



UN WOMEN RESPONSE TO COVID-19 IN THE ARAB STATES

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من الشعب الياباني
From the People of Japan

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FOREWORD

As this report is being released, COVID-19 continues to spread across the globe and throughout the Arab States. The coronavirus pandemic is challenging hard-earned progress on gender equality and women's empowerment, and further exposing the detrimental effect gender inequality has on individuals, society, and the economy.

In the Arab States, women are more vulnerable to COVID-19-related social and economic impacts because of existing gender inequalities. As this report highlights, gender inequalities are particularly apparent in the increased number of women suffering from violence during the pandemic. Also evident is the effect of COVID-19 on women in the labour market, in care giving, and in employment within sectors hardest hit by the pandemic.

We know that by targeting and prioritizing these issues, countries across the region can recover faster.

The crisis has made one thing clear: challenges of this magnitude can only be addressed sustainably by keeping the Sustainable Development Goals at the heart of all action, with a special focus on Goal 5 and other gender-related targets. This means investing in pandemic-related gender data, implementing a cross-sectoral and targeted approach that engages sectors not traditionally associated with gender and women's issues, and creating space for innovation to build back better for women and girls.

However, swift and sustainable recovery is only possible with the full and equitable participation of women in COVID-19 related decision-making, design and implementation. Despite progress in recent decades, there is still a fundamental lack of women in leadership roles. Of the 23 COVID-19 taskforces in the Arab region where gender composition data is available, women constitute only 17 per cent of taskforce membership.

Since March 2020, UN Women in the Arab States has focused on ensuring COVID-19 policies, plans and budgets are responsive to the specific needs of women and girls. Our objective is to positively impact the lives of women and girls across the region by ensuring that countermeasures to the COVID-19 pandemic are not blind to the gender-differentiated impacts.

Alongside our programmes, UN Women provides evidence, analysis, and technical advice, to support regional and national COVID-19 priorities; leveraging our longstanding collaborative relationships with governments, National Women's Machineries, civil society, grassroots women's and youth organizations, as well as the private sector and UN sister agencies.

This report captures the highlights of UN Women's work on COVID-19 in the Arab States during 2020. It is structured around six priorities, aligned with UN Women's global response framework to the pandemic. At regional and country level, we have concentrated efforts where UN Women has a comparative advantage and where the greatest results can be achieved with the immediate resources available.

The report also sets out what more can be achieved with increased and sustainable sources of funding. We hope to stimulate our readers' thinking about the measures and investments required to alleviate the impact of COVID-19 on the region's 200 million women and girls in the years ahead.

We sincerely appreciate all of our partners with whom UN Women continues to collaborate in making a difference in the lives of women and girls in the Arab States. Best wishes for safety and good health to all.

Susanne Mikhail
Regional Director
UN Women Regional Office for the Arab States

ACRONYMS

3RP	The Regional Refugee Resilience Plan in Response to the Syria Crisis
CBI	Cash-based intervention
CSO	Civil society organization
GBV	Gender-based violence
GiHA	Gender in Humanitarian Action
IBC-GJE	Issue-Based Coalition on Gender Justice and Equality
HCT	Humanitarian Country Team
LEAP	Leadership, Empowerment, Access and Protection
MPTF	Multi-Partner Trust Fund
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NRA	Non-Resident Agency
SGBV	Sexual and gender-based violence
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
UNCT	United Nations Country Team
VAW	Violence against women
VAWG	Violence against women and girls
WEE	Women's economic empowerment
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization
WPHF	Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund
WPS	Women, peace and security

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1 INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed serious fault lines and vulnerabilities in societies, institutions and economies around the world. The Arab States region is no exception. Home to 436 million people, the region initially kept transmission and mortality rates lower than the global average. However, a surge in COVID-19 cases in late 2020 and early 2021 is stretching the capacity of healthcare systems throughout the region. This second wave of the pandemic continues to magnify decades-long challenges. These include violence and conflict; inequalities; unemployment; poverty; inadequate social safety nets; human rights concerns; insufficiently responsive institutions and governance systems; and an economic model that has not yet met the aspirations of all.¹

COVID-19 is also having far reaching and diverse effects on women and girls, exacerbating already high levels of violence against women and girls and interrupting women's engagement in the labour market. With the largest gender gap in human development in the world,² women in the Arab region face countless social, economic and political challenges. The pandemic now threatens to roll back hard-won gains on gender equality across the region, while also increasing women's and girls' vulnerability to COVID-19 transmission and impacts.

Experience shows that a systematic and intentional gender lens leads to a better local, national, regional and global response and management of infectious disease.³

Throughout 2020, UN Women in the Arab States leveraged its mandate of normative work, UN system coordination, and operational activities to support governments, the UN system, civil society and other partners to ensure a strong gender equality focus in COVID-19 response and recovery.

This report captures the results delivered through UN Women's rapid, focused response to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on women and girls across the Arab States and to ensure that the long-term recovery benefits them.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- » Key initiatives that took place in the region between March and December 2020.
- » How resources made available during the year enabled UN Women to continue to deliver and expand support to partners in addressing the pandemic's gender dimensions.
- » UN Women areas of comparative advantage in responding to the longer-term socio-economic impact of the crisis on gender equality across the Arab States.

"UN Women's triple mandate is more important than ever. Firstly, normative work on a global scale is essential times of crisis like these, policies and legislation are needed to push gender equality forward. Secondly, UN women's regional and country offices have responded swiftly and adjusted programming to respond to new realities. Lastly, it is of utmost importance that gender responsive actions are successfully coordinated within the whole UN system in both immediate and long-term responses."

Statement by Iceland, delivered by the Permanent Mission of Iceland to the UN, June 2020

2 UN WOMEN RESPONSE FRAMEWORK: 5 PRIORITIES

In March 2020, UN Women's early analysis of the pandemic identified five critical areas that leave women and girls most vulnerable⁴

- » Increased risk for gender-based violence in the context of pandemic response policies, such as national lockdowns.
- » Unemployment, economic and livelihood impacts for the poorest women and girls.
- » Unequal distribution of care and domestic work.
- » Women's and girls' voices are not being included for an informed and effective response, particularly those most left behind in the pandemic.
- » Policy response mechanisms do not incorporate gender analysis, sex-disaggregated data or gender-responsive plans.

This formed the basis of UN Women's global response framework that focuses on five priorities, around which UN Women's regional response to COVID-19 is also framed:⁵

1. Gender-based violence, including domestic violence, is mitigated and reduced.
2. Social protection and economic stimulus packages serve women and girls.
3. People support and practise equal sharing of care work.
4. Women and girls lead and participate in COVID-19 response planning and decision-making.
5. Data and coordination mechanisms include gender perspectives.

The main chapters of this report follow the structure of these five priorities, with an additional chapter on gender-responsive humanitarian action during COVID-19 to reflect ongoing crises and/or conflicts in Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, the State of Palestine, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen.

3 WORKING WITH UN WOMEN IN THE ARAB STATES

PARTNERSHIP APPROACH

Since the onset of the pandemic, UN Women has collaborated with its vast network of government, national and international partners at regional and country levels to adapt, expand and scale up its response services across the Arab States. UN Women's approach has been to support these partners in understanding, responding and recovering from the COVID-19 crisis. These ongoing investments and partnerships encompass data and evidence production, policy advice, and programmatic interventions as part of the broader UN system response to COVID-19.

As of January 2021, UN Women Regional Office for the Arab States provides direct support to UN Women Country Offices in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, and the State of Palestine, and to the Tunisia/Libya and Iraq/Yemen Cluster Offices. The Regional Office also provides support as a Non-Resident Agency member of UN Country Teams in Kuwait, Bahrain, The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Syrian Arab Republic, and works closely with the UN Women Liaison Office in the United Arab Emirates.

Across these countries, UN Women remains focused on its COVID-19 response and building back better for women and girls. UN Women offices throughout the Arab States continue to mobilize all available assets to respond to this unprecedented challenge. Within weeks of COVID-19 being declared a pandemic, UN Women transitioned critical operations across the region to digital/virtual platforms and COVID-19 safety precautionary measures were put in place. This enabled UN Women to continue providing assistance to partners and beneficiaries uninterrupted despite restrictions on movement and physical interaction.

UN Women's operating model in the region was already built to adapt to constantly shifting situations and needs through its operational activities in Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, the State of Palestine and Yemen and technical support to all UN Country Teams (UNCTs) and Humanitarian Country Teams (HCTs). This includes technical support to UNCTs and HCTs where UN Women is a Non-Resident Agency.

UN Women is also an active partner of the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP) through its engagement with country chapters covering Egypt, Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon. Globally, streamlining policies and procedures for greater agility was mirrored by action taken at regional and country levels. This increased UN Women's flexibility in engaging with new partners in the Arab region, including the private sector, receiving and delivering new financing, and taking steps to ensure frontline staff are supported and cared for as they help countries through this crisis.

FINANCIAL REQUIREMENTS

UN Women expects to provide support to more than 12 countries in the region to prepare, respond and recover in the 2021 to 2025 period. This includes region-wide support, direct assistance to nine countries where UN Women has a presence, and four countries where UN Women is a Non-Resident Agency.

Region-wide, UN Women estimates that support for a gender responsive COVID-19 response and recovery will require USD 70 million a year over the next five years (2021 - 2025), targeting both response and recovery efforts across the region. Specific costs are determined on a country-by-country basis in consultation with host governments and in coordination with the UN Resident/Humanitarian Coordinator and other partners.

UN Women will seek to unlock resources by repurposing existing programme funding, in consultation with host governments and donors as appropriate, and urgently seek additional funding to protect the region's hard-won gains on gender equality.

