

## **Governments from the region must guarantee access to safe abortion in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic**

**May 2020**

The COVID-19 pandemic is having a differentiated impact on the lives of women, adolescents and girls, particularly in the area of sexual and reproductive health and rights. The health needs of pregnant women, the need to access safe abortions and the use of contraceptives do not cease during the quarantines imposed in the different countries of the region to slow the spread of the virus. But, without decisive action in these areas, the risks related to reproductive health will increase. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the States to take all necessary measures to minimize the risks of maternal mortality and morbidity associated with unsafe abortions in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The responses of local, national and regional governments to the COVID-19 pandemic must, from a rights perspective, guarantee the access of women, girls and adolescents to sexual and reproductive health services. These services should include the provision of contraceptives as part of the essential drugs package, as well as access to safe abortion, post-abortion care and self-managed abortions, all as part of the basic contingency response services package presented by the pandemic.

The Latin American and Caribbean region has an outstanding obligation in terms of voluntary termination of pregnancy that, if expanded, would affect the poorest and most excluded women most severely and would exacerbate social injustice.

In this context, it is of fundamental importance to remember the WHO recommendation in its "Guide for the Clinical Management of Severe Respiratory Infections when there is suspicion of COVID-19:"

"Women's sexual and reproductive health choices and rights must be respected regardless of whether or not they have been affected by COVID-19, including access to contraception and safe abortions within the limits allowed by law."

And as the UN Secretary General, Antonio Guterres, has expressed in the Global Humanitarian Response Plan to COVID-19, sexual and reproductive health services may be disrupted at times when health providers are overwhelmed in their efforts to deal with the pandemic. For this and for all the above, those of us who subscribe this document make an appeal to the governments of the region to:

1. Ensure women's access to safe abortion services, including self-managed abortions. These services should be incorporated into the initial minimum packages of health services in the context of the pandemic;
2. Guarantee access to contraception, which must be included as part of the package of essential drugs to respond to COVID-19. Governments should pay attention to possible disruptions in supply chains and issue guidelines and / or recommendations that allow women to have personal inventories of at least 3 months of contraceptives in order to avoid the transfer to health facilities or pharmacies to avoid their exposure to COVID-19;
3. Protect and guarantee the integrity and security of health organizations and providers that offer abortion and post-abortion care services;
4. Consider the sexual and reproductive health needs of migrant, refugee and displaced women, including access to abortion and post-abortion services, in the context of COVID-19.
5. Refrain from using the pandemic as an excuse to undermine women's rights to obtain safe abortions and access sexual and reproductive health services.

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