

Syria Country Office

COVID-19 Humanitarian Response Flash Update # 8

1 - 30 September 2020



Situation Overview

As of October 13, 2020, the Syrian Ministry of Health (MoH) has reported 4,826 COVID-19 cases across Syria: 3,231 active, 1,364 recoveries and 231 registered deaths¹. The first positive case was announced on 22 March 2020, with the first fatality reported on 29 March 2020.

Highlighting the particular risks faced by healthcare workers, according to the Syrian MoH, 143 healthcare workers have tested positive for COVID-19. This includes 59 in Damascus³⁰ in Lattakia; 14 in Rural Damascus; 9 in Aleppo; 7 in Hama; 6 each in Quneitra, Tartous and Dara'a; 3 in Al-Hassakeh; 2 in As-Sweida; and 1 in Homs. Of particular concern, 11 healthcare workers are reported to have died, on the 3rd of September.²

The steady increase in affected healthcare workers reported since July underscores Syria's fragile healthcare system with already insufficient numbers of qualified healthcare personnel, and the potential for its overstretched healthcare capacity to be further compromised. Humanitarian actors continue to receive reports that healthcare workers in some areas do not have sufficient personal protective equipment (PPE).³

Even while the current official numbers remain relatively low, it is clear the epidemiological situation in Syria has rapidly evolved. Since July, official numbers have risen sharply; including a peak of more than 1,600 confirmed cases (around half the current total) in August.⁴

An inter-agency socio-economic impact assessment of COVID-19 has been completed. Findings indicate a major economic downturn and significant social impacts, amplified by the ongoing financial crisis in Lebanon. As a result of the multiple crises (including but not solely COVID-19), it is estimated that 200,000-300,000 jobs were permanently lost. The informal sector and businesses have been heavily impacted, with 15 percent of small and medium sized businesses reporting permanent closure. In addition, remittances on which many families heavily rely, are estimated to have reduced up to 50 percent.⁵ In effort to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and its impacts, and as a supplementation to the health and humanitarian response, the UN in Syria has developed a framework for the Immediate Socio-Economic Response to COVID-19'. The socio-economic response to COVID-19 is a multi-agency effort that focuses on five priority impact areas: health; social protection; economic activity and jobs; macroeconomic management; and community resilience and thus giving a structure to guide the formulation of national response plans.⁶



Immediate Response

UNFPA continues to work with key line ministries and implementing partners (IPs) to ensure continuity of Reproductive Health (RH) and Gender-Based Violence (GBV) services, while ensuring that both health and social workers and beneficiaries are protected from COVID-19. UNFPA response includes provision of maternal and RH services for pregnant and lactating women, operation of women's and girls' safe spaces (WGSS'), distribution of RH and dignity kits (both male and female), distribution of hygiene kits, e-voucher system for hygiene supplies, community awareness raising and referrals to both RH and GBV services.

¹ [The Syrian Ministry of Health COVID-19 Cases Dashboard](#)

² [UNOCHA and WHO | Syrian Arab Republic: COVID-19 Humanitarian Update No. 19 as of 29 September 2020](#)

³ [UNOCHA and WHO | Syrian Arab Republic: COVID-19 Humanitarian Update No. 19 as of 29 September 2020](#)

⁴ [UNOCHA and WHO | Syrian Arab Republic: COVID-19 Humanitarian Update No. 19 as of 29 September 2020](#)

⁵ [UNOCHA and WHO | Syrian Arab Republic: COVID-19 Humanitarian Update No. 19 as of 29 September 2020](#)

⁶ https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/SYR_Socioeconomic-Response-Plan_2020B-compressed.pdf



Advancing Dignity and Protecting Women & Girls from Gender Based Violence (GBV)

During this period, UNFPA supported the following:

