

# COVID-19 AND GENDER: IMMEDIATE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PLANNING AND RESPONSE IN JORDAN

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## What is the Issue?

On 11 March 2020, the WHO declared the novel coronavirus that causes the disease COVID-19 a global pandemic. The global response to the threat has been coordinated by the World Health Organization (WHO), which has led global preparedness and response planning and provided technical expertise to a wide range of national efforts to adopt measures to contain the spread of COVID-19 and mitigate its impact.

## What has been the national response in Jordan?

The government established a national response team led by the Prime Minister's Office and the National Center for Crisis Management and has adopted escalating sets of measures to address the threat of the novel coronavirus: restricting air travel from countries with outbreaks; restricting gatherings and public events; closing Jordan's air and land border crossings; placing arriving international travelers in mandatory quarantine; closing schools, universities and non-essential businesses; restricting travel between governorates and within cities; restricting access to the refugee camps; promulgating the Defense Measures Act; closing all private businesses and non-essential public services; and imposing a mandatory curfew. These actions have been accompanied by an immediate set of economic measures aimed towards easing the negative impact of global, regional and national shutdowns of supply chains, travel, tourism, and the private sector. These include measures such as deferring loan payments, cutting interest rates and injecting liquidity. More measures are likely to be taken.

Jordan has taken robust measures towards "flattening the curve" of the spread of COVID-19 and reducing the public health impact. It is already clear that regardless of the public health outcomes the negative economic impact is already significant and will only worsen in terms of increased unemployment, collapse of many small and medium sized businesses, reduced foreign direct investment, reduced domestic revenue generation, and increased budget deficits. The negative socio-related impact is also already significant and likely to worsen.



# What are the gender dimensions? What are the recommendations?

## Access to information and health services

Due to gender roles, women bear primary responsibility caring for ill family members, the elderly and children. This puts women at increased risk of transmission of the virus and increases their need first and foremost for reliable and simple information on how to protect themselves and their families from COVID-19, and second on when and how to access health facilities and services for themselves and their family members. This is particularly important for vulnerable groups of women, such as female heads of households, women with disabilities and female refugees that have limited health care access and female migrant domestic workers who do not speak Arabic and are likely to be providing care to others. Limited access to information and health facilities for these vulnerable groups of women will make it harder to contain the spread of COVID-19 and limit its impact.

### Recommendations:

- The Government of Jordan, Ministry of Health and State Ministry for Media Affairs should develop messaging, delivered through communication vehicles that target and are accessible specifically to vulnerable women. The information should be designed, in light of women's gender roles, on how to care for family members, protect themselves from the spread of the virus during their care activities, and when and how to access health facilities if needed.
- The Government should facilitate the role of international and national response partners in support of vulnerable and at-risk categories of women to access health care services, including through financial assistance.
- The Government should partner with women's organizations, networks and centers to raise awareness and disseminate official government information to vulnerable women in remote communities around the country.

## Protection, safety and security

Protection risks, in particular domestic violence, can be exacerbated as a consequence of heightened tensions in the household due to the length of the confinement period and the stress and anxiety of the outbreak. Evidence from both the COVID-19 outbreak in China as well as Ebola virus outbreaks in Africa<sup>1</sup> point to increases in gender-based violence (GBV). With health service providers and law enforcement preoccupied with handling the COVID-19 outbreak, women experiencing GBV are likely to face challenges in accessing services.

### Recommendations:

- The Family Protection Department (FPD) of the Public Security Directorate (PSD) has already taken measures to ensure minimum staffing of Family Protection Units in all governorates, including with female police officers. This should include also the FPD units in the refugee camps where women police officers are needed. PSD should ensure that during the containment period the FPDs remain adequately staffed across the Kingdom.
- The government should ensure an adequate number of approvals for GBV protection services in remote areas and refugee camps to be continued as life-saving emergency services – both by national and international response partners.
- State Ministry for Media Affairs should include messaging and information in daily press conferences on access to Family Protection services including the emergency numbers to call, available hotlines, and all other available services.
- The Ministry of Social Development is ensuring the continuity of services by shelters for women GBV survivors and should work with all relevant government partners to ensure safe transportation for women that need support leaving quarantine to access shelter services. MOSD should partner with women's civil society organizations to contribute to awareness raising and outreach and to provide data and evidence on how curfew measures should be adapted to meet the safety and security needs and constraints of vulnerable women.

<sup>1</sup> Why the Coronavirus Outbreak Could Hit Women Hardest. Time Magazine. 12 March 2020.  
<https://time.com/5803887/coronavirus-domestic-violence-victims/>

## Response planning and coordination structures

Previous research around public health emergencies reaffirms that a gender perspective needs to be fully integrated in assessments, preparedness planning, and response<sup>2</sup>. This perspective should include the impact of gender roles, women's specific needs and capabilities, and sex disaggregated data for policy making. Producing and using this data and analysis and integrating it into the planning and response can improve effectiveness and appropriateness.

### Recommendations:

- The Government response and coordination mechanism should ensure a gender perspective through its work not only by including women experts from Civil Defense Directorate (CDD), PSD, and other relevant national stakeholders, but also by actively engaging gender expertise in its membership through the Jordanian National Commission for Women.
- International partners' response and coordination efforts should ensure direct engagement of gender expertise. All data related to the outbreak and the measures taken to address it should be disaggregated by sex, age, and disability, and innovative technology leveraged to improve data availability during quarantine. Data must then be continuously monitored and analyzed in order to understand the gendered differences in exposure and treatment and to design differential preventive measures.
- The Government should call upon its partnership with civil society in providing response services.

## Economic Impact

The full extent of the socio-economic impact on Jordan of the COVID-19 outbreak will be significant with increases in unemployment and under-employment and decreases in manufacturing and services. Women and youth in particular will be disproportionately affected by job losses leading to increased inequalities<sup>3</sup>. When initial government measures were announced to close schools and restrict movements in both public and private sectors, employers sent home women employees first, citing their domestic care duties. An economic recession and austerity measures will mean unpaid care burdens continue to fall on women more heavily and serve to restrict the supply of labour. While it was supportive of the public and private sectors to release women from work when the schools were closed, it also served to reinforce gender roles and characterize the unpaid care burden as women's responsibility and not a family issue. The spread of COVID-19 and limit its impact.

### Recommendations:

- The government should integrate in public messaging during the curfew period the importance of sharing care duties and responsibilities in the household between men and women, girls and boys. These messages can be designed with the support of civil society partners.
- Monitor violations taking place in the private sector, especially private schools, and enforce accountability measures.
- If the public and private sector are providing emergency leave for childcare reasons, it should be available to all parents, both mothers and fathers, as well as with clear provisions for first responders (both men and women) and their care burdens.
- The government should design all further macro-economic measures with a strong gender perspective, especially given Jordan already faces a globally low female labour force participation rate. In particular, immediate economic measures being introduced to support small and medium businesses should include specific measures to raise awareness of women business owners of how to access these measures.

<sup>2</sup> UNGA A/70/723. *Protecting Humanity from Future Health Crises: Report of the High Level Panel on the Global Response to Health Crises; The perspective of gender on the Ebola virus using a risk management and population health framework: a scoping review*, <https://idpjournal.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s40249-017-0346-7>

<sup>3</sup> COVID-19 and world of work: Impacts and responses, 18 March 2020. ILO [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/briefingnote/wcms\\_738753.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/briefingnote/wcms_738753.pdf)