



UNFPA's Thematic Funds

in the Context of the COVID-19 Response



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COVID-19 is having a detrimental impact on the lives of women, girls and young people. UNFPA estimates that 47 million women in 114 low- and middle-income countries will be unable to use modern contraceptives and an additional 7 million unintended pregnancies will result if the lockdown continues for 6 months with major disruptions to services. A six-month lockdown is also estimated to result in an additional 31 million cases of gender-based violence.

COVID-19 could critically undermine progress against UNFPA's three transformative results by 2030, ending unmet need for family planning, ending gender-based violence including harmful practices such as female genital mutilation and child marriage, and ending all preventable maternal deaths.

UNFPA's response to the coronavirus pandemic is focused on preserving momentum on these results by delivering on three strategic priorities:

- 1) continuity of sexual and reproductive health services;
- 2) addressing gender-based violence; and
- 3) ensuring the supply of modern contraceptives and reproductive health commodities.

These three strategic priorities, and the delivery of UNFPA's transformative results, are further supported by the complementary action of UN system-wide efforts to respond to the pandemic, including through the Socio-Economic Framework, Global Humanitarian Response Plan, and the Strategic Response and Preparedness Plan.

Hence, UNFPA's Global Response Plan (GRP) is an enabler for UNFPA's 'whole of agency approach to COVID-19'. It prioritizes urgent needs in countries with the weakest health systems to ensure no one is left behind. It also articulates UNFPA's forecasted need with respect to personal protective equipment (PPE), which is essential for the continuity of UNFPA's programmatic interventions, and supports UNFPA in adapting its programming approach to COVID-19 needs.

In addition, the GRP touches on the underlying accelerators that are themselves pivotal to success: e.g. data, youth, risk communication and stigma reduction, and leaving no one behind. UNFPA's Thematic Funds, which are responding to COVID-19 and other needs, are critical to both the capacity of UNFPA to respond to the pandemic, but also to assure that UNFPA has the necessary funds to "build back better", and secure the resilience of programme countries for the Decade of Action.

This paper outlines how the work of UNFPA's Thematic Funds¹ (UNFPA Supplies, Maternal and Newborn Health, and Population Data) are responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, and how these actions anticipate and strengthen the longer term goals of each thematic fund, so that UNFPA continues to deliver on its transformative results.

¹ As the Humanitarian Action Thematic Fund (HTF) is the primary mechanism to support allocation of funds received through the GRP, it is not included in this paper.

UNFPA Supplies: Additional funding need of \$30 million for 2020-2021

UNFPA Supplies is UNFPA's thematic programme dedicated to expanding access to family planning. UNFPA Supplies supports countries with the greatest needs, helping them to strengthen their supply chains so that women and adolescent girls can access a choice of modern contraceptives and essential maternal health medicines no matter where they live. The programme has a particular focus on 46 countries, in addition to providing support for reproductive health services, emergency Reproductive Health kits and contraceptive and maternal health commodities in humanitarian crises.

Challenges presented due to COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic is already disrupting access to life-saving family planning services. It is also compounding existing gender and social inequalities. Low-income countries, such as those supported by UNFPA Supplies, where health systems are already weak, are facing the greatest challenges in maintaining services. Access is even more limited for younger, poorer and more vulnerable and marginalized populations, who already face social and economic exclusion. UNFPA Supplies has identified more than a dozen lowest-income countries at risk of stock-outs of contraceptives or maternal health medicines in the next 6 months.

Contraceptive inaccessibility carries devastating social, economic, and public health consequences. It is thus critical that during the COVID-19 pandemic response the right to access information and quality voluntary family planning services is upheld so that women and adolescents are able to protect themselves from sexually transmitted infections and HIV, to control their fertility and fulfil their reproductive intentions

How UNFPA Supplies is responding to COVID-19

UNFPA Supplies has identified a set of actions to ensure continued access to reproductive health supplies and services during COVID-19 pandemic response, with the following objectives:

- Ensure that SRH services are considered essential services during COVID-19 response
- Supply chains for reproductive health products are continued (in coordination with global and local partners) to last mile
- Ensure family planning services continue to be rights-based and offer a range of contraceptive choices
- Assist country programmes to redirect portions of their programme resources to procure PPE contributing to maintaining the safety and productivity of family planning providers and clients.

As articulated in its latest update, work is being conducted in collaboration with governments and key partners and stakeholders, including private sector partners.

Country Example:

The Ministry of Health Ethiopia recorded a nearly 6% decline in uptake of contraception by early May. UNFPA Supplies needs urgent additional funding to support Ethiopia for: local transportation and supply chain strengthening for last mile delivery of contraceptives and maternal health medicines in selected hard-to-reach and underserved districts where usual services are disrupted; training for community-based distributors and provision mobile outreach services to reduce the need for clients to travel to health facilities; PPE for providers and essential infection prevention and control supplies for provision of family planning services.

Maternal and Newborn Health Thematic Fund: Additional funding need of \$30 million for 2020 and 2021

The Maternal and Newborn Health Thematic Fund (MHTF) aims to make pregnancy and childbirth safer for all women, girls and newborns by bolstering midwifery and strengthening health systems overall, for provision of comprehensive sexual and reproductive health care, in particular the delivery of universal life-saving emergency obstetric and newborn care (EmONC). During its third phase (2018-2022), the MHTF promotes evidence-based interventions, policies and technical guidance to improve maternal and newborn health in 32 countries with high maternal and neonatal mortality rates.

