Due to social distancing measures put in place to stem the spread of COVID-19, abortion services have been increasingly difficult to deliver to people who need them. Not only that, but some lawmakers, such as those in Poland, are taking the current situation and using it as an opportunity to further tighten incredibly restrictive abortion legislation, further threatening the accessibility of abortion services. Abortion has been recognised by leading nongovernmental organisations such as Marie Stopes, as well as the World Health Organisation (WHO), as an essential service that needs to be maintained during the pandemic. We at the Youth Coalition for Sexual and Reproductive Rights, recognise the importance of keeping abortion services running through adapting them to adhere to social distancing guidance, and agree that abortion is an essential service.

**Accessible Abortion as a Key Sexual and Reproductive Right**

Any laws that criminalise abortion services contravene the Convention on the Elimination of All Form of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). The United Nations Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights clearly states that criminalisation of abortion services is a form of discrimination. It is not enough that abortion services be provided, but they must be accessible and safe - void of barriers that would mean anyone who is seeking abortion would not be able to get one, including cost, distance, and the need for consent from a partner.

**Young People’s Sexual and Reproductive Rights**

Young women (defined as 25 years old or younger) and adolescent girls (defined as between 15-19 years old), are less likely to use contraception, with worse health outcomes during pregnancy than women that are older than this category. The COVID-19 pandemic has already had an impact on the global contraceptive supply chain, meaning that even for the young women and adolescents that want to access contraceptives, there is an added barrier. This, coupled with the higher likelihood of poor health outcomes, means that young women and adolescents are now at a greater risk of poor health than before. The high chance of the negative impact of pregnancy on young women and adolescent health is clear evidence that safe, accessible abortion is fundamental to young people fully enjoying their sexual and reproductive rights.
Youth Coalition for Sexual and Reproductive Rights

During this unprecedented time, we are finding it increasingly difficult to mobilise abortion advocacy in traditional ways, and are forced to adapt. YCSRR’s members have been active attending webinars and co-signing letters with other feminist organisations to show our support for people around the world who will need access to abortion services.

We are always looking for opportunities to work together with other organisations on advocacy opportunities; if this is something you or your organisation would be interested in please get in touch with us at administrator@youthcoalition.org.

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) estimates that in the most severe scenario there may be up to 15 million unintended pregnancies due to interruptions to contraceptive access. It is imperative that young people in particular are not negatively impacted by this, and that they are given every opportunity to exercise their sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). The YCSRR believes that in order for young people to have this opportunity they must have access to timely abortion services provided in a way that suits young people; including access to telemedical abortions. In particular, young people who are living in unsupportive, restrictive, abusive, and/or anti-choice environments should be particularly supported to access such services in a way that does not put their health, safety, and wellbeing at risk.

Safe, Accessible & Stigma-free Abortion for ALL