Dear colleagues,

I am pleased to share with you (below) the June 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 June 2020 (Please click an "Open external message" to see the full version of the newsletter).

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

Stay safe and best regards,

Lily
GBV reporting during COVID-19

The Arab States Hub organized an online webinar on 4 June, in celebration of International Day of Action for the Elimination of Violence against Women on 25 November, to honor and support women's rights. The webinar featured a panel discussion on GBV, including issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic. The webinar aimed to raise awareness about GBV among journalists and media professionals. Speakers included representatives from various organizations such as UN Women, UNICEF, and the Arab League. A recording of the webinar is available online.

Supporting the future of Syria and the region

The European Union and the United Nations co-hosted a conference on 20 June to discuss the future of Syria and the region. The conference focused on the impact of the conflict on Syrian women, children, and civilians. Speakers discussed the challenges faced by women and girls in the region and the need for sustained support. The conference included a panel discussion on the role of international organizations in supporting the region. The conference was moderated by a prominent journalist, and the proceedings were recorded.

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SWOP 2020 global launch

UNFPA launched its flagship report State of World Population 2020 with the theme “Against my will: ending the practices that harm women and girls and undermine equality.” The report focuses on three main prevention-based practices: female genital mutilation, child marriage, and female genital cutting. The report highlights the progress made in eliminating these practices and the challenges faced in implementing the recommendations. The report also calls for increased support for women and girls in the region, with a focus on the role of international organizations in promoting gender equality.

New ways to reach GBV survivors

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, traditional support mechanisms and movement restrictions, the need for alternative support mechanisms for survivors of gender-based violence was recognized. GBV service providers reported an increase in the number of calls and challenges faced by women and girls. The report aims to provide guidance on how to reach GBV survivors during the pandemic, taking into account the unique challenges faced by women and girls in the region. The report also recommends the role of international organizations in supporting the implementation of the recommendations.
Maternal health best practices in the region

In June, five high-quality initiatives in maternal health were selected out of three received from the country offices as part of a Maternal Health Best Practices Competition. ASRO and Reproductive Health team launched the regional competition, in 2021, on the occasion of International Day for the midwife, with the aim to advance knowledge sharing and help avoid preventable maternal mortality. The best practices will be documented on the regional level. Then, they will be compiled in a regional report. The winners initiatives were from:

- **Algeria**: Protecting mothers not to risk their lives when giving birth.
- **Morocco**: Multidisciplinary framework for the prevention of maternal deaths through strong regulatory mechanisms.
- **Somalia**: The antenatal services are not at all away for women.
- **Turkey**: UNFPA: Take action, a movement to enhance continuity of care.
- **Kenya**: Reversing a new institutional coordination mechanism during COVID-19 outbreak.

We congratulate the winning teams and praise all the other country offices for their efforts. #UNFPA2021

The HR Corner

Breaking gender barriers

UNFPA, WHO and UNICEF country offices are proud to announce the hiring of Ms. Afia Gawanda, the first female driver in the organization. In the Arab region, although strong in male-dominated professions in the region, the hiring process of Ms. Gawanda proven in line with UNFPA mission to promote gender equality, and break gender barriers. #UNFPA2021

New Staff Counselor

Continuing with efforts on promoting staff welfare as priority, UNFPA in collaboration with WHO and UNICEF appointed a dedicated staff counselor. Catherine Rance, for the region. Her first point of contact is Room 101 at the UNFPA Country Office. The office is open from 8:30 AM to 10:00 AM on Monday, 11:00 AM to 2:00 PM on Tuesday and Thursday, and 3:00 PM to 5:00 PM. The individual appointments can be made here: [staff.counselor@unfpa.org](mailto:staff.counselor@unfpa.org)

LEBANON

Abou Samir grows the best vegetables and he's known for his expertise. I visit him regularly to buy my fresh produce.

Campaign to AgeFriendlyLeveraging

To mark World Elder Abuse Awareness Day, UNFPA Lebanon released a set of infographics and social media campaign to raise awareness about the risk that older persons face in their daily lives, especially during COVID-19. UNFPA works with all partners and local government institutions in Lebanon to safeguard the well-being of older people, and to promote their dignity through the provision of personal protection equipment for older people residing during the pandemic.
Gender Alert on COVID-19 – Issue 3

UNFPA, in collaboration with the National Commission for Lebanese Women (NCWL), UN Women, and WHO, produced the third issue of the Gender Alert on COVID-19. These updates are a periodic, Lebanon-specific gender and COVID-19 data released throughout the duration of the current phase of the public health crisis. The periodic Gender Alerts aim to provide observations on national gender-related issues, compile available data in one reference point, consolidate gender-related policies and programs, and offer recommendations to support a more gender-equitable response. The third issue, developed in partnership with the Inter-Agency Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Task Force (SGBV TF) in Lebanon and available in English and Arabic, focuses on the access to justice.

