitarian Country Team to develop the COVID-19 response plan, which seeks to mobilize US$ 30 million in aid over the next three months.

She Leads – Campaign to celebrate women

Due to the COVID-19 outbreak, UNFPA Palestine marked this year’s International Women’s Day by launching a campaign from 8 March to 28 April. Funded by the Representative Office of Denmark, the Bank of Palestine, and implemented by Thavik Youth Network, the campaign “She Leads” included an online photo exhibition and women诗词 网站 stories featuring young Palestinian women leaders to shed light on their accomplishments.

Efforts to close the gap in supplies in Gaza

UNFPA delivered sexual and reproductive health medical disposables, pharmaceuticals, contraceptives, and nutritional supplements for pregnant and
EGYPT

COVID-19 emergency response plan

As part of its COVID-19 emergency response plan, UNFPA supported the Ministry of Health and Population in procuring €309,000 worth of personal protective equipment (facemasks, gloves, and hand sanitizers) for frontline health workers, in collaboration with the World Health Organization and UNICEF. Together with the Ministry of Health and Population, UNFPA is working to ensure the continuity of care and services at primary healthcare centres, and to strengthen family planning commodity security and procurement.

The UNFPA emergency response plan to COVID-19 focuses on three main pillars: support the national healthcare system, ensure that care management and referral pathway accommodate the needs of pregnant women with COVID-19, and address the immediate sexual and reproductive health, maternal and family planning needs, and the consequences of the pandemic on GBV and gender violence. (UNFPA Egypt)

Distributing dignity kits for most vulnerable

UNFPA mobilized several private sector partnerships to distribute over 4,600 dignity kits to help women and girls maintain their dignity during the COVID-19 outbreak. In coordination with the Ministry of Health and Population and the Ministry of Social Solidarity, UNFPA is set to distribute the kits to key vulnerable and most affected population groups. These include frontline health workers, women and girls quarantined for prevention, screening and treatment; girls and young women in locked-down areas; confined facilities, including orphanages and prisons; vulnerable girls and women in highly populated areas with limited water and sanitation facilities and refugees, asylum seekers and undocumented migrants. The kits will include sanitary pads, femalcoops, dishtowels, toothpaste, toothbrushes, mouthwash, and hand sanitizers providing information on preventive measures against COVID-19 and addressing stigma, as well as information on menstrual hygiene. (UNFPA Egypt)

JORDAN

Eliminating preventable maternal deaths

On 5 March, UNFPA supported a two-day consultation workshop of the Ministry of Health (MoH) to review and adopt the national guidelines and clinical pathways for prevention and management of maternal mortality. The workshop came as one of the actions recommended by the Maternal Mortality Response Implementation Plan endorsed by MoH in February. Among the participants were members of the National Advisory Group for maternal mortality and a number of specialists from the public and private health care system. (UNFPA Jordan)
**Intergenerational dialogue on women’s rights and SRHR**

On the occasion of the International Women’s Day, UNFPA organized an intergenerational dialogue on women’s rights movement and sexual and reproductive health and rights on 1 March. With “7 am Generation Equality: Realizing Women’s Rights” as a theme, the discussion led by eight women pioneers from different age groups—focused on women’s education, mental health, and the challenges that women with disabilities face. Among the participants were gender activists, and representatives of civil society organizations and academia. © UNFPA Jordan

**Engaging youth in the response to COVID-19**

As part of the national response to COVID-19, the Jordan Youth Peace and Security (JPS) National Coalition arranged a virtual meeting led by youth to work with the national campaign “Risk is not safe” (Don’t panic and protect yourself) on disseminating awareness messages through different social media platforms and WhatsApp groups for youth networks across Jordan. UNFPA was re-elected as the co-chair of the Secretariat of the Coalition in Jordan together with the Generations for Peace for year 2020. © UNFPA Jordan

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**SYRIA**

**Raising awareness on COVID-19**

On 26 March, three mobile teams of Amman MSF conducted individual awareness-raising sessions on COVID-19 with the support of UNFPA. The sessions targeted people in the city of Amman, including churches and mosques. Staff who participated in this initiative took necessary precautions to protect themselves. The initiative included distributing brochures and hygiene kits for both women and men.

