



United Nations Population Fund



Regional Actors call all to address the negative impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights

August 25th, 2020

UNFPA, IPPF AWR and the other members of the Arab World Advocacy Network (AWAN) for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Reproductive Rights acknowledge the unprecedented challenge that Covid-19 poses and stand in solidarity with women and girls who are disproportionately affected by the pandemic. Women account for 70% of health workers, and they perform nearly five times as much unpaid care work as men, putting them at a greater risk for contracting the virus.

Members of The Arab World Advocacy Network (AWAN) for sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights note with great concern the burden that the Covid-19 pandemic has placed on the health systems across the region, in particular the adverse effects on essential sexual and reproductive health services and reproductive rights. This includes access to maternal and newborn healthcare; information and counselling on sexual and reproductive health; services for the prevention and detection of and response to sexual and gender-based violence; services for the prevention, detection and treatment of STIs/HIV, infertility, reproductive cancers; safe and effective contraceptive methods and post-abortion services and care.

As financial and human resources have been diverted from various health programmes to contain the spread of Covid-19, the risk of increased unintended pregnancies, unsafe abortions, complications of pregnancy and childbirth, maternal and newborn morbidity and mortality as well as increased protection and health needs of women and girls subjected to violence.

Many governments and other partners in the Arab region made commitments to achieve universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as a part of Universal Health Coverage at the Nairobi Summit on ICPD25 in November 2019. But integrating sexual and

reproductive health and reproductive rights into their Covid-19 response and recovery so far have fallen short. The commitments intended to accelerate the implementation of existing international frameworks, such as the ICPD Programme of Action and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It is now more important than ever before to realize women's and girls' choices and rights to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights.

UNFPA, IPPF AWR and the other Members of the Arab World Advocacy Network (AWAN) for Sexual and Reproductive Health acknowledge that lockdown measures and school closures have a negative effect on the safety and well-being of women and girls. These measures significantly increase the risk of sexual and gender-based violence for women and girls as they are trapped with their perpetrators at home and isolated from support networks. We have seen a surge in violence against women and girls, as well as increased incidences of girls undergoing female genital mutilation or forced and early marriage.

In addition, we recognize that the Covid-19 pandemic has disrupted global supply chains for sexual and reproductive health commodities, including contraceptives and maternal health medicines, due to the increased demand for essential medical and health equipment and supplies, in particular personal protective equipment, and challenges in maintaining adequate supply in the context of limitations in manufacturing, shipping and distributing commodities.

We reiterate that governments and partners in the Arab region committed to advancing sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights at the Nairobi Summit on ICPD25, and also recall governments' commitment to the ICPD Programme of Action, the Sustainable Development Goals and the principle of leaving no one behind. The majority of the countries in the region pledged to step up efforts to end the unmet need for family planning information and services and to end preventable maternal deaths and morbidities. It is critical that Arab governments ensure the continuity of essential sexual and reproductive health services, respecting the reproductive rights of women and girls and their right to bodily integrity and autonomy.

We urge governments and other stakeholders to ensure the continuation of all essential health services during the Covid-19 response and recovery. This includes integrating sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as well as GBV prevention and response before, during and after the crisis as an essential element of universal health coverage. We further urge governments to take measures to prevent and respond to harmful practices, including gender-based violence and female genital mutilation. These harmful practises have increased during the Covid-19 pandemic.

We especially wish to emphasise the need to support vulnerable groups, such as people with disabilities, migrants, internally displaced people, elderly persons, and adolescents and youth. In the spirit of the Nairobi Summit on ICPD25, these groups must be part of the decision-making process in order to ensure response and recovery actions meet their special needs.

We, members of AWAN, are determined to address the negative impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, in cooperation with governments, civil



society, the private sector and other partners. We therefore call on the Arab Governments to implement the following concrete and practical actions:

We call on governments to invest more in preparedness and health system strengthening, to make their systems more resilient and responsive to the needs of the population in health emergencies, in particular the sexual and reproductive health needs of women and girls from vulnerable and marginalized groups, including adolescent girls.

UNFPA, IPPF AWR and the other Members of the Arab World Advocacy Network (AWAN) for Sexual and Reproductive Health encourage governments to leverage multi-stakeholder partnerships with public and private stakeholders. In particular, governments may mobilize the private sector to secure support in the form of supply of sanitary items, medical equipment and other essential commodities, as well as harness the potential that South-South and triangular cooperation holds. The latter may include the exchange of health commodities, human resources, and good practices, as well the provision of technical assistance in the preparedness phase.

We also urge governments to ensure that all health workers have personal protective equipment. This is essential to decrease the risk of infection. At the same time, the provision of psycho-social support for affected individuals, families, communities and health workers is required. Governments should make this a critical part of their response and recovery efforts.

Signatures: AWAN members¹

<p style="text-align: center;">UNFPA Arab States Regional Office</p> <p style="text-align: center;"></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Dr Luay Shabaneh Regional Director</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">IPPF/AWRO Arab World Region</p> <p style="text-align: center;"></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Elizabeth Bennour Interim Regional Director</p>
---	---

¹ **AWAN** is the **Arab World Advocacy Network for Sexual & Reproductive Health and Reproductive Rights (SRH & RR)** co-founded by UNFPA Arab States Regional Office and IPPF Arab World Region with the membership of several organizations that share the same objectives in terms of advocating for women, girls' and young persons' SRH needs and RR.

**Arab World Advocacy Network
for SRH & RR**



Mustapha Kemayel
AWAN Secretariat

AWAN secretariat is signing on behalf of the following members who also endorsed the joint statement:

1. FAPPD - Forum of Arab Parliamentarians on Population & Development
2. CAWTAR - Center of Arab Women for Training & Research
3. Association Algérienne pour la Planification Familiale
4. ABAAD
5. Association Mauritanienne pour la Promotion de la Famille
6. Association Marocaine de Planification Familiale
7. Association Nationale des sages-femmes au Maroc
8. Association Tunisienne de la Prévention positive
9. Association Tunisienne de la Santé de la Reproduction
10. Lebanese Association for Family Health SALAMA
11. Association pour la santé et le développement communautaire en Mauritanie
12. Palestinian Family Planning & Protection Association PFPPA
13. Sudan Family Planning Association
14. UNFPA Tunis
15. Egyptian Family Planning Association