GCC

Aging women and women with disabilities – Situation analysis

On 16 June, UNFPA GCC, in cooperation with the Ministry of Social Development (MDS) in Morocco, held a virtual stakeholders’ workshop to discuss the available services provided to aging women and women with disabilities, the legal framework that safeguards their rights in the society, and the social protection and inclusion mechanisms in place. More than 47 participants and advocates took part in the event to shed light on the challenges faced by these vulnerable population categories, particularly during the pandemic, and the legal and social measures taken by the respective governments, including the Ministry of Health, Education, and Social Development. The papers discussed during the workshop will be translated into policy briefs that will be developed by UNFPA in collaboration with the MDS. The key document will pave the way for the development of a national strategy to help improve the conditions of this target population.

ALGERIA

Responding to the most affected areas by COVID-19

On 2 June, a team from UNFPA Algeria, and the Algerian Red Crescent distributed protection equipment to the health workers in the genealogical-voluntary department, particularly the recently retired, and to women working in services in the Oustat hospice, which is the most affected area by COVID-19. This initiative was part of UNFPA and the Algerian Red Crescent joint agreement to strengthen the health response to COVID-19 and to ensure the continuity of the midwifery services, including reproductive health and family planning services.

Shedding light on the rise of violence amid the pandemic

On 31 May, UNFPA Algeria, in charge, Oussama Dali, held a round table discussion organized by the radio “Voix de Femmes”, the Women in Communication Association, along with the President of the Association for Women’s Empowerment, Souad Bach. The discussion aimed to denounce the public to the rise in the rates of violence against women and girls during the COVID-19 pandemic, and advocate for its prevention and response. Among the main issues discussed, UNFPA cooperation to collaborate with the civil society and national institutions as part of its response efforts, the need for reliable data on the violence against women, and girls during the pandemic, and the expected rate of the needs it is covering the critical issue of prevention and response.
**JORDAN**

Youth against sexual violence in conflict

On the occasion of International Day for the Elimination of Violence against 19 June, UNFPA, Jordan, in collaboration with the Jordan Youth Peace and Security Council, organized an online awareness session to highlight the young people’s and representatives of youth organizations’ role in preventing sexual and violence. Participants, people with expertise in gender violence, shared their experiences of how sexual violence impacts their lives and their communities, seeking ways to put an end to it.

**PALESTINE**

Research paper on family dynamics and domestic violence during COVID-19

UNFPA, Justice for Health and Social Development, Haifa programme, and the UNFPA Sub-Cluster launched a research paper on the "Impact of COVID-19 on Family Dynamics and Domestic Violence in Palestine." Some of the key findings were:
- 90% reported that the family became more supportive during the lockdown, while only 10% reported an increase in family problems.
- There is an increase in family violence and domestic violence against children and spouses, and 71% of Palestine believe that domestic violence against children is associated with the expansion of lockdown.
- More than 60% of participants reported exposure to family violence in their home.

Responding to the hygiene and protection needs of women and girls

On 17 June, UNFPA distributed 1,370 dignity kits to women and girls in quarantine centers in Gaza to meet their hygiene and protection needs with support from GIZ.
UNFPA distributed another 1,000 dignity kits through its implementing partner, the Palestinian Medical Relief Society, to women and girls in GBV-safe spaces and shelters across the West Bank with the support from Canada. On 28 June 2022, the Minister of Social Development, Dr. Ahmad Alhajjar, and UNFPA Palestine Representative, Kristine El-Bihane, distributed an additional 1,200 dignity kits to people with disabilities and disabled urolog in rehabilitation centers, managed by the Ministry of Social Development in the West Bank and Gaza with support from Canada. © UNFPA Palestine

Supporting the most in need during the pandemic

UNFPA distributed face masks and sanitizer to 1,000 families in totarget women and girls, GBV survivors, transwomen, and women-headed households, breast cancer patients, kidney failure patients, and disabled women affected by the COVID-19 restrictions. The distribution is part of the PPDH project.