- **Awareness raising on GBV and COVID-19:** UNFPA IPs, across the 14 governorates, continued to organize awareness raising sessions on different GBV topics, including on COVID-19 prevention in UNFPA-supported WGSS', and through online platforms such as Whatsapp groups. A total of **14,878 beneficiaries** were reached with awareness raising activities on GBV and COVID-19.⁷
- **Vocational trainings and recreational activities at UNFPA- supported WGSS:** vocational training courses and recreational activities were conducted at the WGSS' while ensuring a minimum number of beneficiaries in adherence to COVID-19 preventive measures across 13 governorates.⁸
- **Capacity building initiatives:** as part of the ongoing online webinars organized by UNFPA to promote quality of remote GBV case management and PSS services, a total of **40 GBV case managers** completed a 5-week module on provision of remote GBV service delivery. The webinars covered topics such as: remote GBV case management, PSS, integrated GBV messaging, remote safety planning for intimate-partner violence survivors, and enhancing and mobilizing women and girls networks remotely.⁹
- **GBV case management services:** GBV case management services continued to be provided across the 14 governorates in Syria. UNFPA. IPs provided anecdotal information on the increase in the cases of violence, especially domestic violence during the COVID-19, with most survivors seeking psychosocial support.
- **E-voucher and dignity kits distribution:** As part of the expansion plan, UNFPA continued to provide additional top-ups using the WFP e-voucher system to support pregnant and lactating women to buy hygiene items that they may need from designated stores in: Aleppo, Damascus, Dara'a, Deir-ez-zour, Hama, Hassakeh, Homs, Lattakia, Quneitra, Raqqa, Rural Damascus and Tartous governorates. In the month of September, a total of **60,535 pregnant and lactating women** redeemed their vouchers for hygiene items.
- **3 Community Wellbeing Centers (CWCs)¹⁰** continued to provide integrated GBV and RH services while ensuring the respect of precautionary measures against COVID-19. During this reporting period, services were provided online to ensure beneficiaries continue to be reached with services such as: medical consultations and awareness raising, COVID-19 awareness, PSS and case management services, vocational training, and awareness raising activities related to RH and GBV 2 integrated MTs in Sweida and 1 in Rural Lattakia continued to provide GBV and RH services, including in remote surrounding areas.

⁷ <https://www.unfpa.org/resources/syria-country-office-covid-19-humanitarian-response-flash-update-7>

⁸ <https://www.unfpa.org/resources/syria-country-office-covid-19-humanitarian-response-flash-update-7>

⁹ [A recorded webinar | GBV Messaging Enhancing and Mobilizing Women and Girls Final- in Arabic.](#)

[A recorded webinar | Safety Planning Procedures for Intimate Partner Violence Survivors Remotely - in Arabic](#)

[A recorded session | The Standard GBV Case Management Process - in Arabic.](#)

[A recorded webinar | Providing Gender-based Violence Services during the COVID-19 Pandemic - in Arabic.](#)

¹⁰ A community wellbeing centre is a space which offers comprehensive GBV prevention, awareness-raising and care services to women and girls, and general capacity building to enhance their livelihood opportunities and reduce their vulnerabilities. This is in addition to the provision of SRH and GBV services including PSS services to IDPs and host communities including integrating men and involving them in GBV prevention.

- **The Family Protection Unit (FPU)**¹¹ in Rural Damascus continued to provide integrated GBV and RH services both for the residents of the shelter at the unit and through the external clinics for those living outside the shelter. Online services such as medical consultations (gynecology and pediatrics), counselling and PSS, awareness activities, etc continued to be provided. An online group of approximately **195 beneficiaries** was created for vocational training using visual and audio materials, on topics such as: hairdressing, cooking, sewing, life skills, literacy classes and recreational activities such as aerobics on a weekly basis. In addition, awareness-raising on topics such as: COVID-19 prevention, stress management, raising children through different development stages, etc have been implemented in the online group by social workers.
- The GBV sub-sector led by UNFPA, held a consultation meeting which was attended by **33 partners** to review the GBV sub-sector strategy and work plan to reflect the humanitarian context, taking into account the COVID-19 pandemic. The sub-sector identified needs and gaps to inform the strategy and action plan for 2020-2021.
- The GBV sub-sector further formed a GBV task force to provide strategic advisory support to the sector in Syria in relation to programming in current pandemic and the humanitarian emergency



Advancing Access to Reproductive Health (RH)

During this period, UNFPA supported the following:

- **Awareness raising on RH and COVID-19:** UNFPA continued to conduct awareness-raising sessions through RH static clinics and MTs on RH topics, including: COVID-19 infection and prevention measures, targeting women, adolescent girls and pregnant and lactating women (PLW). The sessions were conducted in: Damascus, Rural Damascus, Dara'a, Sweida, Quneitra, Hama, Lattakia, Homs, Hama, Tartous, Aleppo, Al-Hassakeh and Deir-ez-zour. The awareness raising methods varied from conducting individual sessions, distributing awareness brochures issued by WHO and broadcasting messages. **A total of 12,811 beneficiaries** were reached.
- UNFPA provided technical support to MoH in developing a logistic and procurement strategy as a piloting project for the Ministry's warehouses and procurement system. As part of the roll out of the strategy, MoH conducted 5 evaluation and assessment visits to its central warehouses in selected governorates such as: Lattakia, Homs, Tartous, Quneitra and Hama. The roll out of the strategy is still ongoing until the end of November, 2020. Once fully adopted, the project will support MoH with an automated system for logistic and procurement warehouses that are linked to all central warehouses in all governorates at the national level, to track the registration and distribution and all recorded medical supplies, pharmaceutical items and medical equipment.
- UNFPA supported MoH with the printing of **2,000 copies of the national guideline of breast early detection and services for health workers**. The national guideline is to be disseminated during the national campaign of breast awareness month in October.
- With the support of the Inter-Agency Working Group (IAWG) and UNFPA HQ, UNFPA conducted a 1 day training of trainers (ToT) workshop on Comprehensive Sexual and Reproductive Health services for national IPs for and Syrian MoH staff. **A total of 11 participants were trained.**

¹¹ A family Protection Unit functions as a shelter for women and girl survivors of more serious cases of GBV. The unit is open 24/7 to receive new and urgent cases and sometimes live-saving, services, it also serves as a temporary residence for the women and children who sleep, eat, and receive services.



Enhancing the Livelihoods of Young People

During this period, UNFPA supported activities as follows:

- In the last week of September, UNFPA, in coordination with Aleppo University, launched the *2020 supporting youth project* within the university. As part of an ongoing series of trainings, the project targets the students from all faculties. The first activity was a 4-day Training of Trainers (ToT) for the researchers, and included sessions to cover RH, GBV and youth-related topics related to the UNFPA mandate. **A total of 20 researchers were trained.**
- UNFPA trained **75 young people** from Damascus and Rural Damascus on business startups. The young people were trained on business models, marketing, market strategies, e-marketing, finance, and innovation.¹²
- In Rural Hama, UNFPA IP Masyaf Charitable Association celebrated the International Peace Day under the slogan *Forming Peace Together* by launching a campaign that disseminated messages from youth in Syria and in different regions of the world. The campaign was a call for the spread of empathy, hope and against discrimination in the face of COVID-19. The hashtag *#SyriaPeace* was adopted along with the use of photos which were widely published on social media platforms.¹³
- In addition, the campaign was launched by the UNFPA-supported youth-lead network Y-PEER. The campaign consisted of articles on achieving peace and covered topics such as: women and peace, peace and international laws, peace and conflict. Members of the network also contributed to the campaign by sharing messages on what peace means to them as youth¹⁴.
- Emphasizing on the significant role of young people in raising awareness in their communities, the Syrian Association for Social Development, supported by UNFPA, carried out a 4-day dialogue in Dara'a (Al-Hirak area) where **60 young people** discussed the COVID-19 impact on young people's lives, their studies, and the role of youth in overcoming its effects. The role of youth in gender equality was also discussed, in addition to introducing the sustainable development goals and the challenges faced in achieving them.
- A total of **330 young people** were reached with awareness-raising sessions through various online platforms by UNFPA IPs. The activities covered topics related to COVID-19 prevention measures and GBV, with a focus on the young people's role in raising awareness on COVID-19 amongst their peers. Additionally, awareness raising activities were conducted in the Youth Friendly Spaces¹⁵ (YFS), through outreach teams and social media platforms.

¹² [Sanad Team Official Facebook Page - Business Start-ups Interviews](#)

¹³ [Masyaf Charitable Association Official Facebook Page - International Peace Day Campaign.](#)

¹⁴ [Y-PEER Official Facebook Page - International Peace Day campaign](#)

¹⁵ A Youth Friendly Space (YFS) mobilises communities to provide safe spaces for young people, with programming which could include education activities, life skills trainings, psychosocial support, awareness raising and referral to other services.