FUNDING CHANNELS FOR COVID-19 RESPONSE & RECOVERY IN THE ARAB STATES REGION

Partners can contribute to UN Women's COVID-19 response and recovery efforts across the Arab region through the complementary funding mechanisms outlined below:



UN WOMEN COUNTRY-LEVEL DIRECT FUNDING

- » Enables partners to channel their funding directly to UN Women programmes/projects at the country level, including COVID-19 response and recovery efforts.
- » Operating through UN Women, provides funding partners with a means of direct support to help women and girls most affected by the COVID-19 crisis and allows local solutions to be designed by UN Women together with local partners including women's organizations and in coordination with the host government.



UN WOMEN REGIONAL-LEVEL DIRECT FUNDING AND/OR THEMATIC FUNDING

- » Provides a pragmatic and flexible mechanism to respond to COVID-19 in a specific thematic area and/or on a region-wide or multi-country basis.
- » Resources intended to support COVID-19 response and recovery efforts can be swiftly allocated to thematic areas and/or specific UN Women offices, and easily monitored and reported on to funders.



POOLED UN FUNDING

- » Contributions from multiple partners can be allocated to several implementing UN entities, including UN Women, to jointly support specific local, regional, or global priorities including gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.
- » Complements existing funding channels; examples include the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) and the UN COVID-19 Response & Recovery Multi-Partner Trust Fund (MPTF) through which UN Women in Jordan and the State of Palestine, and UN Women in Tunisia, respectively received COVID-19 related funding in 2020.

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RESULTS AT A GLANCE: GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IS MITIGATED AND REDUCED



As the COVID-19 pandemic calls for a unified global response, the accompanying shadow pandemic of violence against women also requires a concerted multi-sectoral effort.

UN Women's coordination mandate makes it uniquely positioned within the UN system to support this work.

Since the onset of COVID-19, UN Women in the Arab States has continued its focus on catalysing the UN system-wide rapid response to this surge in violence against women and girls (VAWG), alongside supporting Member States and civil society in their responses to the shadow pandemic.

THE NEED

Gender-based violence predominately perpetrated against women and girls, already experienced by 37 per cent of women in Arab countries before the pandemic, has spiked. Other forms of violence persist; for example, one in five girls in the Arab Region marry under the age of 18, and the region accounts for a quarter of all female genital mutilation cases worldwide.

In addition, rates of domestic and gender-based violence in the region are alarmingly underreported.⁶ Early evidence⁷ of increased domestic violence and heightened demand for shelter during the onset of COVID-19 underscored the importance of quickly understanding the extent and dynamics of this shadow pandemic.

UN Women in the Arab States took note and responded, mobilizing new and existing partnerships to conduct rapid assessments in May 2020 on VAWG in nine countries. Just as the need for real-time data when crisis occurs is vital, so too is the need to align and coordinate organizations.

UN WOMEN'S RESPONSE IN THE ARAB STATES

In COVID-19 response and recovery, UN Women regional and country offices remain focused on areas of comparative advantage. These are:

1. Harnessing UN Women's technical gender expertise and thought leadership on data collection on VAWG.
2. Building on UN Women's normative work promoting governmental policies to address VAWG to guide financing and policy decision-making to support survivors and prevent future violence.
3. Mobilizing longstanding relationships with grassroots and women's organizations to assist survivors and advocate with decision-makers to prioritize addressing VAWG in COVID-19 response and recovery.

STRENGTHENED DATA COLLECTION ON VAWG IN THE CONTEXT OF COVID-19:

Efforts to mitigate and reduce gender-based violence during COVID-19 are benefitting from sustained investment by UN Women in national data collection mechanisms on VAWG.

MOROCCO

Survey data generated by an existing [UN Women Count programme](#) was used by civil society organizations (CSOs) to successfully advocate with the Government for measures to protect women against violence during the pandemic.⁸

THE STATE OF PALESTINE

Previous investment in data generation on gender-based violence and women's access to justice meant UN Women was well-placed to adapt methodologies to the COVID-19 context and had partnerships in place to engage Government, civil society and service providers in supporting a [rapid assessment](#) on domestic violence. Released in July 2020, the survey findings provided key data, helping UN Women with its UN, NGO and Government partners to advocate successfully for policies to improve women's access to essential services during the pandemic.

REGIONAL

In addition to UN Women's technical expertise on VAWG data collection, [thought leadership](#), guidance and support during the pandemic ensured region-wide adherence to ethical and safety principles in data gathering.⁹ UN Women Regional Office led by example through the rapid assessment on VAWG conducted with more than 16,000 interviewees across nine countries: Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, the State of Palestine, Tunisia and Yemen. UN Women's assessment was the first of its kind in the region to document the gendered impact of COVID-19 on women and men with a specific focus on violence against women and gendered social norms.

COLLABORATING WITH PRIVATE SECTOR PARTNERS

New private sector partnerships launched in 2020 include UN Women's collaboration with [RIWI Corp](#) to undertake innovative data collection on VAWG using proprietary survey technology. Utilizing RIWI Corp's patented methodology was crucial to ensure respondents absolute anonymity and safety while participating in the study and provided unique access to respondents in nine countries who would otherwise be hard-to-reach, either because of lockdown restrictions and/or conflict settings.

GUIDING EFFECTIVE FINANCING AND POLICY DECISION-MAKING ON VAWG:

In order to guide decision-making in response to rising levels of VAWG across the region, UN Women is increasing technical and operational support to a range of partners. At country level, UN Women works with governmental and women's rights networks to support laws and related bills that call for the protection of women and girls from heightened violence during lockdown and movement restriction measures.

JORDAN

As reported cases of gender-based violence (GBV) rose by 33 per cent during the first months of lockdown the Jordanian Public Security Directorate (PSD) of the Ministry of Interior ensured gender-responsive crisis teams and women officers were quickly deployed to support survivors of violence and vulnerable women and girls across the country. UN Women technical assistance was provided to the PSD Family Protection Department to develop a practical [pocket guide](#) to support first responders in managing cases of GBV.¹⁰

IRAQ

The United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) was provided with a policy position paper for submission to the Government calling for the adoption of an Anti-Domestic Violence Law following increasing rates of domestic violence reported during the pandemic.

LEBANON

The National Commission for Lebanese Women working with other partners revised Lebanon's National Action Plan on UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security in order to scale up work on GBV during COVID-19. UN Women technical support was instrumental to this process. Specific revisions included the provision of shelters and accommodation for domestic violence survivors, and legal reforms. A decree was also issued to establish a special fund for survivors of violence.

THE STATE OF PALESTINE

Ministerial departments, the judiciary and police force reached out to UN Women, as a trusted source of normative and technical expertise, during the development of emergency plans and protocols to protect women and girls from violence during the pandemic. UN Women's mandate of normative and coordination work in the area of VAW contributed to the Council of Ministers' swift adoption of an emergency protocol enabling survivors of violence to be placed in secure quarantine centers for COVID-19 testing prior to transfer to shelters. Support to the justice sector also extended to practical measures such as provision of thermometers to enable continued functioning of the courts and women's access to justice, as well as essential commodities to women at risk of being overlooked in national response efforts, such as female prisoners and their children.

EGYPT

The Ministry of Social Solidarity developed new protocols enabling women's shelters to continue prioritizing case-management assistance to women and their children in a COVID-19 secure way. With UN Women support, Standard Operating Procedures were revised to offer virtual case management alongside access to adequate nutrition and other essential services for women survivors of violence and their children in quarantine settings.

REGIONAL

Through its role as Co-Convener of the UN Regional Collaborative Platform, the Issue-Based Coalition on Gender Justice and Equality (IBC-GJE), UN Women promotes a coordinated, multistakeholder approach to protecting women and girls from violence during the pandemic. In line with the UN Secretary-General's political engagement strategy on GBV and COVID-19, the IBC-GJE co-hosted a High-Level Regional Dialogue on the issue in December 2020. During the event, H.E. Ambassador Haifa Abu Ghazaleh, Assistant Secretary-General of the League of Arab States reaffirmed the need for "proactive efforts to integrate measures in

all COVID-19 related preparedness and recovery plans to address violence against women and girls and ensure that these efforts are adequately resourced". The High-Level meeting was the culmination of efforts by UN Women and sister UN agencies to support decision-makers on VAWG-related policies and service provision during the COVID-19 crisis. It built on a series of joint activities throughout the year, including UN policy briefs on [VAWG and COVID-19 in the Arab Region](#) and [Essential Services Provision for Survivors of VAWG](#) in the Arab States, as well as [public service announcements](#) that raised awareness about women and girls' increased risk of violence during the pandemic. Leveraging UN Women's coordination mandate, these regional UN initiatives reached more than a quarter of a million people through digital platforms alone.

SUPPORTING WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS TO ADDRESS THE SHADOW PANDEMIC OF VAWG:

Strengthening partnerships with women-led and feminist CSOs is a cornerstone of UN Women's efforts to prevent and end VAWG across the Arab States. With survivor services struggling to remain operational in 2020, existing relationship with grassroots and women's organizations places UN Women in a unique position to provide urgent technical and funding support, and enables UN Women to collate and disseminate critical information about VAWG during the pandemic.

LEBANON

During the pandemic, women's human rights organizations continued to promote the use of creative legal strategies to increase access to justice for migrant workers, especially those in domestic and care work who face increased isolation and heightened risk of violence during lockdowns. With support from UN Women, the first case arguing against slavery and slave trading was filed before a Lebanese criminal court by the end of 2020. This ground-breaking case has the potential to finally open the doors of justice for thousands of migrant domestic workers at a time when COVID-19 is placing migrant women at particular risk of exploitation, violence and abuse¹¹.

