



## **ANECD Statement in Response to COVID-19 Crisis**

**May 18, 2020**

The Arab Network for Early Childhood Development (ANECD) includes governmental institutions, civil society bodies, academics and specialists from different Arab countries, and regional and international networks and institutions in the field of early childhood care and development.

ANECD Seeks to ensure that children in Arab countries and societies enjoy their rights, happiness, and well-being in an enriching environment of freedom, social justice, and equity.

ANECD is highly concerned and directly involved in removing the injustice that children and caregivers are experiencing during the Corona pandemic crisis. This injustice is due to risks to their health, development, care, protection, and learning, in addition to severe violations of their rights, and preventing them from achieving their full potentials and their best interest in the future.

Our Arab countries did certainly not need Corona pandemic to complement the flaring up of their political, economic, and social problems. This flaring up would further endanger the health, development, and care of children, as most of these countries no longer have any of the infrastructure and resources to face the health catastrophe to which they are heading.

Moreover, half of the children in these countries already suffer from poverty and deprivation of basic services of education, housing, nutrition, health care, clean water and sanitation, and access to correct and useful information.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic spread in all parts of the world, at least 250 million children were at risk of not achieving their full potential. This number will undoubtedly increase with the exhaustion of health and educational systems, the closure of borders, the prevention of travel, and the closure of childcare centers, nurseries, and schools. More families, caregivers, and societies will be exposed to the pandemic's social, economic, health, and psychological repercussions.

COVID-19 may infect fewer children, but the pandemic effects will affect them directly as many families in Arab countries have become poorer due to the increase in unemployment and the loss of daily work income. Children will also suffer from psychological distress due to the closure of schools, kindergartens, and nurseries, the curfews, the lack of physical exercise and playing outside the home, and their inability to meet their friends.

Coronavirus pandemic is exacerbating this range of factors that will particularly affect the most vulnerable children. These are children with disabilities, the malnourished, and children who live in contexts of domestic violence, gender discrimination, abuse, and neglect, and the millions of children who are locked down now in their homes all over the Arab countries and communities.



In addition to refugee and displaced children, most of whom were uprooted from their homes due to armed conflicts and wars in Syria, Yemen, Palestine, Iraq, Libya, and Sudan; there are also the families and caregivers of the Arab community children inside occupied Palestinian.

Policies of exclusion, marginalization, and racial discrimination practices by Israel contributed to the spread of the virus, as preventive measures and needed care were not available.

The result of all this is that Arab countries and societies have the most significant number of vulnerable children in the world.

**Thus, ANECD calls for coordinating all efforts of governments, international and national institutions, civil society organizations, and academic bodies to the following:**

1. Defend the rights of children, especially in the Arab region already suffering from poverty, inequity, and receding of freedoms, after violations of these rights have reached unprecedented levels of toxic stress
2. Provide needed resources and assistance for the protection of children in wars, migrations, and displacement circumstances, as the Covid-19 will increase the impact of direct and permanent threats to their lives. They will be more exposed to violence, a decline in available health services, abuse and neglect, an increase in child labor, sexual exploitation, food insecurity, and loss of access to learning, and gender discrimination.
3. Prioritize parents and caregivers personal care, and means and tools necessary for them to achieve their primary role in responsive parenting needed now more than ever to protect their children in these difficult circumstances and fragile contexts
4. Promote digital empowerment and security needed for children and for families and caregivers to confront a "misinformation epidemic" that includes fake news, incorrect and inaccurate information, sexual content, and recruiting children for military actions.

Studies have proven that investment in Early Childhood has a significant impact on the development of the child's brain in later stages of life. It also has a considerable impact on the quality of life, welfare, and progress in the future. A strong start is a guide to a future that is more powerful and more vivacious.

The quality of life of our children and their caregivers is at risk. Their future does not seem to be better unless all efforts join in **GLOBAL SOLIDARITY** to face this massive crisis, a crisis that sporadic efforts or fragmented solutions will not overcome.