During the reporting period (1-30 September 2020), UNFPA achieved the following (GBV & RH & Youth):

- Beneficiaries for RH awareness raising, including COVID-19 related topics: **12,811**
- Young people reached with awareness raising on COVID-19 related topics: **330**
- RH static clinics: **87**
- RH mobile teams: **74**
- Number of integrated mobile teams operating: **3**
- Number of supported Women's and Girls' Safe Spaces operating: **47**
- Number of GBV mobile teams operating: **120**
- Number of Community Wellbeing Centers operational: **3**
- Number of integrated mobile teams operating: **3**
- Number of Family Protection Units operational: **1**
- Psycho-social support and counseling on COVID-19 provided to: **19,656 beneficiaries**
- Awareness raising on GBV and COVID-19 provided to: **14,878 beneficiaries**
- Vocational training provided to: **777 women and girls**
- Number of distributed sanitary napkins: **21,112**
- Number of Dignity Kits¹ distributed: **7,124**



From the beginning of COVID-19 response (1st of April-30th of September), UNFPA achieved the following (RH & GBV & Youth):

- Beneficiaries reached with PSS and counseling related to COVID-19: **207,551**
- Beneficiaries reached with awareness raising sessions on COVID-19: **194,110**
- Beneficiaries reached with sanitary napkins packs and dignity kits: **129,581**

Next in response:

- UNFPA is currently in the process of planning a pilot project on the production of textile face masks in Homs. Through this project, UNFPA aims to support its IPs across Syria for mass production of the facemasks which will be distributed to those in need in different locations of implementation.
- UNFPA has finalized the tender process for the procurement of N95 masks and surgical masks to be delivered in the last week of October to the Syrian MoH and the Syrian MoHE in Damascus.

¹⁶ [UNFPA standard dignity kit items](#)



Challenges

- Closure of some agencies providing services due to COVID-19 disrupted GBV referrals pathways.
- Withdrawals from vocational training courses due to the increase in cases of COVID-19 and fear of infection were reported.
- Prolonged power outages have affected online sessions organized by UNFPA IP.
- The very high transportation costs are still a burden and an obstacle for beneficiaries to access services.
- The volatility of the exchange rate (and banking challenges in Lebanon), and other factors that impact the import of certain medical supplies critical to an effective COVID-19 response are still a concern.



Immediate Needs

The financial gap for COVID-19 response until December 2020 is estimated at : \$2,779,000

Of this amount, **an estimated \$1,500,000 is needed to procure winterized kits** for the upcoming winter season. The winterized kits will cover the needs of the most vulnerable populations including: unaccompanied minors, female headed-households, elders, people with disabilities, people at risk due to inadequate shelter conditions as well as vulnerable host community members. The kits will also cover blanket distributions for the populations in camps including: Al Hol, Areesha, Mahmudli, Nawrooz, and camps as well as Abu Khashab and Twhina informal settlements.

“I am a girl and also deaf, but I am still following my dreams”

Picture Credit: UNFPA Syria



“I have faced many to live a normal life as a deaf person, and I was forced to leave school at the age of twelve to become a housewife.” Amal started telling the UNFPA coordinator in Hama.

“I used to be completely isolated in my community, and for this reason, I could not even learn sign language,” Amal continued her story. When she was 19 years old, she persistently tried to convince her father to allow her to go back to school to give her the opportunity to communicate with other people. Unfortunately, he did not allow her to do so because he was ashamed of her disability.

Amal had asked her relative who was one of the beneficiaries of the women’s & girls’ safe space, supported by UNFPA in Hama, to ask her father on her behalf to allow her to register in the same course.

“I was told that I would not be able to go to school, but I used that frustration to fuel my life. I feel like I have two challenges; being deaf and being a girl. It is a double struggle to fit in. I have had to work 10 times harder than my counterparts in my community”, she added.

After finally convincing her father, and with the support of her cousin, Amal managed to register in the hairdressing vocational training at the WGSS. Amal put her all in the training and practiced intensely and also observed the work of the well-known hairdressers on TV. After three months, she graduated from the course, and bought her own beauty kit. She started to work from her home, and she has been able to generate her own income since then. Amal says the most important accomplishment for her was registering in a course to learn sign language.

“Even though I am deaf and often seen as voiceless, I have spoken through my actions”, Amal, whose name means “hope” in Arabic, concluded her story with her own words as a high achiever who set her specific goals towards a successful path despite all obstacles in her life.

Young people with disabilities are often invisible in statistics, excluded from education and health services, and discriminated against in their own communities. UNFPA continues to advocate to ensure that persons with disabilities are fully aware of and able to exercise their rights, and to end stigma and discrimination against all persons with disabilities and ensure their full inclusion.

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