Challenges presented due to COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted access to maternal and newborn health services in a number of ways:

- Maternity facilities have been repurposed and midwives redeployed to support general medical care, leaving women with fewer maternal health resources and facilities, thus exponentially increasing the risk for undiagnosed and untreated complications and increasing maternal mortality and morbidity.
- Weakened provision of care is further compounded by fewer women accessing maternal health care services, including those women facing pregnancy related complications, due to travel restrictions, fear and misinformation. This increases the risk of women dying from complications in pregnancy and childbirth, including obstructed labour which could result in obstetric fistula and other preventable morbidities.
- Midwifery education institutions have closed down across large parts of Africa and almost all of Asia resulting in increased need for virtual education and training models which are often non-existent.
- Health facilities are often overcrowded, with an inability to provide adequate physical distancing measures. They often face shortages of PPE and general maternal and newborn health supplies, including basics such as soap and running water. This increases the risk of infection for patients, doctors, midwives and other care providers and results in incomplete service provision.

The MHTF response to COVID-19

MHTF is reprogramming its resources to focus on the following three priorities:

1. Coordination of the sexual, reproductive, maternal and newborn health (SRMNH) response in collaboration with national stakeholders, partners and the Ministry of Health
2. Protecting the sexual, reproductive and maternal healthcare workforce, in particular midwives, from infection.
3. Sustaining health systems to ensure continuation of safe and effective maternity care for women and their newborns, including alternative measures/modalities to deliver obstetrical and maternity services.

The MHTF's response to COVID-19 includes the development of a plan for 9 Sub-Saharan African countries² with strengthened EmONC facility networks to more efficiently plan, implement and document their actions against COVID-19. These countries present a high burden of maternal mortality and morbidity and need to secure the continuity of maternal and newborn health services at sub-national and national scale. Three out of these 9 countries have already received financial support to launch their COVID-19 response plan for maintaining maternal and neonatal services. UNFPA is also negotiating partnerships with the private sector in support of the COVID-19 response for maintaining maternal and neonatal services in these countries.

² Benin, Chad, Congo Brazzaville, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea-Conakry, Madagascar, Senegal, Sudan, and Togo

Population Data Thematic Fund: Additional funding need of \$7.1 Million for 2020

The Population Data Thematic Fund is UNFPA's response to growing requests by governments to address long standing shortfalls in population data and related human capacity. The Thematic Fund expands the scope and quality of modern census and registry data, increases the use of geo-referenced population data, maps population vulnerabilities, tracks demographic shifts to accelerate progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and advances the objectives of UNFPA's mandate. It capitalizes on UNFPA's support to population census and demographic intelligence over four decades. UNFPA is engaging with key governments, private strategic partners and stakeholders to build a solid partnership base for the fund.

Challenges presented due to COVID-19

With more than 120 countries scheduled to conduct census enumeration in 2020 and 2021, the 2020 census round will be severely impacted by the pandemic. Many censuses may fall behind, which further runs the risk of leaving countries unable to track progress against the SDGs and in particular the 106 population-based SDG indicators. In calendar year 2020, 59 countries were scheduled to undertake their censuses: 23 countries have already postponed, and 26 are considering delays or postponement.

How it is responding to COVID-19

The Population Data Thematic Fund, recently created, has re-adjusted its priorities and activities to strengthen the response of population data systems to the COVID-19 pandemic by providing timely, accurate and reliable data to national Governments for both preparedness and response.

This also includes supporting national statistical systems to adapt their business processes to the pandemic and provide more granular data on those further left behind. There are three focus areas relevant to COVID-19:

1. Assuring data continuity. The Population Data Thematic Fund is tracking census disruptions worldwide, and supporting the urgent transformation of data collection tools and methods to assure data continuity for the SDGs.
2. Population mapping. The Population Data Thematic Fund launched a global dashboard on COVID-19 Population Vulnerability, mapping vulnerable persons, including older persons, those living without piped water, those in dense urban areas, and health sector readiness. Governments are also being supported to map health sector access.
3. Assessing impact. The Population Data Thematic Fund is working to target areas of acute need by monitoring the continuity of maternal health and GBV services, and contributing to inter-agency assessments of the socioeconomic impact of the pandemic.

Annex 1: Focus Countries for Thematic Funds

Below are the focus countries for the current phases of UNFPA Supplies and the Maternal Health and Newborn Thematic Fund. Note that because the Population Data Thematic Fund works in countries depending on census, there is no set list of focus countries.
















Key:






























- UNFPA Supplies



- Maternal and Newborn Health Thematic Fund

East and Southern Africa	West and Central Africa	Asia and the Pacific	Arab States	Latin America and Caribbean	Eastern Europe and Central Asia
Burundi:  	Benin:  	Bangladesh: 	Djibouti: 	Bolivia: 	
DRC:  	Burkina Faso:  	Laos:  	Somalia: 	Haiti:  	
Eritrea: 	Cameroon: 	Myanmar: 	Sudan:  	Honduras: 	
Ethiopia:  	Central African Republic: 	Nepal:  	Yemen: 		

Kenya: 	Chad: 	Papua New Guinea: 			
Lesotho: 	Congo: 	Timor-Leste: 			
Madagascar: 	Côte d'Ivoire: 				
Malawi: 	Gambia: 				
Mozambique: 	Ghana: 				
Rwanda: 	Republic of Guinea: 				
South Sudan: 	Republic of Guinea-Bissau: 				
Uganda: 	Liberia: 				
Tanzania: 	Mauritania: 				
Zambia:	Niger:				

					
<p>Zimbabwe:</p> 	<p>Nigeria:</p> 				
	<p>Republic of the Congo:</p> 				
	<p>Senegal:</p> 				
	<p>Sierra Leone:</p> 				
	<p>Togo:</p> 