



Arab States Region

COVID-19

Situation Report No. 1

United Nations Population Fund



Reporting Period: as of 17 April 2020

Highlights

- All countries in the region have confirmed cases and the disease may now spread quickly.
- The region is home to some of the world's worst humanitarian crises, with more than 62.5 million people in need of humanitarian assistance prior to COVID-19, including 15.5 million women of reproductive age of whom an estimated 1.5 million are pregnant.
- After years of protracted crisis, people's resilience is weakened, and the fragile health systems are ill-equipped to step up the COVID-19 response. Some 74 million people in the region lack access to a basic hand washing facility (UN Economic & Social Commission for Western Asia).
- According to the recent OCHA risk index, Somalia, Sudan, Djibouti, Yemen and Syria are already above the risk threshold not taking into account the potential impact of the pandemic.
- Restrictions on movement and services vary by country with enforced curfews and banned travel. The start of Ramadan (23 April) raises concerns about further spreading of the virus unless clear prevention and community distancing measures are adopted.
- The closures have strained UNFPA service delivery and led to shortages of supplies, including personal protective equipment. All stakeholders are implementing.
- The UNFPA Arab States Regional Office (ASRO) supports country offices and works with governments, UN agencies, and regional entities to coordinate efforts for sexual and reproductive health (SRH), gender-based violence (GBV) prevention and response, and wellbeing for vulnerable populations in the context of COVID-19.
- UNFPA country offices stepped up advocacy and are coordinating with UN agencies to minimize disruption to lifesaving SRH and GBV services, provision of PPE and wellness of health workers through infection prevention and control training. Amidst restrictions, Alternate solutions to deliver services are underway including virtual outreach, mobile clinics, home visits, hotlines and provision of dignity kits in isolation centres.

*Kingdom of Bahrain, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, State of Kuwait, State of Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Sultanate of Oman

Situation in Numbers

 **29,772** Confirmed COVID-19 Cases

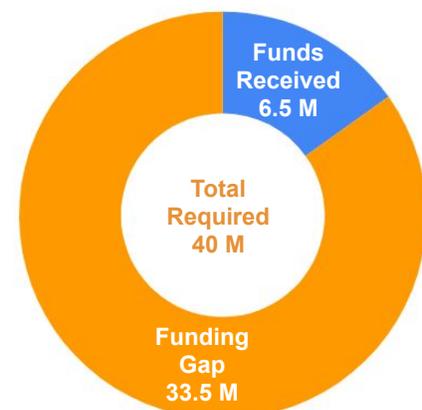
 **949** COVID-19 Deaths

Source: WHO April 17, 2020

Key Population Groups

-  **8 M** Pregnant Women
-  **107 M** Women of Reproductive Age
-  **114 M** Young People (age 10-24)
-  **21 M** Older Persons (age 65+)

Funding Status for Region (US\$)



Regional Response Summary

The UNFPA response in the region aligns with the 2030 Agenda, the 2020 WHO Global Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Global Humanitarian Response Plan, and the [UNFPA COVID-19 Global Response Plan](#).

Coordination

UNFPA participates in inter-agency coordination mechanisms ensuring prioritization of SRH and GBV services within the COVID-19 response. This includes participation in the WHO EMRO regional crisis management group and sub-working groups (risk communication and community engagement; humanitarian settings and displaced population), regional inter-agency gender theme group, and UN Women-UNICEF-WHO-UNFPA regional coordination meetings on the integration of GBV within health.

Country offices are working closely with other UN agencies, governments, implementing partners and other partners, to ensure the continuation of services and safeguard gains in SRH and GBV.

