

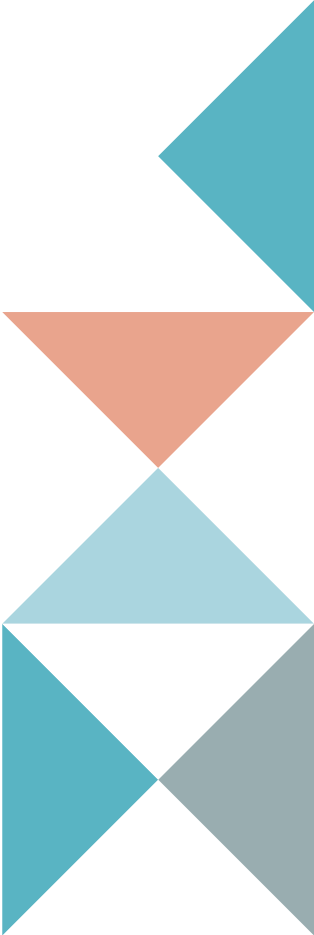


## The Efforts of the Kingdom of Bahrain to Contain the Repercussions of the Coronavirus (Covid-19) Pandemic on Bahraini Women and Families



## Introduction

- ▶ Since the beginning of 2020, the world has witnessed an unprecedented catastrophe in the modern era that has claimed many lives and caused enormous social and economic damage. This necessitated governments and people to take actions and measures to deal with the pandemic and respond to it; and from this standpoint the efforts of the Kingdom of Bahrain to adopt and implement precautionary and preventive measures accelerated, most of which came in the context of proactive and early preparations in line with international standards of the World Health Organization (WHO) in its fight against the virus. These operations are managed by a National Taskforce assigned specifically to combat Coronavirus (Covid-19), which consists of experts and specialists working to develop and implement a comprehensive national strategy to contain and prevent the spread of the virus. It is led directly by His Royal Highness Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, the Crown Prince, Deputy Supreme Commander and First Deputy Prime Minister.
- ▶ Among the most prominent features of the Kingdom of Bahrain's model for combating the threatening spread of the Coronavirus (Covid-19) is the effective integration and coordination between all institutions of the Kingdom of Bahrain within the national efforts to contain the virus and face the damage caused by its spread, including the damage resulting from the disruption of the normal course of life. Many official, private and non-governmental institutions initiated active and collective contributions to participate in restraining/ mitigating the effects of the pandemic at the national level.
- ▶ The Kingdom of Bahrain is working, in the context of these efforts, to continue respecting its international obligations mentioned in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the Security Council Resolution (1325) for the year (2000), which provides for equal participation of men and women at all levels, particularly at the decision-making level and the involvement of women in peacebuilding and peacekeeping operations in light of disasters and conflicts that may afflict humanity.

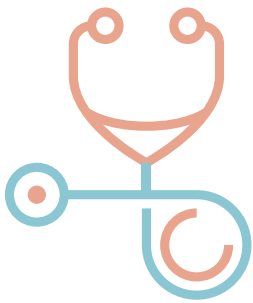
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- ▶ The Kingdom of Bahrain is also keen to take effective steps that are consistent with the sustainable development goals and targets 2030. This is being undertaken by the Supreme Council for Women to ensure linking and aligning the Kingdom's endeavors in the field of women's progress with the sustainable development agenda and goals of 2030 that are directly and indirectly related to women. The Council is intensifying its efforts during this critical period by supporting the Kingdom of Bahrain's efforts in combating the Coronavirus pandemic, reducing its effects and repercussions, and in allocating everything necessary to protect women's health and maintain the stability levels of their lives and families and as stipulated in the third goal associated with ensuring good health for all without discrimination while facing and combating pandemics.
  - ▶ In this context, the Supreme Council for Women in the Kingdom of Bahrain, being the national machinery concerned and directly responsible for all matters relating to the affairs of Bahraini women in the Kingdom, had launched a national campaign entitled «**Together for the Safety of Bahrain**» to face the Coronavirus (Covid-19), following the directives of Her Royal Highness Princess Sabeeka Bint Ibrahim Al-Khalifa Wife of His Majesty the King President of the Supreme Council for Women. This campaign works directly in cooperation and coordination with the National Taskforce for Combating the Coronavirus (Covid-19) in order to provide for the urgent needs of women and their families in cooperation with partners from various sectors. It also works in parallel to secure the psychological and social stability for all members of the family and develop a conscious and responsible societal culture by highlighting the urgent needs of Bahraini women and their families in light of the exceptional circumstances of this crisis in order to reduce and minimize its harms on family and community stability.



