



Second Edition: 6 May 2020<sup>1</sup>

## WOMEN POLICY TRACKER ON RESPONSIVE POLICIES & PROGRAMS DURING THE NEW COVID-19 PANDEMIC

### Introduction

The COVID-19 outbreak has an impact on both men and women. However it impacts women in different ways. In Egypt, women make up around **42.4% of human doctors** and **91.1% nursing staff** of who are actually working for the Ministry of Health, in addition to **73.1% of nursing staff in hospitals and therapeutic facilities in the private sector are women**<sup>2</sup>. **Women in the health sector are more likely to be exposed to the virus and dealing with enormous stress balancing paid and unpaid work roles.** Furthermore, overwhelmed health services may **limit access to family planning services and to contraceptives**, potentially leading to a rise in fertility rates and the socio-economic impact on individuals, households and communities. COVID-19 is expected to **interrupted access of women to reproductive healthcare services and commodities**. Given that pregnant women are more likely to have contact with health services (antenatal care and delivery), they can be greatly exposed to infections in health facilities which may discourage attendance.

COVID-19 poses a **serious threat to women's engagement in economic activities**, especially in informal sectors, and gender gaps can be increased in livelihoods. In Egypt, 18.1% of women are heads of households<sup>3</sup>. 40.9% of females' total non-agricultural employment is in informal employment and 33.9% of females' employment is vulnerable employment. Meanwhile 6.7% of female employment in industry; 36.4% of females' employment is in agriculture; while 56.8% of female employment in services;<sup>4</sup> Egyptian women also represent 70% of the paid care sector workforce (mainly as teachers, health and social workers). Moreover, the paid care sector in Egypt represents around 28–31 % of overall female employment. **Women are almost four times more likely than men to work in the paid care sector.** <sup>5</sup>

Recognizing that, the Egyptian government started to take stringent procedures and measures to contain and prevent the spread of COVID-19 according to the pace of its spread, while considering all segments needs and women in specific during the execution of those measures. The government was particularly keen to integrate & mainstream all the needs of Egyptian women into the entire decision making process needed and the implementation of programs in order to ensure women's empowerment & protection against the socio-economic and psychological repercussions of the new COVID-19 pandemic.

During the meeting held on 22 March 2020 in celebration of the Egyptian Women's Day, the speech of the President of the Republic conveyed a number of messages that in general represent a mechanism to

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<sup>1</sup> The first edition of the report tracked programs and policies from March 14 to April 6, 2020 and the second edition tracked the period from the start of the observatory's launch until May 6, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> CAMPAS 2018

<sup>3</sup> CAPMAS 2020

<sup>4</sup> LMS

<sup>5</sup> LMS



face the risks of spread of COVID-19. The President also issued a set of economic and social protection decrees to support and protect all society, and recognized the role and status of the Egyptian woman and the importance of continuing her supportive role during this current phase.

Since the National Council for Women is the national machinery concerned with proposing the government public policy on women's development pursuant to Law No. 30 of 2018, NCW has prepared a policy paper regarding Egypt's rapid response to women's situation during COVID-19 outbreak, which includes an analysis of the status quo. In this paper, NCW has presented a number of proposed response measures, whether immediate or middle-term responses, for concerned all line ministries & government institutions, regarding the following pillars:

1. **Impact on human endowment (health, education and social protection)** through applying/upscaling the already existing support programs regarding all health aspects including psychological, mental & physical as well as reproductive health care services; social protection programs; particularly response measures for older women; women with disabilities; pregnant women, and women of reproductive age, and education, to deal with the consequences of the school lockdown and the potential girls' dropout.
2. **Women's voice & agency (Violence Against Women, Leadership and Representation in decision making during crisis management)** women's participation in the decision making process can enhance the health security control mechanisms, examination and protection of health, and ensure women's accessibility to the relevant information. Also response measures can be adopted to provide psychosocial, legal and advisory support for women who may be subject to violence resulting from the implications of social conditions generated by the precautionary measures taken to respond to COVID-19 outbreak.
3. **Impact on economic opportunities:** the proposed response interventions depend on the already existing mechanisms as well as introducing new ones to support the women workers whose livelihoods have been affected or whose income from freelance work has declined. Alternative solutions should be proposed to address the economic downturn and its impact on working women in the formal or informal sector.
4. **Promoting data and knowledge:** promoting the compilation of data designed by sex, age and disability-disaggregated data on COVID-19, including tracking the emergency response measures, support policy research & social innovation; monitoring & evaluating the impact of the COVID-19; and conduct public opinion surveys in order to recognize the differences in exposure and treatment & help design the preventive measures accordingly.