The voucher is better than the ppe, it gives an option and flexibility to receive based on the needs and family members' need. © UNFPA Palestine

EGYPT

Women at the forefront facing COVID-19

Ten of Syrian women in UNFPA-supported Safe Spaces participated in an initiative to produce reusable face masks to include dignity kits provided to women and girls in the Syrian and African communities. 8,000 masks will be distributed, including 3,000 for the face masks produced by CHARG, 1,000 by UNFPA, and 5,000 to the Safe Spaces operated by the Ministry Youth and Development Consultancy Institute and the Ministry of Youth and Sports. © UNFPA Egypt

National campaign against FGM

On 14 June, UNFPA and UNICEF launched a campaign in partnership with the National Council for Women, and the National Council for Child and Family Development, under the global Joint Programme to End Violence Against Women. The campaign intended to raise awareness and awareness (PSA) addressing the harmful effects of FGM (nearly) and the role of men and women in protecting their daughters. It included social media ads with messages that combat myths and misconceptions against FGM. The two PSA reached over 2 million views on social media. © UNFPA Egypt

YEMEN

Meeting the urgent reproductive health needs of women

UNFPA secured a contribution of $2 million from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.
at a crucial time as the health system, particularly the reproductive health, is on the verge of collapse following the rapid spread of COVID-19. The funding will enable UNFPA to increase access to emergency reproductive health services for women and girls in six governorates, including those in the hard-hit parts of south Yemen; and support 15 health facilities, and 50 community mobiles. This support will help reach more than 150,000 women and girls in the area to receive existing antenatal care, to deliver safety in delivering the distance they have to travel to receive reproductive health services.

To maintain its support to the most vulnerable women and girls in 2020, UNFPA appealed for USD20.5 million. To date, only 54.1 percent of the funding was received. (UNFPA Yemen)

Stepping up the COVID-19 response

In June, UNFPA provided medical supplies and protection equipment to health facilities in five governorates, including 16 health facilities in Taiz, 11 in Hodeidah, 6 in Al-Bayda, and one in Ibb. To date, 220 health facilities were equipped with personal protective equipment and 40 ventilators. This support will meet the needs of nurses and midwives to arrive, providing life-saving reproductive health services to mothers and their newborns safely.

New manual on the provision of reproductive health during COVID-19

UNFPA, in collaboration with the Ministry of Public Health and Population, UN agencies, and national partners, developed a national manual for the reproductive health service providers. The manual included chapters on COVID-19 prevention, procedures of RHR services, mental health and psychosocial support, gender-based violence, and protection against sexual exploitation and abuse during the pandemic. In June, UNFPA conducted multiple trainings (virtual and face-to-face) on the new manual for reproductive health service providers for the country’s 176 community health workers and medical staff in Taiz, Ibb, and Lang, Shabwa and Amran governorates. Some 100 community health workers will continue providing mobile health services while personal protection equipment allows the timely training.

MOROCCO

SALAMA operation reaches 16 million people

On 13 June, UNFPA supported the Government of Morocco, which started on 31 March in response to the COVID-19 outbreak during lockdown. The nine-phase initiative gave priority to the protection of the most at-risk populations. Among the activities were the distribution of 1,244,400 masks in 275 facilities in 17 regions and rural areas. The project also distributed nearly 8,000 people, distance learning sessions, to ensure the continuity of maternal health services, conducted for more than 500 health professionals, reaching 600; and essential care and services provided to 1,769 women and girls survivors of violence. (UNFPA Morocco)

SALAMA at work: new initiative targeting working women

On 28 June, UNFPA launched a post-lockdown initiative “SALAMA at Work” targeting working women at the workplaces to ensure safe working environment, and support for their rights and dignity. The first phase will be implemented in a number of companies in Tokyo in cooperation with the Japan Social Security Agency, the General Confederation of Workers’ Unions, and the Association of Women Entrepreneurs. The main objectives of the new initiative are to raise awareness on how to prevent COVID-19 infection, ensure access to care and support services, promote gender equality in the workplace. (UNFPA Tokyo)
Leaving no one behind: People with disabilities at the heart of the COVID-19 response

Over a funded project and professionals’ task force in a workshop organized by the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, and the fight against gender-based violence among people with disabilities, during solidarity in collaboration with the National Women’s Committee for people with disabilities on 4 June. The minister was one of the many online information-sharing sessions organized as part of the SALAMA initiative targeting people with disabilities. Non-patients, and non-people with disabilities. Participation life was also extended to people with disabilities in one other and use areas.