## The Bahraini Model for Combating the Coronavirus (Covid-19) Pandemic

### 1. Actions taken at the National Level

#### 1.1 Preventive Measures (Health and Medical)



- ▶ The Kingdom of Bahrain has taken many measures aimed at preserving public health and ensuring social protection in light of the crisis caused by the pandemic, foremost of which is providing free testing for all citizens and residents of the Kingdom of Bahrain without discrimination. Mobile Testing Units have been established to carry tests for citizens and expatriates at their residence. Random samples are also being collected from different areas across the Kingdom to test the largest possible segment in order to curb the spread of the virus.
- ▶ Securing its ports by screening all passengers upon arrival to Bahrain International Airport, where tests are carried out and confirmed cases get transferred to quarantine. As a precaution, passengers with no confirmed infection are instructed to self-isolate for (14) days, for which they will receive paid medical leave.
- ▶ Carrying out evacuation operations for stranded Bahraini citizens and some citizens from the Gulf Cooperation Council countries over a period of two months. The number of evacuated Bahraini citizens reached (4982).
- ▶ Providing the necessary treatment for all active and confirmed cases from citizens and expatriates, free of charge, in designated isolation centers under the supervision of specialized medical teams, and according to the approved treatment and preventive protocols. The National Taskforce is working to increase bed capacity in isolation treatment and quarantine facilities through the establishment of urgent field medical units for isolating confirmed cases and hence, curb the disease.



## 1.2 Institutional Measures



- ▶ In implementation of the same principle, and in order to preserve the safety of male and female students and faculty members, public and private educational institutions, including higher education institutions, were closed. The educational process was resumed by applying the distance learning system. The government of Bahrain also provided various educational platforms to teach students and avoid the interruption of their education during this period.
- ▶ The public and private institutions of Bahrain had taken many precautionary actions and measures, urging various institutions to apply the remote work system as much as possible in implementation of the social distancing principle. Following royal directives, a work from home system was applied for working mothers in particular within all ministries, government bodies and institutions, in recognition of the status of women and their multiple responsibilities. A good number of private sector organizations had responded to these directives and made this option available to their employees as a precautionary measure by working from home.
- ▶ In implementation of the decisions of the Governmental Executive Committee chaired by His Royal Highness the Crown Prince and First Deputy Prime Minister, the Civil Service Bureau issued a decision urging the implementation of the work from home system in public institutions on 70% of the total workforce in that institution. The government adopted a recommendation issued by the Supreme Council for Women to grant husbands whose wives assume vital duties in the frontlines, the opportunity to work remotely due to the presence of their children at home and in absence of the mother to take care of them. The Civil Service Bureau also issued a decision urging government agencies to give the priority of implementing the work from home policy to employees suffering from respiratory and chronic diseases, pregnant women, and female employees who are entitled to two-hour childcare leaves.

## 1.3 Economic Measures



- ▶ Among the precautionary measures taken by Bahrain in implementation of the principle of social distancing is the closing of most public places to reduce gatherings, in addition to regulating the work of shops, restaurants, cinemas and gyms. As for shops that provide basic commodities and supplies such as food stores, the government of Bahrain had issued strict guidelines for its employees and visitors and designated the first opening hour to the groups most at risk of contracting the virus such as the elderly and pregnant women.
- ▶ The Kingdom also took many measures to mitigate the harm resulting from the economic repercussions of the Coronavirus pandemic and assist those affected. The Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Tourism was keen to coordinate with all the concerned authorities to ensure the availability of food and commodities in local markets. The Ministry is working to protect basic commodities like medicine and food by implementing comprehensive inspection campaigns to ensure the normal flow of basic products and stability of their prices to citizens and residents during this crisis.
- ▶ The Kingdom of Bahrain, being aware of the economic burden caused by the pandemic, has doubled the size of the Liquidity Fund to 200 million Bahraini Dinars. The government of the Kingdom of Bahrain paid the electricity and water bills for individuals and companies for three months. Loan installments for citizens were also postponed for six months, while companies' loans were postponed for three months. Installments of all housing services, including units, homes, apartments and housing loans, were postponed for a period of six months, and the salaries of Bahraini workers in the private sector were paid for three months from the Unemployment Insurance Fund (April, May and June 2020), a period that can be extended according to the developments in the situation in general.
- ▶ As for the negative economic effects on institutions, commercial institutions were exempted from municipal fees for three months, and the industrial and commercial institutions were exempted from the governmental land rental fees for three months, in addition to exempting the tourism establishments and facilities from the tourism fees for three months.
- ▶ Tamkeen (Bahrain's Labor Fund) provided financial grants to the affected companies by allocating two funds, the first being allocated to support taxi drivers, communal transportation drivers and buses from both sexes for a period of three months. The second fund is to support driving instructors from both sexes for three months, with the condition that they don't own a commercial registration or a pension. The fund will pay the full salaries of nursery and kindergarten workers (who now number (422) workers in kindergartens and (102) workers in nurseries) who are not covered by the Social Insurance Organization.