In this regard, NCW established the "Women policy tracker on Responsive Policies and Programs During COVID-19 Pandemic" to serve the following purposes:

- 1) Monitor all issued policies and procedures responsive to the needs of Egyptian women directly and/or indirectly in light of the efforts made to reduce the spread of COVID-19.
- 2) Design an easier tool that can be used as reference to all women related issued policies that can be used by decision makers for a more collaborative & comprehensive vision on means of moving forward.
- 3) Document the efforts & highlight the outcome of the coordinated efforts of the government on women related policies to protect them & their families from the COVID-19
- 4) Reflect on all those policies with necessary supporting programs & initiatives

## The major women related responsive policies and measures taken by the Egyptian Government

Since the outbreak of COVID-19, the Ministry of Health and Population (MoHP) in collaboration with all the concerned bodies constantly issues measures and programs to combat the spread of the virus. Moreover, MoHP issues all the data on the numbers of COVID-19 cases transparently and disaggregated by sex & age.

(14 March 2020)

- The President issued a decree on **suspending classes in universities and schools** for two weeks; as protection for the children allowing the mothers to rest assure of their safety.
- The Ministry of Social Solidarity (MoSS) issued a decree on the **lockdown of nurseries** for two weeks; *as protection for the children allowing the mothers to rest assure of their safety.*

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(16 March 2020)

- The Prime Minister issued Decree No. 719 of 2020, including inter alia:
  - o The number of **employees in government authorities and bodies shall be reduced** under the set of the precautionary measures taken by the government to prevent the spread of COVID-19;
  - o Pregnant **women or those looking after one child or more of less than 12 years** shall be granted an **exceptional leave** for as long as the Decree remains in force; *allowing all working mothers to be able to do their family duties without losing their jobs.*
  - o **Women employees looking after their children with disabilities** shall be granted a leave pursuant to a circular; *allowing mothers of children with disabilities to be able to take care of their children without losing their jobs.*
- MoHP announced taking special measures on **dispensing medicines for chronic diseases, formula milk and Family planning methods** (contraceptives) for three months; *accessibility needed reproductive healthcare services for women*

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(19 March 2020)

- Ministry of Social Solidarity (MoSS) announced **intensifying the precautionary measures** for children in foster homes and providing all the health precautions and awareness-raising leaflets, including welfare homes, correctional institutions, orphanages, **nursing homes, social protection facilities**, people with disabilities, and **women shelters**; *protection of elderly women and women with disabilities living in the shelters; Preparedness to any potential case of violence against women through secured concerned shelters.*

(22 March 2020)

- The President instructed as part of a set of decrees and directives aimed to address the new COVID-19 to **launch campaigns for raising the awareness of citizens** for guidance and providing precise information, and strengthen health control according to the highest standards, at the points of entry to the country; **Awareness raising & promoting data & knowledge to include women beneficiaries.**
- MoSS announced **increasing the number of beneficiaries of conditional cash transfer** from Takaful and Karama Program to **100,000 households; Social protection especially for women heads of households**
- MoSS announced **increasing the monthly income for rural women leaders** from EGP 300 to EGP 900 per month; **increased support to women rural leaders on ground**
- MoSS announced **integrating women aged 65 and above in nursing homes** under the umbrella of social protection; **protection of elderly women**
- MoSS announced **increasing the number of beneficiaries of soft loans and loans with negligible interest rates** to set up micro enterprises so that they can improve the living standard of their families; **economic opportunities to include women in need to microfinance loans**