In the humanitarian context countries, UNFPA leads the GBV sub-cluster coordination. Country offices are engaged in the WHO-led Country Preparedness and Response Plan (CPRP), and through interagency preparedness and response in the context of the IASC humanitarian coordination structure, focusing on SRH working groups under the health cluster. They are also coordinating with the logistics clusters for shipment of humanitarian relief supplies. UNFPA Regional Director for the Arab States region signed with RDs from UNDP, UN-Women and ESCWA a joint letter urging governments in the region to strengthen existing services and to provide alternative solutions to ensure the safety of women & girls inside their homes during the COVID-19 crisis

Continuity of SRH interventions, including protection of health workforce

UNFPA Country Offices have supported continuity of sexual and reproductive health (SRH) interventions by:

- Procuring personal protective equipment (PPE) for frontline healthcare workers (masks, surgical masks, goggles) in response to increase demand in country and requests by national counterparts;
- Training of frontline healthcare workers, including provision of infection, prevention and control measures in health facilities, rolling-out standard operating procedures and guidance for COVID-19, with regard to pregnant women/delivery, and adaptation of training packages including on normal deliveries and C-sections;
- Disseminating relevant information, education and communication materials in line with WHO guidelines;
- Establishing alternative delivery modalities (e.g. mobile outreach and home visits in Palestine) where SRH services have been shut down or severely curtailed;
- Advocating with stakeholders for continuity of services and awareness-raising and information sharing; and
- Conducting assessments of impact of COVID-19 on SRH services with concern of countries with fragile health systems, which will impact service provision and cause significant immediate and secondary effects.

Country examples:

- **Egypt:** As of 6 April UNFPA had procured PPE for female frontline health workers: 5000 N95 masks, 12,000 surgical masks and 1000 eye protective goggles. Dignity kits are also being distributed to help vulnerable women and girls better cope with the stress brought on by the pandemic.
- **Iraq:** UNFPA has distributed emergency SRH kits to three maternity hospitals in the Kurdistan Region, and finalised a procurement plan to purchase PPE following great demand.
- **Jordan:** Only hospitals remain open, with all primary health facilities remaining closed. As the lead SRH agency, UNFPA was able to prioritize SRH services in critical locations, particularly Zaatari and Azraq refugee camps.
- **Libya:** In early April, UNFPA and its partners, including Ministry of Health and International Medical Corps UK, trained 50 health workers in Tripoli on COVID-19 prevention, response and risk communication during pregnancy and motherhood, providing guidelines, protocols and recommendations on how to use PPE effectively.
- **Palestine:** In support of an innovative approach, Gaza Sky Geeks, in partnership with UNFPA, UNICEF and WHO, are supporting an online Hackathon with young innovators to design campaigns and provide structured platforms for sharing public feedback related to COVID-19, with decision-makers.

Regional Response Summary (continued)

Country examples continued:

- **Lebanon:** Supported the National Committee on Pregnancy and COVID-19 to develop protocols for frontline health care providers. The UNFPA country office developed a rapid assessment tool for assessing SRH and GBV services currently provided by the implementing partners and their response to COVID-19.
- **Morocco:** Launched the SALAMA campaign, in partnership with institutional partners and community organisation, to provide protection against COVID-19 to the most vulnerable populations, and the medical and paramedical personnel. The campaign will make available the 'SALAMA kits' for women and girls, with a particular focus on pregnant women, GBV survivors, ageing people, migrants, detainees, and persons with disabilities. SALAMA kits were distributed to pregnant women and health professionals, particularly midwives. T
- **Syria:** Liaises with Ministry of Health to maintain antenatal and postnatal care, and support the establishment of dedicated antenatal/postnatal care facilities/ mobile clinics to meet population needs.
- **Yemen:** Supports the Reproductive Health Department at Al Kuwait Hospital, the main referral hospital for the treatment of identified cases in Sana'a Governorate, and 234 health facilities across the country. UNFPA has positioned 40 ventilators in the country with 40 more in the pipeline and pre-positioned assorted infection control and PPE to be distributed to health facilities when needed.
- **Tunisia:** Extended partnership to new partners (i.e. Médecins du Monde) to reach migrants with medical services including SRH services.