## 1.4 Awareness Programs and Field Campaigns



► The Kingdom of Bahrain has launched a number of qualitative and innovative initiatives targeting citizens and expatriates alike. It focuses on activating the role of all members of the Bahraini society in a manner that raises their national sense and participatory responsibility with regards to facing the Coronavirus pandemic, most notably:

- Launching a comprehensive national campaign entitled «Be Aware», which aims to educate the Bahraini community about the risks of being infected by the Coronavirus and ways of prevention in order to enhance the level of awareness with regards to the regulations to be followed, and maintain public health during this pandemic. The campaign posts its activities and publications in multiple languages through the website of the Ministry of Health and various media platforms and are available and accessible to all. A free hotline supporting multiple languages was also activated as part of the campaign and the efforts of the National Taskforce to respond to inquiries and book test appointments.
- The launching of the «Be Aware» application, as an initiative of the Information and E-Government Authority, to enable all citizens and residents to track health developments. One of the most important features of the application is the (location tracking) which is voluntary activated by users to alert them of the presence of cases that did not adhere to the home quarantine close to them by sending direct notifications and text messages to their personal mobile numbers.
- Investing the experienced volunteers registered in the «National Volunteering Platform», which is an electronic platform managed by the government that provides citizens and residents of all ages and areas of specialization with multiple opportunities to volunteer in the field of medical services and field work which is represented in sterilizing Bahrain's areas; or in the ports of the country, or to provide psychological, family, and economic consulting services; in addition to others. It should be noted that the platform has witnessed a strong response since the registration was opened, exceeding (30,000) volunteers.
- The launching of the national campaign «Together for the Safety of Bahrain» by the Supreme Council for Women to set practical measures to prepare and prevent and raise the family's readiness to adapt to the repercussions of this health crisis, while ensuring that families have access to services like welfare and social protection systems and financial and economic solutions in the most convenient and fastest way. For more details, See Section No. (2).
- The Launching of the «Feena Khair» campaign an initiative of the Royal Humanitarian Foundation that responded to the request of institutions and individuals to make financial donations to support national efforts and bear joint responsibility in these circumstances and to mitigate the harms caused by the pandemic to the national economy. The donations will be allocated to a number of relief, social, and medical priorities for the affected groups, especially families in need and expats.



## 2. The Role of the Supreme Council for Women (the Council) in Responding to the Needs of Bahraini Women and Families

- ▶ The «Together for the Safety of Bahrain» campaign continues to provide all the necessary support for Bahraini women, especially women who support families, in addition to the families of medical and nursing cadres working in the front lines in the field of civil and military service, by responding immediately to their urgent needs in order to maintain safe levels of family, psychological and occupational stability for Bahraini women. The campaign's fields of work include providing social, legal, and economic support, as well as educational support to the children of the front-line families; in addition to media promotion by activating the role of electronic platforms affiliated with the Supreme Council for Women.
- ▶ The goals and fields of the campaign are related to the objectives and indicators of the National Plan for the Advancement of Bahraini Women, whose initiatives and programs aim at sustaining family stability and bonding, and maintaining high levels of women's participation in the labor market using a methodology based on initiating practices that guarantee self and professional development, learning, and the acquisition of necessary lifetime skills. This enables Bahraini women to utilize the options available for them in order to improve their capacities and hence, reflect positively on the quality of life of the family and community.
- ▶ The campaign provides its services on the virtual platform, which enabled the Council to continue providing all its services to Bahraini women in order to solve the problems they face in life. As part of the campaign's operations, the Council monitors the urgent needs of women and their families, and work to provide them in cooperation with all state institutions, private sector institutions, civil society, and competent individuals. The work of the campaign is supported by (138) volunteers from the National Volunteer Platform, who were divided into teams according to the fields of work.
- ▶ It is worth noting that the Supreme Council for Women is one of the first national institutions to implement the work from home system and set alternative plans for the sustainability of the social protection system services provided to Bahraini women, which were carried out in an accelerated manner in view of the Kingdom's technical readiness and the efficiency of the platforms devoted for remote work.
- ▶ The «Together for the Safety of Bahrain» campaign services provide alternative means of communication for Bahraini women and non-Bahraini women who are married to a Bahraini (with rights of custody), to obtain free legal assistance on Sharia cases,



such as alimony, divorce, custody and civil issues arising from marital relations; as well as it provides free family / legal counseling to women, “virtual” family reconciliation sessions and preparing amicable divorce agreements and settlements. The campaign also follows up the cases of widowed, divorced, and abandoned women, women with custody rights, and women who provide for their families in order to obtain housing services in coordination with the Ministry of Housing; as well as it follows up with Bahraini women married to non-Bahrainis for their children to obtain the Bahraini nationality.