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(24 March 2020)

- Extending the suspension of classes in schools and universities and lockdown of nurseries of whatever type;
- The Ministry of Manpower (MoM) announced the steps of **registration of irregular workers** on MoM website to receive an **exceptional allowance of EGP 500**, as part of the government plan to protect them due to being affected by the COVID-19; **providing economic support to include women irregular workers**

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(26 March 2020)

The Prime Minister issued Decree No. 776 of 2020 on **establishing a workers' emergency benefits fund and forming a committee for the irregular workers affected by the economic repercussions** of the new Coronavirus, composed of (the Minister of Planning and Economic Development, Minister of Manpower, Minister of Social Solidarity, NCW President, Chairman of Information and Decision Support Center, Head of the Suggestion and Complaints Committee of the National Wage Council, and a member of the Administrative Control Authority). Including NCW in this committee reflects the government's belief in the **importance of women's voice & agency through representation, participation & involvement in the process of decision making and taking into account the needs of Egyptian women** while designing the policies and strategies aimed to respond and mitigate the impacts of the new Coronavirus.

**The Committee shall be responsible for the following:**

- **Collect the data of the workers** affected by the economic repercussions of the new Coronavirus, and take the necessary actions in coordination with the various concerned bodies to offer financial and social support to the workers to overcome the crisis.
  - **Coordinate the efforts and initiatives** introduced by financial institutions, companies, businessmen, non-governmental institutions and other concerned bodies so that the aids are delivered to those eligible.
  - **Coordinate with the Workers' Emergency Benefits Fund** to ensure the existence of a consolidated database for the affected workers to avoid double disbursement.
  - **Develop policies for workers' compensation in case of partial or full lockdown** of the facilities in which they work, in coordination with the concerned funds and accounts.
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(29 March 2020)

- The President issued a decree on **increasing the monthly allowance for medical professionals by 75%** and establishing a risk fund for medical professionals; **Economic benefits to include women health care providers (doctors & medical professionals)**
  - The President announced the **disbursement of exceptional bonuses from "Tahya Misr" Fund for all the workers in quarantine, fever and chest hospitals and central labs** all over Egypt; **Economic benefits to include women health care providers**
  - The Financial Regulatory Authority (FRA) issued a set of resolutions on the activity of microfinance for the benefit of 3.1 million citizens, including:
    - **Reduce or postpone the installments due from the clients by 50%** of the value of each installment for microfinance clients.
    - **Exempt microfinance clients who make timely payments from the commission of the prepayment of indebtedness or reducing the administrative fees** to renew the existing funding; **economic opportunities benefiting women in microfinance**
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(2 April 2020)

- The President instructed to provide **additional support to the health sector** and enhance the financial conditions of the health workers, doctors and nurses, by **increasing the bonuses granted to medical interns** during their internships in university hospitals under the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE0) and Scientific Research and Al-Azhar University hospitals, to **EGP 2200 per month, instead of EGP 400**, as of December 2019 class; **economic benefits to include women doctors**
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(5 April 2020)

- The MoH launched **2 hotlines to provide necessary psychological support** to citizens at home; **psychological support programs to include women beneficiaries**
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(6 April 2020)

- The President instructed to **provide allowances of 500 EGP for irregular workers** who might be impacted by the COVID-19 for 3 consecutive months; **economic benefits to include women irregular worker.**
  - The President instructed to upscale **decent housing by building 250,000 new housing unit and another 100,000 housing unit** for the people living in unsafe habitat; **Social protection intervention to include women beneficiaries**
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(7 April 2020)