THE STATE OF PALESTINE

Grassroots women's organizations ensured the continuity of psychosocial and legal services for survivors of violence throughout 2020 with UN Women support.

REGIONAL

In Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia, UN Women leveraged its partnerships with women's organizations and communities to quickly address reported gaps in awareness and knowledge by mapping available services for women survivors of violence during the pandemic. UN Women's use of social media content and radio spots to raise awareness of survivor services in Egypt paved the way for similar efforts [regionwide](#), resulting in a reach of more than two million in 2020.

REGIONAL

In May 2020, more than 200 women CSOs were mobilized to provide critical insights on the impact of COVID-19 on VAWG. Supported by UN Women, this collective effort brought the voices and experiences of those on the frontlines to the attention of policymakers and service providers. This culminated in a [publication](#) developed through the perspective of women CSOs which documented major threats to women survivors of violence associated with COVID-19 and the repercussions of the pandemic on the most vulnerable, particularly refugee and migrant women, and women with disabilities.



STRONG PARTNERSHIPS FOR FASTER ACTION

UN WOMEN'S WORK WITH NATIONAL WOMEN'S MACHINERIES

EGPYT

The National Council for Women (NCW) spearheaded efforts to prevent VAWG and protect survivors, partnering with UN Women on several initiatives. This included [rapid analysis](#) on the potential impact of COVID-19 on women and the provision of online psychosocial support sessions to women affected by the shadow pandemic. The NCW, other national partners and UN Women also launched a joint initiative entitled "Our Mental Health is a Priority". This collaborative effort used [informative videos](#) to share expert advice and coping mechanisms to support and promote women's mental health during the pandemic. Released on various digital platforms, the videos garnered 200,000 social media interactions, with a direct viewership of more than 52,000.

JORDAN

Swift collaboration between the Jordanian National Commission for Women and UN Women in March 2020 ensured lessons from current and previous health crises on increased incidents of GBV were immediately brought to the attention of policymakers together with [recommendations](#) to mitigate and reduce VAWG in the COVID-19 context.

MOROCCO

The National Union of Women of Morocco (UNFM) continued to invest in the Kolona Maak digital platform which provides 24/7 assistance and guidance nationwide for women survivors of violence. In 2020, UNFM partnered with UN Women to optimize the platform through use of artificial intelligence resulting in rapid improvements in data management and data quality.

LEBANON

The National Commission for Lebanese Women (NCLW) and UN Women's leadership on the women, peace and security agenda was instrumental in unlocking additional financing for VAWG during the pandemic. This joint effort between the NCLW and UN Women supported revisions to Lebanon's National Action Plan on UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, including the creation of a special fund to support survivors of violence during COVID-19 and beyond.

5

RESULTS AT A GLANCE: SOCIAL PROTECTION AND ECONOMIC STIMULUS PACKAGES SERVE WOMEN AND GIRLS



UN Women, working with its network of partners, continues to leverage its comparative advantage and technical expertise on women's economic empowerment to address the gendered impacts of COVID-19. Through existing partnerships with Ministries of Finance and Gender Equality Mechanisms, women's rights organizations, sister UN agencies and the private sector, UN Women is putting women at the heart of economic recovery and resilience.

THE NEED

Evidence from infectious disease-driven economic crises point to greater impact on women.¹² In the Arab States, the female formal labour force participation rate of 21 per cent (as compared to 70 per cent for men) is already the lowest worldwide and set to weaken further as women stand to lose 700,000 jobs as a result of the pandemic.¹³ Many of these jobs will be lost in the informal sector where women constitute 61.8 per cent of workers, generally lacking basic social or legal protection and employment benefits.¹⁴

For the estimated nine million women migrant workers in the region, travel bans and other restrictions are harming their livelihoods and ability to support family members in their countries of origin.¹⁵ Young women face a double challenge, as the economic slowdown resulting from the crisis further exacerbates youth's vulnerability in the labour market.

The region has the highest rate of youth unemployment (aged 15-24) worldwide, at 26.9 per cent on average in 2019, and as high as 42.8 per cent for female youth.¹⁶ As the economic consequences of COVID-19 push diverse groups of women into poverty, female-headed households are particularly vulnerable. These women face a disproportionate care burden and are more likely to be in insecure and low-paid work.

This is compounded by underlying gender biases in government policies that consider men the main heads of households. The plight of women informal workers, migrant women, young women and female-headed households across the region serves to highlight how gender intersects with other forms of marginalization to impede women's economic inclusion and empowerment.

UN WOMEN'S RESPONSE IN THE ARAB STATES

UN Women efforts to build women's economic resilience during the COVID-19 crisis can be grouped into three broad categories:

1. Bringing an intentional gender lens to the design of fiscal stimulus packages and social assistance programmes.
2. Rapidly re-orientating existing women's economic empowerment programmes/projects to secure women's livelihoods and access to resources.
3. Catalyzing new partnerships and technologies to expand women's economic resilience during COVID-19 and beyond.

BRINGING A GENDER LENS TO THE DESIGN OF FISCAL STIMULUS AND SOCIAL PROTECTION PACKAGES:

UN Women's leadership within the UN system on gender-responsive budgeting helps to ensure social protection and economic stimulus packages across the region serve women and girls, particularly those at the bottom of the economic pyramid.

TUNISIA

UN Women mobilized additional funding of USD 146,000 from the UN COVID-19 Response & Recovery MPTF to support a range of initiatives designed to make social protection and fiscal measures more gender-responsive and protective towards women whose social and economic rights have been affected by COVID-19. This included trainings to sectoral ministries for the application of gender-responsive budgeting to COVID-19 support and recovery packages.

LEBANON

Policy and technical advisory services on gender-responsive social protection contributed to the adoption of targeted measures to address the impact of COVID-19 on women. These include cash transfers for the informal sector, migrant and domestic workers, and implementation of employment and labour market policies in sectors disproportionately employing women and support for women-owned businesses.

JORDAN

Technical assistance to policymakers, at their request, ensured a stronger focus on the collection and use of sex-disaggregated data within the national COVID-19 preparedness and response plan. UN Women expertise on gender-responsive budgeting was also utilized to ensure a gender lens was applied to government analysis of the pandemic's effect on macroeconomic indicators.

RE-ORIENTING EXISTING PROGRAMMES TO SECURE WOMEN'S LIVELIHOODS DURING COVID-19:

From crisis onset, UN Women with its partners acted swiftly to ensure the economic resilience of women excluded from formal social protection schemes. Through interventions such as unconditional cash transfers UN Women has been able to meet the short-term economic needs of some of the region's most vulnerable women and their families, particularly those in female-headed households.

LEBANON

UN Women collaborated with CSO partners to re-align training and job placement programmes, scaling up the use of digital technology to provide economic empowerment services to women and providing unconditional cash transfers to those already enrolled in UN Women livelihood programmes.

EGYPT

UN Women acted to quickly mitigate the impact of economic shocks on women caused by the pandemic. This included targeted financial assistance to women in refugee and host communities unable to access employment or continue with skill training programmes due to movement restriction policies.

MOROCCO

UN Women increased the access of women-led cooperatives to online marketplaces and facilitated online administrative processes for rural women, enabling women traders to quickly adapt to physical distancing measures.

THE STATE OF PALESTINE

UN Women drew on global best practices and reviews of cash-based intervention (CBIs) modalities in the West Bank and Gaza to ensure women's economic resilience during the pandemic. This approach ensured UN Women assistance was evidence-informed, based on the local context, and able to meet needs of the most vulnerable, including women survivors of violence, women with disabilities, and elderly women. Throughout 2020, UN Women worked in tandem with other UN, NGO and development partners to avoid duplication and ensure close coordination, for example by optimizing CBIs for protection from gender-based violence..

CATALYZING NEW PARTNERSHIPS AND TECHNOLOGIES TO EXPAND WOMEN'S ECONOMIC RESILIENCE:

Across the Arab States, UN Women saw 2020 as an opportunity to catalyze new approaches for safeguarding women's economic empowerment during COVID-19 and beyond.

JORDAN

UN Women is strategically positioned as the partner of choice in delivering innovative cash transfer schemes. Collaboration with the World Food Programme (WFP) meant UN Women was one of the few humanitarian actors able to seamlessly and remotely ensure cash assistance continued to reach Syrian refugee women in camps during the COVID-19 confinement period. Leveraging an innovative blockchain cash-disbursement system meant more than 500 women were able to access their entitlements through WFP's Building Blocks platform. This increased women's control over their salaries and the identity verification scan ensured that only the women themselves could withdraw cash through the system.¹⁷

THE STATE OF PALESTINE

Civil society partnered with UN Women to increase the access of women-led enterprises to new technologies (such as digital marketing platforms) and new business continuity approaches, helping to ensure their ventures can survive, and even thrive, during and after COVID-19. Through the Global Rule of Law Programme, UN Women also supported the Palestinian General Federation Trade Union to provide legal aid services to women who lost their jobs or have their jobs affected as a result of COVID-19, including court representation and representation in front of tripartite to enhance their access to justice and realization of their rights.

EGYPT

UN Women embraced new online tools and partners to sustain momentum of the Government of Egypt's 2030 Vision, which aims to have 30 per cent of corporate boards in several key sectors be comprised of women by the end of the decade. During 2020, UN Women's partnership with the International Finance Corporation and Women on Boards Observatory accelerated the use of digital platforms to reach and train more women in corporate leadership roles.