- ▶ Ensuring the sustainability of the work of Sharia / Family Courts and Family Reconciliation Offices by filing all types of Sharia cases electronically, and by providing the services of the Family Reconciliation Office within the online platform, including family counseling and reconciliation and settlement sessions via virtual sessions using visual communication technology.

## ▶ Below is a brief explanation of the support provided by the campaign to Bahraini women and families:

### 2.1 Social Support

**The campaign provides social and family support to Bahraini women on several levels:**

1. Following the kind directives of Her Royal Highness Princess Sabeeka bint Ibrahim Al Khalifa, Wife of His Majesty the King and President of the Supreme Council for Women (SCW), the SCW has announced that the “Together for the Safety of Bahrain” campaign, in cooperation with the National Taskforce for Combating Coronavirus (COVID-19), will coordinate the payment of debts and sums of money owed by Bahraini women who received judicial verdicts and were listed by the Ministry of Interior in the “Fael Khair” (A Person of Good Will) program.
2. Food support, provision of the necessary consumable and health supplies (medicines / blood pressure monitors / blood glucose monitors and their equipment / respiratory devices / wheelchairs / etc.) for families that are supported by Bahraini women, the elderly, those with special needs, and those with special circumstances of both genders.
3. Consultative and educational support, where the Supreme Council for Women continues to provide its immediate services of family and legal advice and consultations by developing communication channels for the Women Support Center through a special program called «Your Remote Advisor». The program conducts video sessions and instant conversations via the Council's website in order to respond to inquiries, requests for support, and remote guidance.
4. Moral support for workers in the front lines from doctors and nursing and health teams, by providing educational needs and follow-up to their children during their absence, in addition to providing the necessary needs of their families (such as consumables and preventive supplies). As a gesture of appreciation for these families amid the new circumstances they are facing, and in support of their difficult working conditions, the Council presented symbolic gifts to the children of these families.

## 2.2 Social Support

1. In recognition of the Supreme Council for Women of the repercussions of the pandemic effects on the economic situation of Bahraini women, whether they are the family supporter, working mother or an entrepreneur; one of the campaign fields of work has been designated to provide to economic consultations in a way to help address difficulties facing the affected sectors and to support troubled female entrepreneurs by ensuring that they benefit from the various financial measures put forward by the state to help them continue their commercial activities in the labor market.
2. A team of consultants was formed by the Supreme Council for Women, the Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Tourism, the Tamkeen Labor Fund, and the Bahraini Entrepreneur Foundation, in addition to a group of independent volunteers. The team consists of (21) consultants, from various fields, including nurseries, kindergartens, hospitality, food industry and the logistics sector, etc.
3. Within the framework of the role of the Supreme Council for Women in following up on the sound enforcement of motivational flexible administrative policies and systems decided by the state to support Bahraini families to reconcile between their family and national responsibilities, and to enhance the efficiency and increase the productivity of female and male employees in the current situation in the public and private sectors; a joint committee has been formed between the Supreme Council for Women and the Civil Service Bureau that is concerned with following up on the implementation of the «work from home» decisions for all eligible groups, which is aimed at achieving the highest levels of family and community stability, and achieving a work-life balance balance between life and work in light of the current conditions that the country and the world are going through.
4. The Council continues to monitor the appeals received regarding the application of relevant decisions and follows-up with the Civil Service Bureau, and to encourage private sector institutions to adopt flexible work policies for working mothers, in addition to pregnant women, those entitled to childcare hours, and those with chronic and respiratory diseases, etc. This has resulted in a response from many private companies in the banking, industrial and telecommunications sectors as well by implementing the remote working system amongst their employees.

## 2.3 Educational Support to Continue the «Distance Learning Process»

1. This support is represented by assigning volunteering educational cadres from the Bahrain Education Trade Union to present and explain lessons to the children of female workers who are among the health and medical cadres in the front lines. Those academic experts communicate with male and female students via distance education technologies to help them complete their academic requirements for the current year.
2. The support also included providing smart tablets and laptops to the children of needy families that are supported by women, in order to ensure their right to education, whose methods have changed overnight.