- **Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise Development Agency (MSMEDA)** announced the launch of an **exceptional loan for a limited period to help small projects survive the crisis** & support needed liquid money to finance running & production costs. Loan maximum amount is 1 million EGP & it **shall be granted to small businesses** with specific conditions & an exceptional interest rate, according to the nature of each project. (Given that, the total no. of small project provided to women in 2019 was 69% while 51% of microfinance loans were granted to women).
  - **Egyptian microfinance federation** allow their 3,500,000 beneficiaries in the informal sector to **access electronic financial services using meeza card and/or electronic mobile wallets**. This is done through 200,000 employees working in 964 organizations & non-governmental organizations, 11 microfinance companies; other than banks that provide the same service as well.
  - **Ministry of Manpower** announced that **40% of the beneficiaries of irregular workers registered as impacted from COVID-19 provided the 500 EGP allowances are women.**
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(9 April 2020)

- **The Central Bank of Egypt dedicated 50 billion egp for mortgage finance** to middle class income through banks & mortgage companies for 20 years; (given that previously, 20% of the mortgage finance funds beneficiaries are women).
  - **Ministry of Health & population launched a mobile application "Egypt's Health"** which is the **official platform for awareness raising against COVID-19** & a guidance the necessary steps to be taken incase infected by the virus & means of contacting the authorized health staff.
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(11 April 2020)

- **Ministry of interior (Moi)** launched the 2<sup>nd</sup> phase of the initiative **"we are one"** that started at the beginning of April. Moi **has distributed basic food supplies to families in need** in Al Asmarat neighborhood under this initiative.
  - A campaign titled **"Stop the Bulling, Corona virus is not a crime"** was launched to raise the public awareness about the social stigma that is related to COVID19.
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(12 April 2020)

- **Ministry of Environment** launched its action-plan to fight COVID-19 through proper recycling of medical waste & monitoring pollution sources; the ministry also shall launch an **awareness campaign titles “get ready for being green”** which includes a component for fighting COVID-19 through rationalizing resource consumption and purchasing only basic needs, raising awareness of how to **safely dispose of masks and gloves to ensure the virus does not spread, and educating cleaners on the need to wear masks and gloves.**
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(13 April 2020)

- **The Prime Minister launched Ahalina community Initiative** with the slogan of **“Hand in Hand we help each other”** to support irregular workers impacted by the COVID-19 through donations. The initiative aims to **provide financial support to irregular workers through the contribution of all stakeholders (Private sector, individuals, & other organizations).** In that context, **Banque Misr** has launched **new offerings for the e-wallet product to encourage donations** in a timely & efficient manner.
  - **Ministry of Health & Population** has provided **personal protection equipment to the personnel working on family planning campaigns & services** as prevention from the COVID19.
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(15 April 2020)

- **Ministry of ICT** launched a **technological center for people with disabilities which provide 24 hour response service to people with disabilities about any COVID-19** related inquiry including anyone who might be having COVID-19 symptoms & link them to the concerned health entities in Egypt through the **Application titled “Wase1” dedicated for the deaf & people with hearing impairment.**
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(16 April 2020)

- **The Prime Minister of Egypt** issued a decree to **control the prices of precautionary products** that are used to prevent and limit the spread of COVID19.
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(19 April 2020)

- **The National Council for Women with the Ministry of Health & Population, World Health Organization, UNFPA, Extra news & Egypt Today Magazine** launched a campaign to **raise the awareness of the public on COVID19 from a medical/scientific dimension** through the production of videos featuring expert medical doctors from different specialties.
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(20 April 2020)

- **The Ministry of foreign affairs & Ministry of Migration** have been working on **launching exceptional flights for Egyptians** who were stuck in other countries due to the COVID19. **Priority was given to 270 women and children** who were stuck in Kuwait.
  - The **Ministry of Social Solidarity** announced:
    - o **Extending the beneficiaries of Conditional cash transfer** program “Takaful & Karama” to new **160,000 families**.
    - o Providing **exceptional cash support for 3 months to One million citizens** (over 200 thousand families).
    - o Starting a pilot of **digitizing insurance services through transferring pension over mobile phones** in Luxor & Port said Governorates.
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(22 April 2020)