REGIONAL

A growing number of companies in the Arab region joined the Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs) global network in 2020. The number of companies from the Arab States joining the platform rose by 26 per cent from 189 signatories in 2019 to 238 by the end of 2020. Through the platform, companies across the region are benefitting from tailored guidance developed by UN Women in response to the pandemic. In 2020, this included guidance on how companies can continue to support and empower women employees, mitigate the negative impact of COVID-19 on their operations, and attract new talent as they adapt business practices. Using UN Women-developed resources such as [the COVID-19 and Gender Rapid Self-Assessment Tool](#), thematic knowledge products and knowledge sharing, as well as technical assistance and outreach, companies are able to assess their COVID-19 response and ensure they are supporting women through the crisis and beyond with gender-sensitive measures throughout their value chain.



STRONG PARTNERSHIPS FOR FASTER ACTION

UN WOMEN'S STRATEGIC / TECHNICAL SUPPORT TO GOVERNMENT

TUNISIA

UN Women partnered with UNDP, the World Food Programme and UN-Habitat to secure funding of USD 1 million from the UN COVID-19 Response & Recovery MPTF in June 2020. This funding was critical in supporting the Government of Tunisia to scale up the socioeconomic response to COVID-19 and apply a gender lens to these efforts. As a result of strong partnerships with the Ministry of Women, Family, and Seniors and women Parliamentarians, UN Women is the technical and operational lead for the programme's dedicated work-stream on gender-responsive macro-economic policy solutions. In recognition of its technical expertise on gender data and previous collaboration with Tunisia's National Institute of Statistics, UN Women also leads the UN system's work-stream on collection and analysis of sex-disaggregated data to inform policy and decision-making.

LEBANON

UN Women has been actively collaborating with Government partners and contributing to macro-economic policy discussions to ensure gender-sensitive approaches. In 2020, against the backdrop of COVID-19, severe economic contraction, and the devastating Beirut explosion, UN Women provided rapid gender analysis and data in support of more gender-responsive social protection and economic stimulus packages. This provided critical data points to inform the Government's expansion of the Emergency National Poverty Targeting Programme, resulting in an additional 140,000 female-headed households receiving cash assistance.

6

RESULTS AT A GLANCE: PEOPLE
SUPPORT AND PRACTICE EQUAL
SHARING OF CARE WORK



In the Arab States region, UN Women leadership on issues of care work was evident prior to the pandemic. In 2019, UN Women commissioned the first comprehensive regional study to look at the state of the care economy in selected Arab States. When COVID-19 struck, UN Women Regional and Country Offices were quick to recognize the pandemic's implication on women's care burden, adjusting the research focus to incorporate emerging evidence of the pandemic's impact on both women's unpaid and paid care work.

THE NEED

During 2020, COVID-19 containment measures resulted in the closure of many services – including schools, basic health care and day care centres – shifting responsibility for their provision on to households. While this could have offered an opportunity for gender roles to shift within the home, instead the COVID-19 crisis has exacerbated the pre-existing restrictive social norms defining women's and men's roles across the region. Emerging evidence, including new research commissioned by UN Women, shows that care roles continue to be assumed disproportionately by women during the pandemic as the perception that men's jobs (as head of household) should take preference over women's jobs in times of crisis intensifies.¹⁸ Women in the Arab States already spend 4.7 more time in unpaid care work than men, the highest rate among all regions globally.¹⁹ In some countries of the region, the ratio of women's to men's time spent in unpaid care reaches as high as 19:1.²⁰

This heavy care burden has further increased during the COVID-19 crisis as men's employment is privileged and women must manage out-of-school children and increased household responsibilities. For female-headed households, working women, and women with disabilities the burden of unpaid care work is especially hard. Increased care responsibilities at home can also limit girls' study time compared to their brothers and may hinder their return to school, limiting their future economic prospects.²¹ These gendered consequences of the pandemic expose the widespread gaps in care policies and services that are leaving women and their families across the Arab States vulnerable to negative social, economic and health outcomes.

UN WOMEN'S RESPONSE IN THE ARAB STATES

In 2020, UN Women efforts to address the burden and distribution of care work focused on two key areas:

1. Improving data and analysis to sharpen policy.
2. Launching social norm and behaviour change campaigns.

IMPROVING DATA ANALYSIS TO SHARPEN POLICY:

Partnering with the Economic Research Forum and its Open Access Micro Data Initiative, UN Women used new analysis to put forth a policy agenda to advance the care economy in the Arab States.

REGIONAL

Generating unique evidence on the state of the care economy, the regional report '[Progress of Women in the Arab States 2020: The role of the care economy in promoting gender equality](#)' uses original microdata analysis to frame policy priorities. The study highlights how unpaid care work has been largely invisible in economic calculations and policy setting prior to COVID-19 and offers emerging evidence that unpaid care responsibilities fall mostly on women in the pandemic. The report calls on governments in the region to establish a comprehensive approach to the care economy during COVID-19 and beyond. This includes: expanding social protection systems to cover both employed women and men in the formal and informal sectors, establishing more flexible care and leave options, and institutionalizing flexible working arrangements. In Egypt, Jordan, the State of Palestine and Tunisia, UN Women's regional report on the care economy was supplemented by targeted policy briefs aimed at national policymakers.

SUCCESSFUL SOCIAL NORM AND BEHAVIOUR CHANGE CAMPAIGNS:

As lockdowns and movement restrictions were imposed throughout the region in 2020, changing social norms that support unequal distribution of care responsibilities assumed a new urgency. UN Women was swift to respond, pivoting to challenge these stereotypes through behaviour change campaigns. Across the region, UN Women offices proactively reached out to partner with sister UN agencies in order to increase the scope, reach and impact of these campaigns.

REGIONAL

UN Women led a positive masculinities behaviour change campaign [Because I am a man](#) #لجري نال under the regional programme – Men and Women for Gender Equality funded by Sweden - in six countries: Lebanon, Palestine, Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, and Jordan. The campaign focused on #معمل لأوس #WorkingTogether as the main theme reaching over 35 million men and women aged 18 to 59 in 2020 through online and mass media, with men comprising around 44 per cent of the online engagement. This reflects UN Women's successful content generation that focused on showcasing ordinary men as positive role models for gender equality. The campaign engaged influencers and celebrities who acted as powerful advocates and helped to disseminate messages across their own social media platforms. During the year approximately 200 pieces of content were disseminated including videos, billboards in prominent locations, TV programmes, radio adverts and drama series, songs and music videos, animations, and stories of change.

ACHIEVEMENT IN NUMBERS:

Over 35 million people across the Arab region reached in 2020 with UN Women-led or supported behaviour change campaigns promoting equal sharing of care responsibilities.

THE STATE OF PALESTINE

UN Women in partnership with UN-Habitat, UNFPA and UNODC launched an online campaign #دلب ل ل ي م ح ا to raise awareness on the positive aspects of sharing domestic responsibilities during lockdown and healthy practices to reduce the spread of COVID-19.

LEBANON

UN Women conducted behaviour change campaigns throughout the year on social norms, burden sharing and domestic violence, reaching more than 1.4 million men, women, girls and boys across multiple social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn).

JORDAN

UN Women leveraged the [#HeForSheAtHome](#) campaign to address the gender dimensions of the pandemic and promote gender equality and women's empowerment. This included highlighting positive examples of sharing care and household responsibilities and tasks more equally. The social media campaign delivered more than 40 online events, mobilized 500 youth volunteers, and achieved a reach of more than 650,000 people.

EGYPT

In partnership with the Egyptian National Council for Women, UN Women used football as an entry point to mobilize men and boys for gender equality as part of the Because I am a man campaign, reaching out to around seven million social media users in 2020.

TUNISIA

Working with social media influencers, celebrities, the Swedish Ambassador, and the UN Resident Coordinator, UN Women supported efforts to prepare locally developed content for dissemination in early 2021.



تعتمد العديد من العائلات على مساهمة الرجال والنساء معًا في دخل الأسرة.

الآن خلال الأوقات الصعبة التي تواجهها العائلات مع جائحة **#فيروس_كورونا** فإن مشاركة الرجال والآباء في رعاية الأطفال والعمل المنزلي أصبح أكثر ضرورة. **#العمل_سويًا** يزيد من فرص احتفاظ الرجال والنساء بوظائفهم على حد سواء.



Many families depend on men's and women's contribution to the household income.

Engagement in care and domestic work of men and dads is now essential during the tough times that families are facing with **#COVID19** **#WorkingTogether** raises the likelihood of both men and women keeping their jobs. **#Because_I_am_a_man**



STRONG PARTNERSHIPS FOR FASTER ACTION

REACHING MILLIONS THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS TO SHIFT GENDER NORMS

LEBANON

At crisis onset, UN Women and UNDP were quick to launch a joint social media campaign to shift social norms around care work. Taking place across multiple social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter) over 15 days in April 2020, #TogetherAndEqual aimed to influence perpetrators of violence against women, and to challenge men to do their part in domestic work and childcare to alleviate the burden on working mothers. Sixteen messages were published in both Arabic and English across these platforms to share facts and statistics as well as to urge cooperation with women in their homes. In two weeks, the campaign reached 210,000 people and engaged over 15 TV presenters, actors, bloggers, and ambassadors to serve as male influencers. Building on the success of this campaign, UN Women with its civil society partners disseminated messages on positive parenting, gender equitable norms, and VAWG as part of the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence campaign that took place between 25 November and 10 December 2020. These messages were viewed by 1,300,000 Facebook users and 139,734 Instagram users.