On 23 March, the Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) mobile teams conducted house visits to 30 targeted areas in Homs and rural Homs with the support of UNFPA to raise awareness about COVID-19. As part of the precautionary and preventive measures, the SARC reproductive health clinics were disinfected and sterilized, and some measures were taken to avoid crowding and protect people from the risk of infection.

On 14 March, the Amman Charitable Association, in cooperation with SARC and UNFPA, conducted a social awareness initiative about COVID-19 preventive measures, with the support of UNFPA. The campaign distributed 150 hygiene kits to the poorest families in Amman city and rural areas. The kits included antibiotics, masks, and COVID-19 awareness brochures. © UNFPA Syria

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**SOMALIA**

**Midwives and youth gear for COVID-19**

As part of the global coordinated response to the COVID-19 pandemic, UNFPA Somalia worked closely with the Federal Ministry of Health and Human Services to ensure the accessibility and availability of reproductive health and gender-based violence services, with a focus on pregnant women and children.

On 18 March, UNFPA and the banana! youth network carried out a youth outreach campaign to promote awareness of the COVID-19 pandemic and the importance of maintaining hygiene and practicing safe behaviors. © UNFPA Somalia
New batches of graduate midwives
On 2 March, 23 midwifery students completed a two-year midwifery programme at the Magadishu Midwifery School, supported by UNFPA and the Ministry of Health of the Federal Government of Somalia. On 1 March, 60 midwives graduated from the Hawlena School of Health Sciences in Somaliland, with the support of UNFPA and the Somaliland Ministry of Health. UNFPA received a certification of recognition from MoH SD for its support. (UNFPA Somalia)

MOROCCO

SALAMA campaign in response to COVID-19
On 24 March, UNFPA launched the SALAMA campaign to provide the most vulnerable populations, and the medical and paramedical personnel with the means of protection against COVID-19. The campaign was launched through a partnership with the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Solidarity, Social Development, Equality and Family, the Mohammed V National Centre for persons with disabilities, the Moroccan Association of Midwives (ANMF), the National Association of Midwives in Morocco (ANFPM), the Moroccan Association of Family Planning (ANPF), and the Pan African Organization for the Fight against AIDS (OPAL). The SALAMA network, initiatives for the Protection of women’s rights (POD), and the YouW network. UNFPA along with its institutional and civil society partners will make available the “SALAMA lists” for women and girls, with a particular focus on pregnant women, GBV survivors, single people, migrants and persons with disabilities. (UNFPA Morocco)

Using arts to promote SRHR and gender equality
On 24 March, UNFPA supported the Youth PNGK Morocco (Peer Education Training and Research Institute) to train a pool of arts teachers and school club facilitators in Marrakesh to help them to strengthen their knowledge of the sexual and reproductive health and rights, and build their capacities on peer education techniques. 21 participants from different cities (Marrakesh, El-Hichak, Steophane and Essaouira) participated in the workshop to reach out to adolescents and youth and participate in the national regional competition with artistic productions that promote gender equality and raise awareness about SRHR. (UNFPA Morocco)

LIBYA

Supporting COVID-19 preparedness and response efforts
On 23 March, UNFPA provided the only maternity hospital in Tripoli, the Jembory Hospital, with a three-month supply of reproductive health kits, including surgical consumables items to ensure access to reproductive health services for an estimated 150,000 people. In parallel, the GBV and psychosocial support initiative 1417, supported by UNFPA through a local implementing partner, certified 45 peer counselors in Tripoli, with more than 400 referrals in the first
Engaging youth in peacebuilding and stabilization efforts in Sirte