- The Ministry of Social Solidarity published the report of the efforts of **the Egyptian Red Crescent** during the COVID19 pandemic during the period from April 16 to April 22, and included the implementation of field interventions to confront the virus through field teams deployed throughout the country that carry out sterilization and disinfection operations for state institutions that provide Services to the public; and distributing aid to the families in need. **The number of volunteers reached 2706** with a volunteer campaign in every street; **the number of volunteers trained to respond to the COVID19 reached 5705; the number of public awareness campaigns reached 380; and the number of sterilization and disinfection campaigns reached 361. While total number of interventions for affected areas is 17; and the total number of relief resources and disinfectants distributed is 1077.**
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(25 April 2020)

- **Ministry of ICT** launched a package of **educational program for women** to prepare them for labor market including **new technological tools to help women in the areas of e-marketing and e-commerce** to ensure they are empowered economically.
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(26 April 2020)

- **The general healthcare authority**, which is one of the new comprehensive health insurance system authorities, working under the supervision of the Ministry of Health & Population, signed a memorandum of understanding with **the general federation of non-governmental organizations (NGOs)**. The MOU aims at **raising awareness about COVID19 & means of preventing & limiting its spread**. The MOU was signed to enhance coordination of governmental entities (represented in the healthcare authority) & non- governmental entities (represented in the federation of ngos) efforts. The agreement also includes training and raising the capacities of volunteers and **delivering necessary medicine to the elderly & people with chronic disease** who are beneficiaries of the health insurance system; **and 4500 patient of those categories have already received their medicine**. It also participates in sanitizing premises determined by the healthcare authority & dedicated necessary equipment to do so.
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(28 April 2020)

- **The President of Egypt** directed to *intensify awareness raising campaigns to address any misconceptions about the COVID19 and the social stigma* that might hinder citizens to ask for medical help or apply for the COVID19 tests.
  
- **The Ministry of Foreign Affairs**, under the guidance of the Cabinet, works to ensure that the *lives of migrants and refugees are not exposed to any direct effects of the COVID19* through support provided by the *health care system* and that *no measures are taken to return the migrants to their countries. United Nations concerned organizations also provide basic services* and health care for refugees in Egypt.
  
- **Ministry of Industry & commerce and MSMEDA** has drafted a policy note with *suggested policy measures for women*, as response to the National Council for women's note. Among the most important suggestions are:
  - Support mechanisms of E-marketing to women products so they can sell their products from home through the e-exhibition of MSMEDA.
  - Study the possibility of conducting women trainings online.
  - Facilitate & support financing/lending projects that women can do from their home such as heritage products.
  - Study the possibility of providing necessary services through social development & human sector (such as health & literacy projects) through the internet.
  - MSMEDA local offices shall contact their female heads of households beneficiaries who own projects and study means of supporting them & their projects to reduce any negative impact resulting from COVID19.
  - Prepare for a media plan to aware women on all digital services provided by MSMEDA.
  - Coordinate with NCW to study means of implementing the suggested policies in Egypt's rapid response to women's situation through COVID19 outbreak.
  - Provided needed information about sectors that include women that are highly impacted by the COVID19 & study means of immediate intervention to support women in those sectors, especially Female heads of household & women caring for a disabled family member in the microfinance sector.
  - Study means of contacting private sector and banking sector through their corporate social responsibility departments (CSR) to provide needed support for sectors that have high percentages of women owned businesses & especially commercial projects.

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(29 April 2020)

- **Public prosecution** took immediate steps & necessary legal measures after the emergence of some lawsuit of exploitation of women and girls, and the pursuit of making money by illegal means, within the framework of *protecting women and girls from human trafficking crimes and electronic/cybercrimes*.
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(1 May 2020)

- **Tahya Masr Fund** has launched a new convoys with 123 cars that **includes basic food supplies & disinfectants/sanitizers that have been delivered to 150,000 families** in need especially during the holy month of Ramadan and as a preventive measure against the COVID19 pandemic
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(2 May 2020)

