

The impact of COVID-19 on realizing the ICPD agenda, SRHR and gender equality

Thursday 15 April at 9-10:30 AM EST/ 3-4:30 PM CET

Co-organized by the governments of the Netherlands, South-Africa, Canada and Mexico; UNFPA and Rutgers.

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Language: English, with simultaneous French and Spanish translation

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Objectives

- Exchange experiences on the impact of COVID-19 on realizing the ICPD agenda, and in particular on realizing SRHR and gender equality;
- Identify what is needed multilaterally (concrete actions) to support addressing the drawbacks from the COVID-19 pandemic on SRHR and gender equality.

Background

The COVID-19 pandemic and particularly the mitigation policies have an adverse effects on women and girls, and threaten to reverse some of the hard-fought progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The economic consequences are likely to deepen poverty including the feminization of poverty.¹ As the provision of essential health services is disrupted, many women find their access to contraceptives and essential maternal healthcare hampered. UNFPA estimates that globally due to COVID-19, 12 million women have experienced contraceptive access interruptions, leading to 1.4 million unintended pregnancies². Due to delayed programmes and economic hardship, an estimated 13 million additional child marriages could take place over the coming 10 years. What's more, we face the threat of a shadow pandemic of violence against women and girls, with an additional 31 million cases of gender-based violence, including many cases of domestic and sexual violence. All these effects have direct implications for the health and rights of young people, women and girls in particular, but also long-term effects on achieving the *demographic dividend*.

Key findings from the webinar series *Demography and COVID-19 in Africa* show among other things that continuation of, as well as funding for sexual and reproductive health and rights, including services is critical. More comprehensive measures are needed to mitigate the shadow pandemic of sexual and gender-based violence. Moreover, the destructive effects of disrupted education needs to be addressed to minimize drop out of disadvantages groups including girls.

A survey³ done among 3.000 young people across Ghana, Kenya, Uganda, Zimbabwe, Nepal and Indonesia on the impact of COVID-19 on young people's SRHR confirms these findings. Interruption of schooling has cut-off young people from important sources for information including comprehensive sexuality education, as well as their peers. Deep impacts on mental health and

¹ The impact of COVID-19 on women and men. Nairobi: UN Women and UNFPA, East and Southern Africa Regional Offices. March 2021

² <https://www.unfpa.org/news/one-year-pandemic-unfpa-estimates-12-million-women-have-seen-contraceptive-interruptions>

³ Both, R., Castle, S., Hensen, B. (2021). 'I feel that things are out of my hands'. *How COVID-19 prevention measures have affected young people's sexual and reproductive health in Ghana, Indonesia, Kenya, Nepal, Uganda and Zimbabwe*. Rutgers: Utrecht, The Netherlands

wellbeing were experienced, some youth turning to risky behaviour. Many young people lost their source of income, and noticed impact on their food security and other basic necessities. This has also lead to increased recourse to transactional sex, contributing to additional risks for young people's sexual and reproductive health.

Similar patterns of effects on gender equality and SRHR are found in the Latin American region⁴, where concentration of resources and attention to the COVID-19 response, may lead to undoing a decade of efforts to improve contraceptive access and fulfilling unmet demand for family planning. As a result, it is estimated that the region could see an additional 3.900 maternal deaths and over 50.000 neonatal deaths. These effects are particularly felt among young people and those women and girls already belonging to marginalized groups, further entrenching existing lines of inequality.

At the UN, these concerns have been addressed in several resolutions guiding the global response to COVID-19. These include the omnibus resolution on a 'Comprehensive and coordinated response to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic', and two Third Committee resolutions specifically focusing on the impact of COVID-19 on women and girls. These resolutions and agreements rest on a decades-old consensus at the UN about the importance of gender equality and SRHR, as expressed in the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals. Each region also has specific regional review outcomes and commitments regarding gender equality and SRHR.

The Commission on Population and Development, as the Commission where progress and emerging challenges with regards to the ICPD Programme of Action is discussed, plays a critical role in addressing these COVID-19 effects on gender equality and sexual and reproductive health and rights. This side-event therefore aims to bring together the experiences from the various regions, to identify necessary (multilateral) actions to ensure we get back on track towards realizing sexual and reproductive health and rights for all.

AGENDA

Moderator: Sivananthi Thanenthiran, Executive Director ARROW

Opening by:

Karina Gould, Minister of International Development, Canada (tbc)

Aliza Singh, Programme coordinator Beyond Beijing Committee Nepal (tbc)

Bernard Onyango, Ph.D. Senior Research and Policy Analyst at African Institute for Development Policy (AFIDEP), on key findings report *Demography and COVID-19*

Panel discussion with:

Dr. Karla Berdichevsky, General Director of the National Centre for Gender Equality and Reproductive Health, Mexico

Pascal Grotenhuis, Ambassador Women's Rights & Gender Equality, the Netherlands

Brian Ssekajja, SRHR advocate and peer educator at Reproductive Health Uganda

Dr. Julitta Onabanjo, Regional Director ESA, UNFPA (tbc)

Q&A with the panel

Closing remarks by Minister Zulu, South-Africa (tbc)

⁴ https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/46508/1/S2000905_en.pdf