

Summary of the Discussion on COVID-19 on the Platform FACEBOOK Page

The page attempted to provide its readers with different online resources that shed light on issues related to SDG as well as the Covid-19 pandemic.

It also attempted to engage its readers in open discussions. One of these discussions was on Covid-19 in which it posted question on the various cautionary procedures adopted by the Arab countries in response to the pandemic, the most vulnerable group during this period of time as well as the needed procedures to improve the data efficiency in assessing the pandemic infection and mortality rates. The page received 46 comments from individuals in four countries namely Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon and Sudan. Following is a summary of these comments.

1. Procedures implemented by the Arab countries

Iraq implemented a total shut down for a month during with halting all means among the different governorates. However, some cultural traditions have obstructed these efforts in particular those related to religion related customs.

Egypt adopted a partial shutdown (curfew) in recognition of the fragility of the informal sector which comprise 60% of the labor market in Egypt

Lebanon suffered from the inefficiency of the government efforts in addressing the pandemic. This inefficiency was the result of the inability of the Lebanese to adhere to social distancing and their insistence of group prayers and holding large weddings and other ceremonies.

Poverty in Sudan has undermined the government efforts and pushed many of its informal sector members to confront the pandemic rather than dying of hunger.

2. The efficiency of the health and education system in responding to the pandemic

Almost all the comments pointed to the fragility of the health and education system in the Arab countries and their ill preparedness to the pandemic.

For education system, while schools and universities resorted to online learning techniques to avoid the wide spread of infections in them, the education system as a whole was not prepared enough with the needed resources or skills to carry out this type of education and there were significant confusion in the education tracks in many countries.

3. The most vulnerable groups

There was general consensus that the informal sector and poor population segments are the most vulnerable population groups in this pandemic.

However, some comments pointed to the vulnerability of other groups:

- Children in particular their psychological and physical wellbeing during the shutdown period and being confined at home.
- Pregnant women since there is limited information on the consequences of Covid-19 infection on the mother or the infant.
- People with chronic diseases and their inability to access to their routine health care due to the overloading of the health system with the cases of Covid-19.

4. Data efficiency and its ability to assess the infection and mortality rates of Covid-19

There was a common complaint that the available data are inefficient and do not reflect the situation on the ground. Almost all comments called for a new open information system that:

- has specific measures that assess the success/failure of the current cautionary procedures,
- encompasses the current data sources in the different government bodies to ensure the efficiency of current efforts whether at the medical front or the social front,
- implements the new technology of online applications to follow the spread of the infection across the different geographical areas, and
- increases the accessibility to technology through increasing the affordability of this technology and enhancing the individuals' capacities to use it.