On 10 January, UNFPA organized a consultative meeting with over 15 young female entrepreneurs in Sirte to discuss their needs, how to better address them and facilitate an impact on entrepreneurship in Sirte, through the ongoing peacebuilding project jointly implemented with UNDP, UNICEF and UNMIL. In the same day, UNFPA and its local partner were hosted at Sirte Local Radio on a live show to introduce the project to the general public of Sirte. 26 young activists from different CGIOs addressed web training sessions on the concept of civil society, and strategic planning in service delivery sectors on 12-13 March. (UNFPA) Libya

Celebrating IWD

UNFPA Libya and the French Embassy brought together women's rights activists, journalists, and officials in Tripoli to announce the release of new funds aimed at enhancing access to quality care for women and newborns, and supporting GBV survivors in the Libyan south.

"Investing more in quality reproductive and maternal health services in the underdeveloped areas of South Libya will directly contribute to ending preventable maternal and neonatal death and is essential to improving family and community well-being," said UNFPA Libya Representative, Stéphanie Debois.

UNFPA local implementing partners held open discussions at the Women and Girls Safe Spaces in Tripoli and Sirt to raise awareness on the available activities and services provided at the centers and on the role of women in peacebuilding efforts at community level. (UNFPA Libya)

TUNISIA

Supporting SIFI services during COVID-19 outbreak

UNFPA supported the Ministry of Women Affairs to extend the SIFI hotline working hours to 24/7 to ensure the continuity of SIFI counseling services. Before the outbreak of COVID-19, the hotline used to function during official working hours. Three UNFPA-supported shelters continue their services, including accommodation and psychosocial support while ensuring that necessary precautionary and protection measures are in place. However, the centers were reluctant to receive new cases as part of their precautionary measures. In response, UNFPA supported the Ministry of Women Affairs to establish a new shelter to serve the new cases suspected to be positive to COVID-19 to address the ongoing violence against women, multiplied by five according to the hotline services data. UNFPA provided PPE products, dignity kits and medical equipment.

SUDAN
Strengthening the national response to COVID-19

On 26 March, UNFPA, with UNICEF, organized a virtual meeting with the Federation Ministry of Health, offering guidance on how to adapt and ensure protocols issued by the Ministry in this regard, and training of trainers for 20 health workers to help them understand and adapt the protocols issued by the Ministry. On 30 March, UNFPA supported the Health Promotion Programme of the Ministry in the Blue Nile state to raise public awareness of COVID-19 to promote the taking of precautionary measures. To distribute hygiene kits to 150 families in the city of Khartoum.

DJIJBOUTI

Emergency plan to maintain GBV services during COVID-19 outbreak

UNFPA, in coordination with its partners, activated a rapid response plan to ensure GBV response services continue to be provided during the COVID-19 outbreak. The plan contains activities aimed at strengthening the capacity of the Ministry of Health to respond to GBV cases and prevention during the pandemic. It includes the training of health workers on GBV service provision in COVID-19 settings, referral guidance for health and GBV services, and provision of GBV-related materials to health facilities.

IRAQ

UNFPA – woman centres provide support in times of the COVID-19 pandemic.

UNFPA works in 69 countries to respond to the reproductive health needs of people, including in situations of conflict or humanitarian emergencies. As a human rights-based organization, it engages with governments, civil society and allies around the world to ensure that people, especially women and girls, are able to make sexual and reproductive health decisions and access services. It is committed to gender equality and the empowerment of women.

Shafik, the head of the UNFPA program in Iraq, wrote, “UNFPA is working to ensure that women and girls have access to reproductive health services during the COVID-19 pandemic. We are providing GBV support services, including counseling and counseling services, to women and girls affected by the pandemic.”

UNFPA also supports women’s centers, which provide services to women and girls affected by GBV, including counseling, legal assistance, and access to justice. The centers also provide information on reproductive health and rights, including access to contraception and safe abortion services.

Shafik said, “We are working closely with partners to ensure that women and girls have access to the services they need during the pandemic. We are also providing information on how to access reproductive health services and how to report GBV cases.”

The UNFPA newsletter is available for download in PDF format at the following link: [PDF]

For more information, please visit the UNFPA website: [Website]