- **Tahya Masr Fund** has coordinated with **Ministry of Social Solidarity and Ministry of local development** to allocate a share of **basic food supplies & disinfectants/sanitizers** to the branches of **The National Council for Women to be distributed to families in need and impacted by the COVID19**
  - **The National Council for Women with Baseera Center in partnership with UN Women** has launched **a phone survey** during the period from 4<sup>th</sup> -14<sup>th</sup> of April that tackled the effect of COVID19 pandemic. The survey included 1518 women with a minimum age of 18 years old. The survey results confirmed that the pandemic contributed to a change in lifestyle compared to the pre-pandemic period; tackling violence against women & economic impact among other topics. Results showed that **7% of the wives reported that they had already been subjected to violence by the husband** (verbal abuse or insult); that this did not happen before the pandemic occurred. The survey showed that **33% is the rate of increased problems with in the family**; and **19% increase in violence among family members**. The **level of awareness among family members on means of prevention from corona virus is 94%**; while **72% of the respondents believe that the family's income has been affected by the crisis**, and that the **time spent by women in doing households tasks has increased**.
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(3 May 2020)

- **The Ministry of Justice** has suspended the work in courts but took an **exceptional decision to proceed with the family court cases** in order to finalize issues such as alimony payment, child custody & residence and other important matters that will support women custodians during the pandemic. The decision has been coupled with another one to **sanitize the concerned courts & apply all precautionary measures to them**.
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(4 May 2020)

- **Egypt is leading an international movement in the United Nations to magnify the attention to the situation of women & girls during COVID19 times. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and The National Council for Women** are working on this as means to emphasize the need for international cooperation & sharing of experiences in order to overcome this challenge facing humanity. This cooperation shall ensure that all negative social repercussions of the spread of the COVID19 on women are addressed and preventive measures are taken to reduce its impact on the most affected segments. In that context, **a draft resolution was presented to the United Nations General Assembly in order to support national and international efforts to respond immediately to the impact of the COVID19 pandemic on women and girls, under the item on global health and foreign policy**, with the aim of establishing a comprehensive and robust implementation framework for rapid response to health and social repercussions of COVID19 on women. The Ministry of foreign affairs, through its embassies and official missions, have distributed Egypt's policy note titled



“Egypt’s rapid response to women’s situation during COVID19 outbreak” & women policy tracker first edition titled “Women policy Tracker on Responsive Policies and Programs during the New COVID-19 Pandemic” to share Egypt’s experiences and practice on the international level.

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(5 May 2020)

- **The Ministry of planning & economic development (MoPED) in cooperation with Terous Misr Foundation** launched an initiative titled **“Masr Hataady/Egypt will overcome”**. The initiative aims to **encourage the private sector to retain employment and provide new job opportunities** and encourage all programs and initiatives to support and develop the SME sector; as it is one of the most affected sectors impacted by the COVID19. The Initiative is done **with the participation of a large number of owners and heads of companies, civil society institutions, intellectuals and private sector companies**. An **interactive website and platforms on social media will be launched** and benefit from audio and visual media to contribute to raising Public awareness and achieving the highest level of interaction with citizens.
- **The Prime Minister and the Ministry of Planning & economic development** announced the progress on **digitization plan of the government**; including allowing Egyptian citizens to process any transactions or **issue their official documents without having to go to governmental premises**; given that **some of the governmental services & documents will be digitized & delivered citizens at home**.

(6 May 2020)

- **The National Council for Women, in cooperation with the UN Women** launched the **“Mental Health Prioritization”** initiative, with several partners, including **Safe Kids and Chezlong, and Egypt Today magazine**, and the initiative was launched on the social networking sites of the Council and the partners. A number **of psychologists and concerned institutions to support the mental health of Egyptian women** and raise awareness among women & men on the importance of mental health in general in light of the spread of the current COVID19 and the initiative comes as an important part of the Government awareness raising efforts.

The National Council for Women will continue tracking & monitoring all issued policies & programs that mainstream & respond to the needs of women during this crisis. NCW commits to a strong coordination with all concerned ministries and bodies to support the implementation of those policies as well as suggesting new polices in favor of Egyptian women.