MOROCCO

UN Women capitalised on the '[Because I am a man](#)' campaign to develop 10 videos on shared household responsibilities for release and dissemination during the nationwide lockdown. Leveraging digital communication channels, smart phone technology, and through the engagement of social media influencers, opinion leaders, gender equality advocates and male audiences, the campaign reached over 7.3 million on social media, and up to 6.5 million on TV.

THE STATE OF PALESTINE

UN Women tailored the '[Because I am a man](#)' campaign to the Palestinian context and encouraged men to become more active in caregiving, childcare, domestic work, prevention of violence against women and girls, and the broader promotion of gender equality. Aware that COVID-19 risks rolling back the fragile gains made in female labour force participation in recent decades, UN Women renewed its focus on the issue of paternity leave, building on the success of [earlier campaigns](#). The behaviour change campaign reached more than 3,431,379 people during 2020 across multiple social media platforms, fostered new partnerships with civil society, and elevated discussion around paternity leave, resulting in numerous organizations making provision for paternity leave within their employment terms.

7

RESULTS AT A GLANCE: WOMEN'S AND GIRLS' LEADERSHIP AND VOICE IN THE COVID-19 RESPONSE



In the Arab States, UN Women's long-term support to women leaders at all levels represents a strong comparative advantage. From the outset, UN Women has been strategically positioned to strengthen women's leadership and participation in the COVID-19 response. This includes through women, peace and security (WPS) efforts in Iraq, Jordan, Libya, Lebanon, the State of Palestine, the Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia and Yemen where UN Women has deep, longstanding relationships with women parliamentarians, grassroots and community-based organizations, women human rights defenders and women's networks.

Continuing to invest in these partnerships during COVID-19 and beyond is critical to ensuring women's voices are heard and their leadership is advanced. Moreover, the WPS agenda has shown that when women participate, the needs and priorities of affected women and girls are better addressed, as are the socio-economic impacts of crisis on communities as a whole²².

THE NEED

Women's leadership and contributions remain critical to curbing infection rates and enabling resilience and recovery. Evidence from previous infectious disease outbreaks such as Ebola suggest the participation of women and women's organizations in decision-making promotes a more gendered response²³.

Conversely, evidence across sectors, including economic planning and emergency response, demonstrates that policies that do not consult women or include them in decision-making are less effective, and can even do harm.²⁴ Gender equality and the inclusion of women in the COVID-19 response, in line with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5, is critical to avoid backsliding on limited rights gained and jeopardizing the attainment of the SDGs as a whole.

Yet, evidence points to low levels of female participation in national COVID-19 decision-making bodies even though women make up the majority of those on the frontlines of the crisis.²⁵ Of the 23 COVID-19 taskforces in the Arab region where membership data is available, women constitute 17 per cent of this membership.²⁶ The overwhelming majority of taskforces (96 per cent) are dominated by men.²⁷ Despite gains in recent decades,

the presence of women in leadership roles across the Arab States still lags behind other regions in the world.²⁸ A 2019 survey of 25,000 respondents across 12 Arab countries found two-thirds believe women are not as effective in public leadership compared to men²⁹, highlighting how cultural attitudes continue to undermine women's role as senior decision-makers who can influence policy strategy and resource allocation.

Social norms and gender roles are also preventing women's ability to participate in local decision-making.³⁰ Research conducted with women's organizations across the Arab States in 2020, including studies supported by UN Women, found that grassroots and women's organizations are being excluded from decision-making related to COVID-19, and are not receiving a fair share of funding.³¹ These organizations also face limitations to their ability to advocate and campaign through restrictions to civic space created by the COVID-19 response.³²

UN WOMEN'S RESPONSE IN THE ARAB STATES

UN Women champions women and girls' leadership and participation by focusing on areas where we have demonstrated capacity and experience to deliver. In COVID-19 response and recovery, these are:

1. Convening leaders and decision makers to advocate for the importance of women's leadership in COVID-19 response and recovery.
2. Support to women's organizations and women on the frontlines of the COVID-19 crisis.

CONVENING LEADERS AND DECISION-MAKERS TO ADVOCATE FOR WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP AND PARTICIPATION:

Throughout 2020, UN Women convened leaders and policymakers to promote women's leadership and participation at all levels of the COVID-19 response. While online assemblies have the potential to reach more

decision-makers and bring more women's voices to the table, their design can either restrict or expand meaningful participation. Through its Women, Peace and Security (WPS) work, UN Women is already adept at managing these types of forums. This meant UN Women could immediately draw on its expertise and increase accessibility to these platforms during COVID-19, particularly among women.

JORDAN

UN Women's partnership with the Inter-Ministerial Committee on Women's Empowerment and the Jordanian National Commission for Women helped to elevate women's participation in the drafting of the country's COVID-19 Emergency Response Plan. Facilitating the engagement of women's organizations in the planning process ensured the Plan includes provisions for providing updated information to communities on the impact of COVID-19 on women, girls and the elderly, women front-line workers and community activists.

REGIONAL

In June 2020, UN Women Regional Office for the Arab States in partnership with the Arab Women Parliamentarians' Network for Equality (Ra'edat) hosted [a dialogue to elevate women's leadership and participation in the COVID-19 response](#). Bringing together more than 230 parliamentarians, civil society and women community leaders, the online dialogue offered a new, important space for women leaders to share their expertise and offer solutions to inform policy and programme responses to COVID-19. Recommendations from the dialogue continue to guide the Ra'edat's regional advocacy work during the pandemic and beyond.

REGIONAL

In October 2020, The Elders, Wilton Park, UN Women Regional Office for the Arab States and the UK Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office, convened a [high-level virtual conference](#), with a focus on women's participation in mediation processes. The forum brought together women CSOs and advocates from 25 countries with decision makers from donor governments, regional

organizations, and UN entities involved in convening peace processes across the region. Women's voices from Libya, Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, Yemen, Iraq, the Syrian Arab Republic and the State of Palestine were heard by policymakers and a key issue addressed was women's exclusion from high-level mediation processes and related impacts of COVID-19.

While the pandemic has accelerated the digitalisation of peace-making, potentially opening up virtual spaces to increase women's meaningful participation, participants observed the reverse is happening. Instead of fast-tracking women's inclusion, leaders and policymakers were made aware of COVID-19 exposing new challenges to women's participation, such as securing women's online spaces free from harassment and the digital gender divide. In virtual spaces it may be easier to involve women, but it's proving harder to let their voices be heard. Informed by these discussions, UN Women Regional Office [documented](#) practical ways to increase women's participation in peace processes during COVID-19 and beyond.

SUPPORTING WOMEN AND WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS ON THE FRONTLINES OF COVID-19:

From crisis onset, UN Women was swift to engage women's and grassroots organizations, document their needs and priorities, and elevate their voices. By April 2020, UN Women had undertaken rapid sub-regional consultations to identify specific operational barriers for women's organizations emerging as a result of COVID-19. These efforts are vital in ensuring UN Women support is tailored to the real needs on the ground.

REGIONAL

UN Women lent its support to the creation of the Arab States Civil Society Organizations and Feminists Network, formed June 2020 in response to the COVID-19 crisis. Comprising 25 CSOs and women's grassroots organizations from Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, the State of Palestine, Tunisia and Yemen the network aims to create a strong voice for women in the region, provide policy recommendations to governments, and share successful interventions undertaken by CSOs in response

to the pandemic. Throughout 2020, the Network provided a means for collaboration and communication between women's organizations, resulting in a coordinated CSO regional response plan that puts women and girls at the centre of recovery efforts.

REGIONAL

In response to the pandemic, UN Women adapted its Leadership, Empowerment, Access and Protection (LEAP) programmes in the region to increase support to women's organizations as they rapidly adapted to

meet the needs of their communities. The Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund (WPHF), to which UN Women provides board leadership and Secretariat support, also launched a COVID-19 Emergency Response Window to support women's organizations on the frontline of the pandemic approving several projects from the region. Through these initiatives UN Women offices provided technical and financial support to local women's groups, organizations and networks in Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, and the State of Palestine, facilitating women's leadership and meaningful engagement in coordinated response efforts.



STRONG PARTNERSHIPS FOR FASTER ACTION

DELIVERING LIFELINE SUPPORT TO GRASSROOTS AND WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS

REGIONAL

In March 2020, the Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund surveyed 80 women's organizations across eight countries including Iraq and Jordan. Almost a third expressed serious concern that their organization would not survive the effects of the COVID-19 crisis. Notably, many of the local women's organizations self-identify as particularly well placed to prevent and respond to the pandemic.

Yet, their contributions often go unrecognized and unfunded. By using existing funding channels UN Women has been able to increase core support to women's organizations during the pandemic, as illustrated below through partnerships in Iraq.

IRAQ

Through the UN Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women, urgently needed resources were provided to the Organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq (OWFI). An existing grantee of the Fund, the OWFI benefitted from additional support to keep its shelter open for women survivors of violence while ensuring health protocols are followed. As requests from women to access the shelter doubled with the onset of lockdown, support from the Trust Fund increased staff capacity to respond to the impacts of the pandemic. This included the deployment of three staff members to screen new residents and put in place measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Through the Women's Leadership, Empowerment, Access and Protection in Crisis Response (LEAP) initiative, supported by the Government of Japan, UN Women was able to channel additional resources to the Women Leadership Institute, a prominent women's rights organization, and the Baghdad Women Association, which provides services to survivors of gender-based violence. With UN Women support these women's organizations were able to quickly adapt operations and respond to the immediate livelihood and protection needs of women and girls in COVID-19 affected communities.

8

RESULTS AT A GLANCE: DATA AND COORDINATION MECHANISMS INCLUDE GENDER PERSPECTIVES



In 2020 UN Women emerged as a global leader in the promotion of gender data to inform COVID-19 responses.³³ Across the Arab States, UN Women is utilizing its thought leadership and triple mandate (normative, coordination and operational) to ensure coherence across efforts to promote gender mainstreaming in national responses and data collection.