Regional Response Summary (continued)

Addressing GBV

UNFPA Country Offices⁵ have addressed gender-based violence (GBV) by:

- Developing online media and advocacy tools on GBV prevention and response during COVID-19 and working with faith-based leaders and community networks to provide weekly seminars on protection/GBV-related issues;
- Distributing dignity kits adapted to COVID-19 for female healthcare workers, women and girls in quarantine and isolation, and refugees and asylum seekers; and
- Reviewing and updating referral pathways and services addressing GBV to compensate for the disruption of services, in particular for clinical management of rape, and offering the essential package of services to address various GBV prevention and response needs at UNFPA-supported safe spaces.

Country examples:

- **Lebanon:** Conducted community-level rapid GBV assessment to provide information related to the protection environment and the GBV needs of affected communities.
- **Libya:** Sustained GBV and mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) hotline through a local partner in Tripoli, with more than 470 phone calls received during this reporting period, including calls related to medical consultations, COVID-19 and other issues.
- **Sudan:** Activated GBV protection networks in 11 focus states to disseminate Covid19 related GBV messages and serve as community entry points for response. Developed standard operating procedures for community and youth response during COVID-19 and updating GBV of referral pathways. In collaboration with the Combating Violence against Women directorate, UNFPA is also working on establishing the first GBV hotline in the country.
- **Tunisia:** Supported financially the Ministry of Women's Affairs to set up a new temporary shelter for survivors of GBV, as well as supported an existing 3 shelters with PPE products. The Tunisia Country Office also supported the extension of the GBV hotline to being 24/7.
- **Palestine:** Scaled up emergency hotlines and virtual services such as MHPSS for survivors of GBV, and provided support to the main hotline operator to scale up services to be available 24/7.
- **Syria:** With implementing partners, provided one-on-one sessions for case management, individual MHPSS counseling, and health consultations in addition to outdoor individual awareness-raising initiatives on COVID-19.

Impact assessment on the health and socioeconomic impact of COVID-19

The Arab States Regional Office developed a [position paper](#) entitled "Expected impact of public health emergencies on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Reproductive Rights in the Arab States Region. The case of Covid-19" on the expected impact of Covid-19 on sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights in the Arab States region and calling on governments to address obstacles and barriers to service provision enabling women and girls to continue accessing much needed services. Country offices in the region have also started looking at the potential direct and secondary effects of the pandemic.

- **Egypt:** conducted a rapid assessment of the effect of COVID-19 on reproductive health services, i.e. repurposing of healthcare centers and secondary level services and stock out of reproductive health commodities and supplies. UNFPA also contributed to the UN Country Team's paper on socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in Egypt.
- **Jordan:** involved in various Covid19 assessments and studies including impact on SRHR services and adolescent girls; leading coordination to support national assessments on the effect of COVID19 on SRH health outcomes and indicators; and research about the effect of the pandemic on youth employment impacting investment in the demographic dividend, and on the implementation of ICPD-SDG indicators and impact of economic crisis on national investment to achieve the SDGs.

⁵ Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia and Yemen

Regional Response Summary (continued)

Risk communication and community engagement

UNFPA offices have promoted risk communication and community engagement through :

- Communication platforms to reach as many people as possible such as podcasts, hotlines, and media ¹⁰
- Joint awareness raising, education, and activism with wide range of partners, including communities¹¹
- Participation in risk communication and community engagement working groups

Country examples:

- **Egypt:** Produced *Y-Peer podcast* to spread awareness and reach more people. The podcast focus is on sexual and reproductive health, gender-based violence and harmful practices, with assigned episodes for raising awareness on COVID-19, featuring WHO and government experts. UNFPA is supporting the International Federation of Medical Students Associations (IFMSA) to provide on-the-ground risk communication in both community and clinical settings. IFMSA and the Harvard Medical School Response Team is organizing efforts to address the COVID-19 pandemic through education and activism. Education efforts resulted in curriculum for the medical community and social media campaign (see @FutureMDvsCOVID).
- **Lebanon:** UNFPA established a partnership with the Syndicate of Social Workers to mobilize 135 social workers to provide awareness raising on COVID19, support communities' response with a focus on older adults' needs, and to strengthen referral to needed health and protection care for women and older adults. A partnership with the Lebanese Order of Midwives focuses on sharing information and raising awareness on SRH and COVID19, to promote continuity of RH care including antenatal care, postnatal care, family planning, etc.
- **Morocco:** UNFPA leads the Risk Communications and Community Engagement UN Task force and participates in the UN Health Task force led by WHO, the crisis communications team led by the UN Information Centre and the regional Communications committee. Produced and shared youth-friendly materials, including infographics and animation videos on TV, social media and web-radio channels. Printed IEC materials on basic hygiene practices, infection precautions, and how and where to seek care in local language to pregnant women and midwives. Produced digital & media campaign for sensitization and prevention of violence against women.
- **Somalia:** UNFPA supports youth programme partners through mobilization and sensitization efforts, including disseminating messages on COVID-19 symptoms and prevention via TV, radio, social media, billboards, and deploying mobile caravans to inform communities about the importance of staying at home and social distancing.
- **Sudan:** UNFPA and Ministry of Health communicated risks of COVID-19 through 500 posters to reach 4500 beneficiaries, targeting communities at risk and women and girls of reproductive age, including pregnant women, in North Darfur, South Darfur, Nyala North and Blue Nile. Other efforts include:
 - NGOs and partners engaged communities in 15 states in awareness raising activities on COVID-19
 - UNFPA supported Kordofan university team in COVID-19 awareness programme to reach nearly 250,000 community members in homes, markets and mosques through mobile teams
 - UNFPA, the University of Kordofan, and State Ministry of Health launched a COVID-19 community awareness campaign targeting localities of Sheikan, Bara and Um Rawaba, as well as El Rahad town.
 - On 29 March, UNFPA broadcast a COVID-19 awareness programme on radio channel in North Kordofan
 - UNFPA is engaging 50 young persons from Y-Peer youth network in 11 locations to maintain field activities and ensure community outreach

Media & Communications

UNFPA Arab States offices are actively engaged in media outreach to raise awareness, share guidance, and showcase achievements.

Global, regional and country level efforts::

- [Executive Director's statements translated to Arabic](#)
- [Press Releases translated to Arabic](#)
- [Open letter from regional directors to governments to ensure security and safety of women and girls inside their homes and to assist survivors](#)
- [Regional Director's Op-Eds- Arabic and English](#)
- [Joint UN press release: UN in Iraq raises the alarm: Time to endorse the anti-domestic violence law](#)
- [Technical Briefs translated into Arabic](#)
- [Social media campaign, available in 4 languages](#)
- Issued an internal website on COVID-19 to facilitate smooth and speedy information sharing, including [Arabic material related to COVID-19 are posted on the regional website](#)
- Established a social media committee, which is producing COVID-19 content on social media.
- Launching an online Campaign in support of medical staff and midwives.

Country level stories:

Yemen: [Delivering triplets in war-torn Yemen, under shadow of pandemic](#)

Somalia: [COVID-19 threatens already vulnerable maternal and reproductive health systems in Somalia](#)

Syria: [Pandemic threatens communities ravaged by war and crisis, global support needed](#)

Egypt: [EU, UNFPA support family planning sector amid COVID-19 outbreak in Egypt](#), and [Childbirth in a pandemic: Expectant mothers' concerns mount amid COVID-19 outbreak](#)



A midwife examines a newborn at Banadir Hospital in Mogadishu while wearing PPE to prevent the spread of COVID-19, Somalia



In Syria, the Misyaf Charitable Association and youth team in cooperation with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent and SAYYAR voluntary team participated in a joint social awareness initiative about COVID-19 preventive measures, supported by UNFPA.



The campaign in Syria aims to raise awareness among local communities about the virus. They also distributed 1000 hygiene kits for the prevention of COVID-19 to the poorest families in Misyaf city, rural Hama, ensuring sterilization during the process of packing and distribution. Each hygiene kit contained antiseptic, 4 masks per family, and WHO awareness brochures.



In Yemen, UNFPA-supported partners are raising awareness and explaining to a woman and her family how to stay protected from COVID-19.



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UNFPA-supported medical teams disinfect Al-Shahir Hospital in Hadramout where the first COVID-19 case in Yemen was discovered.



