



## Recommendations to improve access to contraceptives and legal abortion services during the COVID-19 pandemic

### Purpose of the Research

To explore the barriers and challenges in access to contraception and abortion services during COVID-19 situation in Iran, Bangladesh and the Netherlands, in order to collect evidence-based data pertinent to contraception and abortion care, and to inform key stakeholders.

### Methodology

Online surveys and interviews were used to collect data from 542 women of reproductive age (15-49) and 215 service providers in Iran (IR), Bangladesh (BL) and the Netherlands (NL)

### Results

**Service provision:** COVID-19 pandemic affected family planning services. Challenges were less clients, shortage of some contraception devices, shortages of staff, and the change from face-to-face towards telephone and online consulting.

**Contraception:** In Iran, only 6.0% of the respondents had experienced challenges in access and only 7.5% of the women had changed contraception method. Rising and shortage of some contraceptives were problematic.

**Abortion Services:** Services remained open in Iran during the COVID-19 pandemic. Out of seven unplanned pregnancies in the group of respondents, six pregnancies ended in an abortion.

### Measures:

In Iran mainly contraception services were addressed. Online and phone consultation to improve access as well as rotational duties were employed to improve access to family planning services.

In The Netherlands information provision for service users also was done via (social) media.

In Bangladesh, door-to-door services were the other strategy to bring care closer to service users.



## Recommendations

### ***Government Level***

- Free or affordable access to contraception and abortion (services).
- Government awareness campaigns and (online) knowledge development programs about SRHR during crises.

### ***Institutional Level***

- Continuity of services, including the continuation or adaptation of service provision by online/telephone consultations
- Development of a handbook for service providers (GPs) on SRHR in crises.

### ***Future Research***

- Access to contraceptive & abortion care for undocumented women during crises.
- The role of men in family planning and reproductive health during the COVID-19 pandemic or other crises.



## Take Home Messages:

- COVID-19 has had strong impact on the access to contraception and abortion in several countries.
- All stakeholders (women, service providers, government officials) need to put their strengths together to ensure access for all during future global health crises.
- This COVID-19 pandemic is an example and should give a push towards equitable access to sexual and reproductive health for all.