THE NEED

A significant challenge in the delivery of a gendered COVID-19 response is the lack of sex and age disaggregated data to inform national response plans. Globally, fewer than half of countries report confirmed COVID-19 cases and deaths separately for women and men, hindering the analysis of the gendered implications of COVID-19 and the development of appropriate responses.³⁴

Regionally, sex-disaggregated data on COVID-19 incidence and mortality, respectively, is reported in only 15 and 10 out of the 22 Arab countries.³⁵ Additionally, the pandemic has put a complete stop to statistical work in some countries, and affected data collection in others.³⁶ This risks pushing gender data even lower down the list of priorities, raising concerns that acute data gaps will lead to national responses that overlook the vulnerabilities and needs of women and girls.

Lack of disaggregated data is compounded by the exclusion of women from national coordination mechanisms overseeing COVID-19 response and recovery. Structures set up to oversee the national response to COVID-19 need to be gender-sensitive in their composition, mandate and working methods. If these structures fail to include women, governments will miss out on critical expertise needed to mainstream gender considerations into their work, resulting in decision-making that is less effective and potentially harmful.³⁷

UN WOMEN'S RESPONSE IN THE ARAB STATES

UN Women's response in the Arab States region focuses on three areas where it is strategically positioned to enhance the UN system's support to national processes:

1. Promoting the collection and use of sex-disaggregated data and gender analysis.
2. Provision of technical support to governments and partners upon request to mainstream gender perspectives.
3. Targeted policy advocacy in collaboration with national women's machineries and women's organizations.

INCREASED FOCUS ON COLLECTION AND USE OF SEX-DISAGGREGATED DATA AND GENDER ANALYSIS:

From crisis onset, UN Women has been leading international partner of Arab governments and research institutions in the compilation of data on the pandemic's impact on women and girls.

EGYPT

The National Council for Women (NCW) with technical assistance and inputs from UN Women issued a Policy Paper in March 2020 on [Egypt's Rapid Response to Women's Situation During the COVID-19 Outbreak](#). The Paper draws on available data and gender analysis to present a number of proposed short-and medium-term response measures, several of which have since been adopted by the Government of Egypt. This rapid compilation of gender analysis and gender-responsive interventions was instrumental to ensuring issues of women's economic security, handling an increase in unpaid care work in the home, and tackling violence against women and girls were central to the national response effort from the outset.

REGIONAL

Throughout 2020, continuing into 2021, UN Women Regional Office collaborated with the UNDP Regional Bureau of Arab States to regularly update the [UN Women-UNDP COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker](#). This living database monitors policy measures enacted by national governments worldwide to tackle the COVID-19 crisis, and highlights responses that are gender-sensitive. By December 2020, UN Women and UNDP had analysed 317 COVID-19 related measures registered for 22 countries across the Arab region. Undertaken with inputs from UN Women regional and country office staff, the analysis looked at the 317 measures across three key dimensions: violence against women and girls, unpaid care work and economic insecurity caused by the pandemic. Only a third of these measures were found to be gender-sensitive. The tracker continues to generate new insights from available data highlighting areas where more needs to be done and supporting governments in making the right policy decisions by sharing good practices.

ACHIEVEMENT IN NUMBERS:

6 UN Country Team Socioeconomic Response Plans in the Arab region included gender analysis across the majority or all sectors informed by sex-disaggregated data.

QUALITY AND TIMELY TECHNICAL SUPPORT TO GOVERNMENTS AND PARTNERS:

Upon request, UN Women provides direct technical support to government and UN partners to ensure that national COVID-19 strategies meet women's and girls' needs. A rapid deployment of gender technical experts to government and UN partners is enabling the systematic integration of gender perspectives into crisis planning and response.

LEBANON

UN Women was quick to identify, resource and deploy a gender expert to the WHO country office resulting in the mainstreaming of protection and gender into the national COVID-19 planning framework.

TUNISIA

The Ministry of Women, Family, and Seniors utilized inputs from internationally recognized gender and health experts to inform its crisis response activities. Through a secondment supported by UN Women, national and international experts' contributions shaped aspects of the Ministry's response to COVID-19, particularly surrounding women's health needs. Specific contributions included the preparation of four policy briefs on women's health during the pandemic, addressing the shadow pandemic of violence against women during lockdown, and supporting the Ministry to convene a high-level forum to promote the integration of a gender approach in the national COVID-19 response. Many of the measures put forward during the forum as recommendations were subsequently adopted by the Government of Tunisia.

THE STATE OF PALESTINE

UN Women immediately deployed technical experts to ensure the use of gender analysis and sex-disaggregated data in humanitarian planning and response. An expert in gender and health was seconded to the WHO-led Health Cluster, a gender mainstreaming expert was recruited to support the efforts of other clusters, and staff time was invested in producing a [rapid gender analysis](#) to inform the work of the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT). These strategies were effective in mainstreaming gender into the [HCT Response Plan for COVID-19](#) and the inclusion of a section dedicated to the gendered impact of COVID-19.

EFFECTIVE AND TARGETED POLICY ADVOCACY ON GENDER DATA:

UN Women's leadership on gender data across the region ensures it is strategically positioned to use emerging research on COVID-19 for targeted policy advocacy. Collaboration with National Women's Machineries and women's organizations enabled UN Women to achieve the following gender mainstreaming results:

JORDAN

Recommendations for integrating gender into the country's COVID-19 planning and response were [rapidly compiled and shared](#) with policymakers in March 2020 as a joint effort of the Jordanian National Commission for Women and UN Women.³⁸

THE STATE OF PALESTINE

Rapid gender analysis led by UN Women in partnership with 30 women-led organizations and woman leaders in the West Bank and Gaza resulted in the incorporation of gender analysis and gender mainstreaming into humanitarian response frameworks alongside targeted interventions to support women, including pregnant and lactating women and women survivors of violence.

EGYPT

Four COVID-19 gender policy trackers were immediately adopted following the issuing of a policy paper developed and led by the National Council of Women, with technical inputs from UN Women. These policy trackers continue to inform policymakers and increase accountability for gender mainstreaming.³⁹



STRONG PARTNERSHIPS FOR FASTER ACTION

FAST, EFFECTIVE SECONDMENT OF GENDER TECHNICAL EXPERTS DURING CRISIS RESPONSE

LEBANON

In close partnership with the WHO, UN Women significantly increased attention on gender equality and women's rights issues within the UN system's COVID-19 response in Lebanon. At the onset of the pandemic, UN Women Lebanon Country Office seconded a Gender Specialist to WHO to lead the mainstreaming of protection and gender into the response, resulting in 40 per cent of the activities in Lebanon's COVID planning framework addressing gender issues and all (100 per cent) of planning and reporting documents integrating gender analysis and gender-sensitive approaches. These efforts contributed to increased attention to VAWG and action to address this by national authorities. The WHO also began to mandate sex and age disaggregated data for all COVID-19 surveillance data. Following the six-month secondment, the WHO hired a full-time gender advisor, and requested UN Women to support in the capacity building of the individual and their portfolio for an additional six months.

As part of the secondment, UN Women and WHO partnered with UNFPA and the National Commission for Lebanese Women to publish regular gender alerts on pressing issues, compiled resources for practitioners, and set out recommendations to influence policy and decision making. Findings from the alerts were shared and discussed at COVID-19 meetings and the inter-ministerial taskforce, disseminated in WHO COVID-19 daily briefs, and featured in national media. This supported evidence-based decision-making by the Government, such as scaling of resources to the national domestic violence hotline, and improved remote and online prosecution procedures for cases of domestic violence under lockdown through the enactment of Generalization 68/2020.

9

RESULTS AT A GLANCE:
HUMANITARIAN ACTION
DURING COVID-19 IS GENDER
RESPONSIVE



Data from the region show the humanitarian system needs to deliver better for women and girls who continue to bear the brunt of multiple, overlapping crises. While UN Women is not equipped to respond to humanitarian crises per se, it is uniquely placed to take the lead in coordinating and advocating for the inclusion of women's issues and protection in the humanitarian response programmes of other entities.

With the onset of the pandemic, there has been a perceived value added in scaling-up the presence of UN Women in humanitarian settings to ensure that gender-sensitive measures are integrated into COVID-19 response and recovery.

THE NEED

Humanitarian contexts affect women and girls more heavily: 70 per cent of women experience gender-based violence (GBV) in humanitarian contexts compared with 35 per cent worldwide⁴⁰. Adolescent girls in conflict zones are 90 per cent more likely to be out of school than girls in non-conflict settings⁴¹. Sixty per cent of preventable maternal mortality takes place in settings of conflict, displacement, and natural disasters.

Humanitarian crises disrupt family and social networks, change the roles played by different genders, and break down protection structures. Already volatile prior to COVID-19 due to socioeconomic instabilities and protracted humanitarian crises, the Arab region is uniquely affected by the pandemic, with more than 62.5 million women, men, girls and boys in need of humanitarian assistance⁴². As COVID-19 continues to strain health systems, the disproportionate impact felt by women and girls in humanitarian settings is evident.

In Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, the State of Palestine, the Syrian Arab Republic, and Yemen, the pandemic has exposed gaps in services targeting women's protection, livelihood, leadership and participation. Data show persistent underfunding to initiatives for GBV prevention and response, despite reports of heightened prevalence in the region's conflict-affected countries.⁴³ Where ongoing conflict has already restrained women's economic opportunities and livelihoods, research indicates the pandemic is exacerbating these vulnerabilities.