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PPE supplies are in high demand and essential for the protection of healthcare workers against COVID-19.



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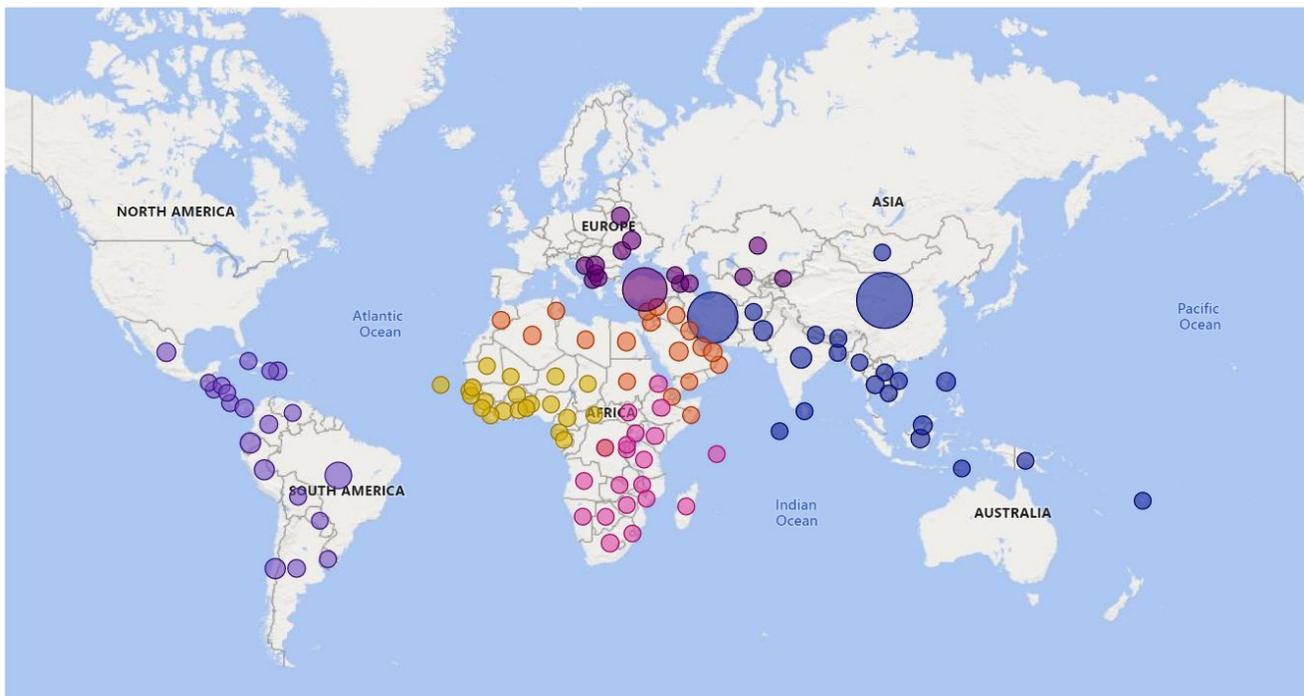
Rapid response kits containing emergency relief and hygiene supplies are provided at a quarantine centre in Taizz, Yemen.

Annex: Confirmed COVID-19 Cases and Deaths in ASRO (WHO, 17 April 2020)

Country	Confirmed Cases	Deaths
Algeria	2,268	348
Djibouti	591	2
Egypt	2,505	183
Gulf Cooperation Council*	18,391	130
Iraq	1,434	80
Jordan	401	7
Lebanon	663	21
Libya	48	1
Morocco	2,251	128
Palestine	294	2
Somalia	80	5
Sudan	32	5
Syrian Arab Republic	33	2
Tunisia	780	35
Yemen	1	0
Total ASRO	29,772	949

Confirmed Cases by Country and Region

Region ● APRO ● ASRO ● EECARO ● ESARO ● LACRO ● WCARO



* Kingdom of Bahrain, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, State of Kuwait, State of Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Sultanate of Oman