



Situation brief No.1

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## VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND COVID-19: A SNAPSHOT OF UN WOMEN RESPONSE IN THE ARAB STATES



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VAW has been shown to increase during any emergency, including epidemics. Following the outbreak of COVID-19, measures have been taken by a number of countries in the Arab States region, such as lockdown, quarantines, curfew and closure of essential services. This has made women more vulnerable to violence in the home, including physical, psychological and economic violence. Anecdotal data from Tunisia and Lebanon already flagged that domestic violence is on the rise: in Tunisia, the number of calls to the Government assistance hotline has increased by 5 following confinement measures. In Lebanon, cases reported increased by 60% in March 2020 compared to previous months. UN Women country offices in the Arab States region have been mobilized to respond to the potential surge in VAW caused by COVID-19, specifically in the following areas:

### Generating Data to better understand the needs

Generating data on the effect the response to the pandemic is having on violence against women has been a priority for UN Women at the country level. In Egypt, Libya, Morocco and Palestine, assessments have been or are in the process of being undertaken.

- In **Palestine**, a survey will assess the impact of the COVID-19 response on the provision of services to survivors, the findings of which will be shared with the government and other partners. Data is also being collected to track the impact on the number of reported cases of violence against women.
- In **Egypt**, a phone survey is being conducted to document experiences of domestic violence but also additional care work for women.
- In **Jordan**, a rapid Impact Assessment is underway to understand the impact of Covid19 on access to basic services for vulnerable groups.
- In **Libya**, a flash survey highlighted that 46% of women respondents fear an escalation of stress and potential violence in the home.
- In **Lebanon**, UN Women is contributing to an assessment of the potential increase in GBV and SGBV due to the confinement measures.
- The **Regional office** intends to conduct a regional study using a pioneer technology to capture the effect of COVID -19 on gender equality and violence against women in the region.



## Conducting advocacy to place women's needs first

UN Women's response in countries has consisted of advocacy and awareness-raising on the secondary impact of COVID-19 response measures on women, and risks of rising levels of VAW.

- In **Palestine**, UN Women is advocating with government partners to find alternative protection mechanisms and measures for women victims and survivors of violence, including by building the capacities of relevant Ministries on CEDAW.
- In **Jordan**, UN Women, in partnership with the Jordanian National Commission for Women, has prepared a gender brief on COVID-19 with immediate recommendations for Government and other partners engaged in the response.
- In **Egypt**, in collaboration with the National Council for Women, UN Women is working to generate messages on the impact of COVID-19 on women's lives, including as it relates to unpaid care work and stress within the household.
- The **Regional office** established a youth taskforce with hundreds of volunteers to daily monitor mass and social media for stories demonstrating the impact of emergencies on women and girls specially on domestic violence, women's livelihood and examine the pervasiveness of sexism and misogyny in the meme culture. With the outbreak, intense iteration of hegemonic masculinity in online sexism, couched in "irony" and "jokes", negatively stereotyping wives, mothers, and female care givers were noted. The material will be used to raise awareness and convey advocacy messages.



## Working to prevent violence from occurring

In the context of the current outbreak and the increasing likelihood of higher rates of VAW, country offices have engaged in prevention activities.

- In **Palestine** and **Morocco**, short awareness videos, social media messages and TV spots are being prepared on the possible impact of the COVID-19 measures on VAW. A Facebook Networking Group was created by UN Women in Palestine to allow women to share their stories, worries and feelings during the state of emergency.
- In **Egypt** and **Iraq**, through its CSO partners, UN Women is reaching out to women in various communities to raise awareness on COVID-19 in general and the specific impact on women. In Lebanon, UN Women and partners are sharing SGBV prevention messages with Syrian refugee and Lebanese women.
- As women are bearing the brunt of the increased care work in the household, UN Women has also focused on engaging men and boys in shouldering some of the burden of unpaid care and domestic work. This is the case in **Palestine** and in **Morocco**, where a communications campaign is being developed on positive masculinities and ways men can leverage their presence at home during the lockdown to participate more actively in domestic work and children's education.



## Ensuring the continuation of services

In different countries in the Arab States, UN Women has been working to ensure continuity in the provision of services to women survivors despite the new challenges created by the COVID-19 outbreak.

- UN Women in **Palestine** is providing psychosocial support, through a dial-in service, to women at risk and women survivors, including female inmates. 4 shelters are being supported so as to allow them to continue providing protection, psychosocial support and legal services to survivors.
- In **Jordan**, remote counselling and psychosocial support services have been put in place, and direct cash assistance is being provided to women refugees and vulnerable women from host communities.

- UN Women is strengthening the capacity of service providers in **Morocco**, to deliver remote counselling and advice to women survivors of violence, by equipping service providers with mobile phones.
- An online, free of charge service has also been set up in **Egypt** to provide psychosocial support.
- Existing hotlines are being supported by UN Women in **Lebanon** for women to keep reporting cases of GBV. UN Women is also partnering with NGOs to update the SGBV referral pathways to include the current COVID-19 related measures.
- In Laylan camp, Kirkuk governorate, in **Iraq**, women were supported to sew 400 masks which were distributed to women IDPs in the camp
- UN Women Country Offices have also made consistent efforts towards ensuring the accessibility of services, such as by setting up text messaging services for VAW in **Palestine** for those women who cannot access social media, and developing videos and brochures on GBV services, forensic clinics and health services.

### **Coordinating with partners for a better response**

Finally, UN Women has also engaged in coordination at the country level to ensure that gender issues are mainstreamed in the COVID-19 response and ensure a common UN Message. This has been the case in **Lebanon, Palestine** and **Jordan** where UN Women is providing technical expertise on gender including on violence against women in emergencies to WHO and OCHA. At regional level, UN Women ROAS established an interagency coordination group with the aim of enhancing joint collaboration and information sharing around GBV and COVID-19.

### **Current challenges in responding to VAW in the Arab States**

In various countries, **the lack of accessibility of services by women survivors was highlighted as an issue**. In Iraq and Palestine, women victims of violence are required to self-isolate for 14 days before being allowed into shelters. While some shelters offer quarantine spaces, this is often not the case, meaning that de facto survivors cannot access the shelters. In Lebanon, shelters have communicated that they could not accept new admissions altogether. In Morocco, **some hotlines have been closed as a result of the lockdown**, however NGOs are looking into setting up online services to reach out to and assist survivors.

Governments need **support to come up with alternative solutions, ensure remote case management and provide essential services**. This includes justice-related services, **as the courts in some countries of the region have been forced to close**. With **internet not being as reliable everywhere in the region**, inclusive solutions need to be designed to also reach the women furthest behind, and **referrals pathways should be updated** to reflect the current situation.

**Women refugees and vulnerable women in conflict situation are also at particular risk of VAW**, including economic violence, with **cash and food assistance being jeopardized** by the latest COVID-19 measures in the region.

**The lack of discourse around and general integration of the issue of domestic violence, both at the institutional level and in the media were also identified as a potential danger**. Furthermore, **cyberviolence has been reported to be increasing** in countries of the region, such as Morocco where dangerous messages on gender stereotypes and VAW has been circulating on social media.