Results from a flash survey conducted by UN Women in Libya indicate that 52 per cent of women have seen their work affected by the COVID-19 crisis, while 26 per cent foresee an impact on their livelihoods if the lockdown is extended.⁴⁴

Containment measures are also depriving women of public participation and freedom of movement, restricting their access to public space and services. This is compounded by reports of women's rights and women-led organizations and leaders not being included in decision-making around the humanitarian response to COVID-19, or receiving their fair share of funding.⁴⁵

UN WOMEN'S RESPONSE IN THE ARAB STATES

During 2020, UN Women in the Arab States fulfilled its humanitarian role in the region by:

1. Providing co-ordination, leadership and technical expertise on gender issues to humanitarian partners.
2. Promoting the voices, agency and capacity of women's civil society organizations in COVID-19-related humanitarian efforts.
3. Supporting resilience programmes that respond to women's economic livelihoods and protection needs.

PROVIDING CO-ORDINATION, LEADERSHIP AND TECHNICAL EXPERTISE ON GENDER ISSUES:

Prior to COVID-19, UN Women participated in national and regional-level humanitarian structures, including as an active partner of the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP) in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon. UN Women also plays a lead role in Gender in Humanitarian Action (GiHA) coordination groups in Jordan, Lebanon, the State of Palestine and Yemen. In 2020, engagement in these forums assumed greater importance as humanitarian partners relied on UN Women to provide urgent analysis on the pandemic's gender dimensions, technical assistance on gender mainstreaming, and scaled-up support to women's organizations on the frontlines.

REGIONAL

At the pandemic's onset, UN Women established the regional GiHA Working Group, co-chaired with OCHA and CARE to facilitate greater information sharing during the crisis, streamlined advocacy, and multi-sectoral coordination to strengthen the integration of gender perspectives into response, recovery and resilience building measures. With additional representation from UNDP, UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, WHO, IRC, Mercy Corps, OXFAM and TearFund, the Working Group rapidly undertook joint advocacy and sharing of gender analysis to ensure the needs and rights of women and girls were addressed in the collective humanitarian response to COVID-19.

THE STATE OF PALESTINE

UN Women was quick to second a gender expert to the GiHA coordination mechanism to support gender mainstreaming in COVID-19 preparedness and response. Additional technical expertise resulted in stronger inclusion of gender perspectives into the Humanitarian Needs Overview and increased attention to gender-related needs in each of the main sectors (or 'clusters') of humanitarian action. Capacity building was also a key focus of this technical support, with online trainings on the IASC Gender and Age Marker provided to 170 UN and INGO staff.

LEBANON

UN Women strengthened linkages between humanitarian and COVID-19 coordination bodies. In recognition of its leadership on gender issues, UN Women was the partner of choice to represent WHO in the coordination forums on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA), sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), migrants, refugees, and gender. As a result, UN humanitarian coordination structures benefitted from updated information on the pandemic's trends and policy responses and UN Women was able to increase the number of gender-responsive initiatives. This included ensuring all information materials were gender-sensitive and translated into migrant languages, and SGBV hotline leaflets were distributed with

SGBV hotline leaflets were distributed with COVID-19 hygiene kits.

JORDAN

UN Women assumed Co-Chair responsibilities of two coordination bodies in 2020: the Sector Gender Focal Points Network (with UNHCR) and the Localization Task Team (with the Jordan INGO Forum). In this role, UN Women encouraged humanitarian partners to assess and respond to the needs of women and girls and promoted programming approaches that consider how gender interacts with other drivers of inequality (such as age, ethnicity, disability, poverty level, geographic location and migration or refugee status) to influence health outcomes. Through capacity-building opportunities and [technical guidance](#) UN Women supported humanitarian structures to gain a more nuanced understanding of the impacts of COVID-19 on refugee and host communities.

REGIONAL

As an active partner in the WHO-led COVID-19 Crisis Management Group, UN Women led interagency efforts to ensure risk communication messages reach women and girls across the Arab States. UN Women inputs into [UN guidelines](#) on risk communication and community engagement ensured a strong focus on how to reach and connect with the most vulnerable and marginalized women and girls, including internally-displaced, migrant, refugee, pregnant, and lactating women as well as women and girls with disabilities and women in conflict zones.

ACHIEVEMENT IN NUMBERS:

17 national and regional humanitarian coordination structures and forums benefitted from UN Women strategic guidance, technical support and policy advice in 2020.

PROMOTING THE VOICES, AGENCY AND CAPACITY OF WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS:

Across the region's conflict-affected countries, UN Women is working to ensure that the most affected and at-risk women and girls play their fullest role in the response to COVID-19 and are protected from its impacts. In the Arab States, UN Women is uniquely situated to drive these efforts given its existing funding support to CSOs for their work on women, peace and security.⁴⁶

REGIONAL

With access to funding scarce for women's organizations in humanitarian settings, UN Women worked to close this gap in the Arab Region, including through the [Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund \(WPHF\)](#) and the Leadership, Empowerment, Access and Protection (LEAP) portfolio. Under the COVID-19 Emergency Response Window of the WPHF, urgent programmatic and institutional funding approaching \$1 million has been provided to support women's organizations in Jordan, the State of Palestine and Yemen. In 2020, UN Women adapted its LEAP activities in Egypt, Iraq and Jordan to increase programme outreach, for example by using social media and safe spaces to reach more women and women's organizations with UN-Women supported cash for work interventions and small grants assistance.

REGIONAL

Leveraging the reach of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, UN Women brought together 91 women's organizations from Iraq, Libya, the State of Palestine, the Syrian Arab Republic, and Yemen to issue a [joint statement to call for a ceasefire](#) in the face of COVID-19, joining a [global appeal issued by UN Secretary-General](#) at the outset of the pandemic. Reported in the regional and international press, the statement kept a spotlight on the region's conflicts as well as women's crucial role in peacemaking and humanitarian efforts.

THE STATE OF PALESTINE

With UN Women support, more than 30 women organizations in Gaza and the West Bank created a virtual platform at crisis onset to provide a space for information sharing and to amplify the voices of women in humanitarian and COVID-19 processes. Through its coordination and convening role, UN Women facilitated meetings between this platform of women leaders and women's organizations and the Prime Minister's Office, the head of the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, and the Ministry of Women's Affairs. Outcomes from these discussions in 2020 helped to ensure women's and girls' needs were better addressed in national COVID-19 response planning, including data generation and analysis.

LIBYA

UN Women support to the Libyan Women's Network for Peacebuilding ensured they could rapidly adapt operations and increase access to Libya's most vulnerable men, women, girls and boys in hard-to-reach areas. Utilizing new digital and radio platforms, the Network was able to disseminate accurate information about COVID-19 and share hotline numbers for those experiencing violence. The Network also scaled-up its online activism in response to the pandemic using What's App and social media pages to ensure women's voices continued to be heard at various levels in both peacebuilding and COVID-19 efforts.

RESILIENCE PROGRAMMING THAT RESPONDS TO WOMEN'S ECONOMIC LIVELIHOODS AND PROTECTION:

The lack of integrating gender perspectives into resilience programming is a long-standing gap in the humanitarian system, and an area where UN Women has demonstrated value add. In 2020, UN Women in the Arab States prioritized support to programmes that strengthen resilience and women's economic participation and mitigate gender-based violence (GBV), with a strong emphasis on prevention efforts.

THE STATE OF PALESTINE

UN Women partnered with the Red Crescent Society for Gaza Strip (RCS4GS) and Roles for Social Change Association (ADWAR) to provide essential protection services and strengthen the economic resilience of marginalized women affected by COVID-19. With UN Women support, ADWAR is implementing unconditional cash assistance and cash for work in the West Bank, and RCS4G is providing essential protection services, including GBV case management, psychosocial support, legal counselling and court representation, health and reproductive health services, and referrals, coupled with unconditional cash assistance in the Gaza Strip.

IRAQ

The Directorate of Combating Violence Against Women partnered with UN Women to strengthen remote GBV service delivery in northern governorates with large internally displaced populations. Support to family protection teams and Directorate staff ensured the continuity of essential protection services for women and girls, including displaced survivors of violence.

REGIONAL

In 2020, UN Women leveraged its coordination mandate to support the adoption of new gender-responsive monitoring approaches across the UN system. Partnering with FAO, UN Women Regional Office developed a gender-sensitive resilience index to generate stronger evidence on the short and long-term factors critical for strengthening women's resilience to shocks and stressors. The tool also promotes accountability for performance on women's rights and gender equality within the UN and beyond. Piloted with humanitarian partners in Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, the State of Palestine and Yemen, this monitoring approach helped to ensure women's needs were met within resilience programming during 2020. Initial findings suggest that UN Women's gender-sensitive resilience index will provide clear indications on the types of investments and combination of strategies needed to strengthen women's resilience during COVID-19 and beyond.

ACHIEVEMENT IN NUMBERS:

1,426 women and girls affected by conflict benefitting from immediate and essential services in 2020 through UN Women-supported programmes and partners.



STRONG PARTNERSHIPS FOR FASTER ACTION

UN WOMEN VALUE ADD IN UN HUMANITARIAN STRUCTURES

TECHNICAL SUPPORT TO REGIONAL HUMANITARIAN PARTNERS

In January 2021, UN Women Regional Office undertook an assessment with key humanitarian partners (IFRC, FAO, UNDP, UNICEF, WFP, WHO) to understand their commitment to integrating gender perspectives in COVID-19 programmes, identify challenges, and measure the perceived level of UN Women influence on interagency coordination structures.