TUNISIA

New campaign to protect older people

On 20 June, UNFPA Tunisia, in partnership with the Ministry of Women, Children, and the Family and Services, organized a national seminar titled “Aging people’s human rights” on World Elder Abuse Awareness Day. Two participants joined the event and celebrated the launch of the “Aging populous campaign,” the release of the results of two qualitative studies on the impact of COVID-19 on aging people, and the violence against elderly. The minister’s announcement about a Code of Conduct that will be adopted and adopted before the end of the year. A video was screened at the event advocating for the protection and social inclusion of older people.

Advocating for the Nairobi commitments

UNFPA held a meeting with the newly appointed Minister of Health, and the Heads of partner organizations to present the main achievements of 2019, and the planned activities of 2020. The meeting was an opportunity to highlight the high-level partnerships with the MoH, and to advocate for the implementation of the Nairobi commitments made by UNFPA. UNFPA underscored the importance of the implementation of the essential package of maternal and newborn health services currently being rolled out, the integration of the national maternal and newborn health strategy, and the adoption of the national youth and adolescent health strategy.

Reaching out to migrants via social media

UNFPA launched a social media campaign “Reach out, Lookers, Embar” targeting migrants in Tunisia to raise awareness about the available support services. Two videos “Lookers” and “Embar” were disseminated to provide them with a one-stop-shop reference. The videos reached 251,382 people, and resulted in an increase in the number of migrants seeking support services.

SOMALIA

COVID-19 Vulnerability Mapping for Risk Factors

In June, UNFPA Somalia launched an initiative that consists of mapping COVID-19 vulnerability in the country. The aim of the mapping process is to inform stakeholders on the best practices of responding to the pandemic, and to allocate resources to those who need it. The mapping showed that 60% of the most vulnerable populations are in the north of the country, and to the insecure social media to individuals.

COVID-19 vulnerability mapping by risk factors

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Strengthening maternal health during the coronavirus crisis

UNFPA Somalia received €256,000 from Finland to support sexual and reproductive health and rights. The funding will help ensure the continuity of maternal health services, in intensely displaced people’s settlements, purchase protective equipment, and strengthen national capacity in coronavirus testing.

"As with most crises, this pandemic has severely disrupted access to life-saving sexual and reproductive health services and efforts to respond to gender-based violence, at a time when women and girls need these services most." said UNFPA Somalia Representative, Andrea Thomsen. Photo by: UNFPA Somalia

IRAQ

Scaling up the COVID-19 interventions

The Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) contributed SEK 18 million (approximately USD 1.73 million) to support UNFPA’s response to COVID-19 in Iraq.

The funds are primarily to support UNFPA in the promotion of the Minister of Health’s call to all women to remain at home, and to avoid gatherings of many people. The funds will also support the Ministry of Health’s campaign for the provision of housing, educational and health services, and improve the quality of services provided to women and girls. In addition, the funds will support the Ministry of Health’s efforts to combat gender-based violence, including those in quarantine, by providing women and girls with counseling, and improving the availability of gender-based violence services.

National determination to carry out the census

On 26 June, the newly appointed Iraq Prime Minister, Mustafa Al-Kadhimi, attended the meeting of the Higher Population Council (HPC). The PM reiterated the government’s determination to hold the census as soon as possible, and to ensure that UNFPA’s role in the preparatory stages of the Census is maintained.

The census is crucial to ensure that the government can plan for the future and make informed decisions. The HPC’s recommendation for the PM to take charge of the census is an important step forward.

Engaging youth in the COVID-19 response

UNFPA launched a U4 action plan for 30-year-olds with the aim of engaging youth in the COVID-19 response. The project focuses on four key areas: education, health, environment, and human rights.

In collaboration with UNFPA and the Ministry of Youth and Sports, youth-led networks are promoting awareness on COVID-19, providing information on how to protect oneself and others, and promoting the use of protective equipment.

In addition, UNFPA is working with social media influencers to reach young people and provide them with accurate information on the pandemic.

SYRIA

UNFPA has been working with the Ministry of Health to provide sexual and reproductive health services to displaced people in Syria.

The UNFPA-supported reproductive health facilities, including family planning services and antenatal care, are accessible to people in displacement settings. The UNFPA-supported reproductive health facilities are also providing mental health and psychosocial support to displaced people, especially women and girls. Photo by: UNFPA Syria