## 2.4 Studies and Research

1. The campaign did not fail to revive the research and investigation aspect. The Council is carrying out a scientific study to evaluate and analyze the experience of the Kingdom of Bahrain in dealing with the effects and implications of the Coronavirus (Covid-19) on the family, with the aim of highlighting the procedures and measures that the Kingdom had undertaken as an urgent response to the changing health situation, and to document best practices regarding crisis management and the response to it, while taking into account the needs of the family and women. The study will contribute to set/visualize future scenarios based on the changes imposed by the pandemic, and to support decision-makers in developing policies and plans that have direct impact and support social protection systems and strategies for the advancement of women.
2. On the other hand, the Kingdom of Bahrain aspires that the outputs and recommendations of the study will contribute in implementing the requirements of the relevant UN resolutions, that have been ratified by the Kingdom such as the Security Council Resolution (1325) on women, peace, and security for the year (2000), which calls for equal participation of men and women at all levels, especially at the level of decision-making and the involvement of women in peacebuilding and peacekeeping operations in light of disasters and conflicts that may afflict humanity.


## 2.5 The Outreach and Awareness-raising Track

- ▶ The «**Together for the Safety of Bahrain**» campaign works within an awareness outreach path to ensure the optimum use of its services, and to ensure, in the same framework, raising the proper awareness of the nature of services and practices that will accelerate the recovery process from the repercussions of the health crisis. **The fields of awareness-raising include:**
- ▶ Informing and motivating citizens to benefit from the campaign services through the electronic transformation plan by promoting links that facilitate access to family, economic and educational support services; as well as focusing on demonstrating the field work of the campaign to highlight the values of volunteering and community solidarity in crises and disasters in relation to serving needy groups of families supported by women and supporting families of front line workers who are combating the Coronavirus pandemic.
- ▶ Sending awareness messages to all groups of society, especially women and the youth, via social media to reduce the number of people infected with the virus and safely overcome this crisis. In addition to shedding the light on the Kingdom's efforts to direct everyone to take advantage of the benefits it offers to overcome this emergency circumstance.
- ▶ The launch of an electronic application for the «**Together for the Safety of Bahrain**» campaign, which is an additional communication channel to facilitate the beneficiaries' access to the campaign, especially with regards to what is provided urgently under the umbrella of the campaign. The application's approach is consistent with the official directions that require full compliance with precautionary measures to prevent virus infection, including social distancing, in a manner that provides easy access to family, counseling, judicial, educational, and economic support services. It is available via the Apple Store, Google Play, the Council's website, and the barcode reader.
- ▶ The Youth Committee of the Supreme Council for Women launched a photography contest to highlight the nature of the significant initiatives and contributions of Bahraini women in dealing with the challenges of the repercussions imposed by the «Covid-19» pandemic. The contest, entitled «**My Story Through My Lens**», comes in the context of the Kingdom of Bahrain's exceptional efforts to combat the pandemic in order to monitor the expressive stories and experiences that affect Bahraini women when dealing with the emerging situation in all fields of work and in the family and social environment, despite the difficulties and repercussions of the health crisis, which confused the course of life and imposed a new reality that requires adaptation. The «**My Story Through My Lens**» contest

emphasizes stimulating and encouraging the visual and artistic skills of the participants, as participation requires documenting an inspiring and influential story through either photography or videography and in a professional and creative way to present the content of the story and the inspirational messages it carries on transforming life challenges into opportunities, lessons about patience, commitment and continued construction.

- ▶ The Youth Committee of the Supreme Council for Women started to encourage young men and women to talk in live broadcasts through one of the social media channels to raise awareness on several topics, most notably: mental health, civil behavior in times of crisis, positivity in family life, work and productivity.

## Concluding Note



This world crisis played a big role in forcing us to reconsider the nature of national policies and plans that have been implemented since the international community set out its agenda to achieve the goals of sustainable development 2030, and in a manner that ensures fair distribution of resources, equal opportunities for women and men, closing any developmental gaps that affect women participation in public life, hinder her contributions to achieve economic growth, or disrupt her social and family stability. The Kingdom of Bahrain is committed, within the framework of what it has achieved regarding the progress of Bahraini women, to plan for what is coming from the perspective of the implications of the health crisis, in order to preserve the state's achievements and the gains of Bahraini women, and to resume construction and development operations so that Bahrain remains an advanced center of expertise and economy of knowledge in the field of women's progress.

**Supreme Council for Women - Kingdom of Bahrain**  
**[www.scw.bh](http://www.scw.bh)**