The results of the assessment indicate a marked increase in partner efforts to mainstream gender into their COVID-19 related work with respondents highlighting UN Women's value add through its coordination role and technical expertise. Partners benefitted from UN Women policy briefs and guidance notes on the gendered impacts of COVID-19 in every sphere, from health to the economy, security to social protection. For example, programme design was frequently informed by UN Women's timely generation and dissemination of gender analysis and data.

Humanitarian partners also noted the positive impact of continued advocacy by UN Women, both publicly and at interagency meetings, to put women and girls at the centre of the COVID-19 response.

GENDER IN HUMANITARIAN ACTION (GIHA) COORDINATION GROUPS

As one of the Co-Chairs and Secretariat of the Gender in Humanitarian Action (GiHA) Reference Group, UN Women has a leadership role in the IASC's global community of practice on gender equality and women's empowerment. In the Arab States, UN Women serves as Co-Chair of five GiHA Coordination Groups and is an active member of all others where it has a presence. Since the onset of the pandemic, there has been increased demand for UN Women to leverage its coordination role and gender expertise to ensure the distinct needs of women, girls, boys and men are taken into account during COVID-19. UN Women regional and country offices responded, even though partners' needs have grown exponentially during the crisis and are outpacing available funding.

During 2020, UN Women collated and shared emerging data on the gender impacts of the pandemic with its humanitarian partners. Gender experts were seconded to coordination groups in Lebanon and the State of Palestine where timely access to expertise was critical for mainstreaming gender into humanitarian plans. UN Women continued to invest in its partnerships, offering sister UN agencies and INGOs a variety of practical and transferable tools to strengthen the integration of gender equality programming in cluster, sector-wide humanitarian action.

Finally, UN Women developed new monitoring tools such as the gender-sensitive resilience index to promote accountability for system-wide work on gender equality and the empowerment of women.

REGIONAL REFUGEE AND RESILIENCE PLAN (3RP) AND WHO CRISIS-MANAGEMENT GROUP

At the onset of the pandemic UN Women responded swiftly to partner requests for support as an active member of regional COVID-19 coordination structures including the 3RP, the WHO Crisis-Management Group and Humanitarian Country Teams.

Through these structures, UN Women leveraged its normative, coordination and operational mandate to help national and humanitarian partners better understand and address the gendered impacts of the pandemic. As a trusted source of normative and technical expertise, UN Women provided gender analysis, strategic guidance and policy advice throughout 2020. The participation of UN Women regional and country-level staff proved critical to ensuring that the needs of women and girls were addressed and prioritized during discussions and in the drafting of plans.

UN Women contributions led to visible gender mainstreaming in the COVID-19 Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan of the WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean and the 3RP Regional Needs Overview which provides deeper insights into the gender-specific needs and vulnerabilities of women and girls in refugee and host communities.

10 UN WOMEN PRIORITY FUNDING NEEDS IN THE ARAB STATES

For the period 2021 to 2022, UN Women regional, multi-country and country offices in the Arab States seek partners and donors to work with us to achieve the following:

ENSURE THE LONG-TERM RECOVERY FROM COVID-19 BENEFITS WOMEN AND GIRLS

The impacts of crises are never gender-neutral, and COVID-19 is no exception. As highlighted throughout this report, the pandemic has brought particular disadvantages for women and girls across Arab countries, compounding existing inequalities in a region ranked lowest in the world for achieving gender equality.⁴⁷ In light of these widening gender inequalities, it is critical that recovery efforts maintain a long-term perspective on how Arab States countries are making progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Here, UN Women has a central role in contributing to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in the Arab States through its unique gender equality focused mandate that is fully aligned with both Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 and gender as a crosscutting priority. In COVID-19 response and recovery, UN Women has the mandate, technical expertise and comparative advantage to ensure accountability for SDG 5 and to support UN and Member States efforts to build back better for women and girls.

CLOSE THE GENDER GAP IN AREAS OF COMPARATIVE ADVANTAGE

While the crisis risks derailing progress towards achieving the SDGs aimed at gender equality and empowerment of women and girls, the pandemic is also affirming the critical role and potential of women in

Arab societies. COVID-19 recovery provides a unique opportunity to close the gender gap in areas such as labour force participation, unpaid care provision, political decision-making, peace negotiations and humanitarian action.

However, we cannot close the gender gap without first closing the data gap. UN Women initiatives across the region, including the [Women Count](#) program, are working to fill data gaps and to have data used more systematically by countries but incomplete or missing data persists on some of the most pressing issues such as women's unpaid labour, gender-based violence in humanitarian settings, and social protection coverage.

A regional champion for women and girls across the Arab States, UN Women has a reputation for expertise in these and other thematic and policy areas outlined in this report. Leveraging areas of comparative advantage, UN Women's key priorities for COVID-19 recovery and beyond in the Arab region are:

1. Ending gender-based violence.
2. Women's economic empowerment.
3. Advancing the women, peace and security agenda.
4. Gender-responsive governance, women's leadership and political participation.
5. Advancing gender equality across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus.

Across these priority areas, UN Women is strategically positioned to support policymakers, the UN system, civil society, communities and grassroots women's organizations to build back a more gender-equal, inclusive and sustainable economy, and a more resilient society that leaves no woman or girl behind. But UN Women needs the resources to do it.

CLOSE THE GENDER EQUALITY FUNDING GAP IN THE REGION

In 2020, the focus of many development cooperation programmes on gender equality shifted toward supporting beneficiaries to adapt and respond to the immediate effects of the pandemic. It is expected that Official Development Assistance (ODA) to the Arab region will decline as a result of the crisis. At the same time, there is overwhelming support from donor countries to continue financing efforts dedicated to advancing gender equality and women's empowerment in the Arab States. As the UN organization dedicated to gender equality and women's empowerment, UN Women is well positioned to be the partner of choice.

Thanks to the generosity and flexibility of donors in 2020, UN Women was able to ensure continuity of programmes in the Arab States, sustain operations and support to government partners, and positively

impact the lives of women and girls across the region. Despite willingness to adapt funding flows and a strong commitment from existing donors to UN Women's region-wide response to COVID-19, the pace and level of contributions have not kept up with growing needs.

UN Women in the Arab States urgently seeks additional resources to support gender equality priorities during COVID-19, estimated at USD 70 million per year for the period 2021 - 2025. This includes region-wide support, direct assistance to nine countries where UN Women has a presence, and a further four countries where UN Women is a Non-Resident Agency.

Driven by its triple mandate and the need to be effective despite a large and persistent funding gap (that restricts UN Women's human resource capacity), UN Women has a proven track record in achieving results despite constrained funding and complex political environments.⁴⁸

The pandemic is likely to have severe consequences on the achievement of SDG 5 across the Arab States. Additional investment in UN Women over the 2021 - 2025 period will ensure SDG targets that reflect specific gender issues, including SDG 5 targets, are prioritized within COVID-19 response and recovery efforts.

PRIORITIZED TARGETS FOR UN WOMEN IN THE REGION INCLUDE:

- » SDG Target 5.2: Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation.
- » SDG Target 5.4: Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate.
- » SDG Target 5.5: Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life.
- » SDG Target 5.c: Adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels.
- » SDG Target 8.5: By 2030, achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value.

ENDNOTES

- 1 UN 2020b.
- 2 The Arab region scores 0.856 on the Gender Development Index, below the world average of 0.941.
- 3 UN Women 2020f.
- 4 UN Women 2020b.
- 5 UN Women 2020k.
- 6 UN Women 2020i.
- 7 UN Women 2020c.
- 8 UN Women 2020g.
- 9 UN Women and WHO 2020.
- 10 UN Women 2020h.
- 11 UN Women 2020d; Giammarinaro 2020..
- 12 Bandiera et al 2018; African Development Bank 2015.
- 13 OECD 2020.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 ILO 2020.
- 16 World Bank 2019.
- 17 UN Women 2021.
- 18 OECD 2020.
- 19 ESCWA and UN Women 2020.
- 20 UN Women 2020j.
- 21 UNESCO 2020.
- 22 Asia-Pacific Gender in Humanitarian Action Working Group 2020.
- 23 Fuhrman and Rhodes 2020.
- 24 UN 2020a.
- 25 Aghajanian and Page 2020.
- 26 UNDP and UN Women 2021.
- 27 Ibid.
- 28 UNDP 2020.
- 29 Bollag 2019; Arab Barometer 2019.
- 30 Wenham et al 2020; World Bank 2020.
- 31 Fuhrman and Rhodes 2020.
- 32 Ibid.
- 33 As evidenced through the extensive [COVID-19 section](#) on UN Women's [Women Count Data Hub](#).
- 34 WHO 2020.
- 35 Wehbe et al 2021.
- 36 ESCWA 2020b.
- 37 UN 2020a.
- 38 UN Women 2020a.
- 39 Egypt Today 2021.
- 40 OCHA 2020b.
- 41 Ibid.
- 42 AbiRafeh 2020.
- 43 OCHA 2020a; Clugston and Spearing 2020.
- 44 UN Women 2020e.
- 45 Fuhrman and Rhodes 2020.
- 46 A [2015 survey](#) of 317 civil society organizations in 71 countries (including Egypt, the State of Palestine, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Tunisia, Syrian Arab Republic, Yemen) managed by the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders, Cordaid, and the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security revealed that almost two-thirds (63 per cent) of civil society organizations receive support from UN Women for their work on women, peace and security. Approximately one in four organizations received support from UNDP (26 per cent) followed by OHCHR (18 per cent), UNFPA (16 per cent) and UNICEF (16 per cent).
- 47 UN Women 2017.
- 48 World Economic Forum 2019.

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