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monthly updates on gender issues in unrwa and the region

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update of the month

In various fields of operations UNRWA is assessing the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 and the gender section is working with the various teams on ensuring that gender is taken into account in these assessments. These assessments seek to examine the increase in aggressive behavior in the home affecting women and children, pauperization of vulnerable groups like women heading households, neglect of women and girls with disabilities, and female among the elderly.

stories from unrwa

Success stories from UNRWA field Office in Syria: Providing psychological support to vulnerable groups during COVID-19

The Relief and Social Services Programme (RSSP) established phone hotlines in all five Field offices to provide Palestine refugees with information on Agency services and social workers followed-up individual cases through phone calls and WhatsApp to provide health, hygiene and nutrition advice and to give support and information on emergency services. In Syria Field Office the RSSP team were using the hotlines and whatsapp groups to provide psycho-social support to vulnerable individuals. These are some of their success stories.

H. is a 30 years old woman with mild intellectual disability from the Hama camp. She received support from UNRWA, including support to enroll in sports (skiing and bocce) and participate in the Paralympic Games. During the COVID-19 pandemic, movement restrictions have affected H's ability to partake in activities and she feels isolated. Once UNRWA set up the support groups using social media, she joined one of them, and was able to discuss her family situation with others. She also got an offer to join a vocational training course that allowed her to connect with others and feel she can support her family in the future. Recently, she was able to get back to sports and won a competition with a financial reward that is supportive in these very difficult time.

R. is a 20-year-old woman with a hearing disability who lives in Husseiniyeh, a gathering 3 kilometers from Qabr Essit refugee camp in rural Damascus. Her parents wanted her to get married but she does not want to. This is one of many topics discussed

in the WhatsApp group. Discussions involve various members of the support group, including persons with disabilities. The group shared their perspectives on the matter. They were supportive of her choice and her mother was also convinced.

N. is 70 years old from Latakia (Al Aedoon) camp, and a member of the elderly support group. An UNRWA social worker made a check-in and found that N was feeling lonely and isolated from her family. Her children stopped visiting her after she remarried after the death of their father. She received regular support calls from the social worker assigned to her area that monitored her appreciation of herself. An UNRWA social worker assigned to N area called her regularly and worked on building N self-confidence. Only a few weeks later, N began visiting a women programme center and taking part in community activities.

H. is 65 year-old and lives with his wife F, 60. They live alone in Homs as their children have all left the country. The social worker managing the support group contacted them by phone and through her assessment of their situation realized that H had several medical concerns which required regular monitoring. She found that H was feeling overwhelmed and unable to support her husband. She coordinated with the Health programme his access to his NCD treatment and a medical officer control visit. F coordinated with the UNRWA Health programme for access to his treatment, including scheduling a visit by a medical control officer. The officer continued her support to the couple and even visited them on Eid. For more information contact s.sahli@unrwa.org.



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inspiring story

The She Can initiative for stronger women and girls in Lebanon: Self-defense courses

With 220 women currently enrolled, the initiative launched by CARE International and UN Women "She Can" provides free self-defense classes as well as psychological support and referrals for women and girls to strengthen women's protection and empowerment in Lebanon. In Beirut's southern suburbs, the number of victims of sexual violence is alarming. With the objective to end violence against refugee and host-community women, the course has helped many of them to feel more confident and stronger: "these sessions have also changed the relationship I have with my husband. I learned how to voice my opinions, claim my rights and express my views. Before, I did not dare to oppose him", says Maha. Fatima, a mother of four, adds that if she had not taken these classes, she would have never been able to defend herself in a society in which a woman can never disclose such an incident. Finally, Faten Tibi, who is responsible for women's economic empowerment at UN Women, observes that "self-defense not only provides women with practical skills for self-protection, it increases women's sense of safety to deal with difficult situations". For more, click [here](#).

events of interest

Gender and Organizational Change: The International Training Center ILO is organizing an online course on gender at the organizational level from **28 September to 4 December 2020**. As greater representation of women in leadership roles and within organizations does not automatically translate with more equality, a change in organizational strategy is needed. The training aims at teaching different ways to include gender into management action plans in order to achieve long-term results and effective change. In this context, at the end of the course the participants will be able to learn change management tools and gender equality initiatives that organizations can integrate in their management strategy. Click [here](#) for more.



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UNRWA is a United Nations agency established by the General Assembly in 1949 and mandated to provide assistance and protection to some 5.6 million registered Palestine refugees. Its mission is to help Palestine refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, West Bank and the Gaza Strip achieve their full human development potential, pending a just and lasting solution to their plight. UNRWA services encompass education, health care, relief and social services, camp infrastructure and improvement, protection and microfinance.

regional news

Lebanon

Over half of the people displaced by the blast, approximately 150,000 people, were women and girls. With the restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the situation will increase the gender-based violence threat. During an emergency like this, the mechanisms women and girls could reach out to seek protection are often malfunctioning due to the crisis, so it is essential to make sure to address the physical and psychological needs of these women and girls who are often those most affected by these crises. More [here](#).

Egypt

A general decrease in underreported sexual assault cases has recently pushed the Egyptian government to submit a law that protects the identities of the women that sue for sexual harassment and assault. In line with the #MeToo movement that has recently started in Egypt over social media to speak up for women's rights, the newly approved bill automatically gives women that report sexual violence cases the right to anonymity. More [here](#).

reports & resources

Shelters for Women Survivors of Violence: Availability and Accessibility in the Arab Region

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Arab States Regional Office (ASRO) together with the Lebanese ABAAD Resource Centre for Gender Equality and Women Against Violence Europe (WAVE) have recently launched a snapshot that provides an overview on the availability and accessibility of shelters for survivors of gender-based violence in the Arab region, including the situation in UNRWA fields of operations. The study shows that despite the various initiatives that have been advanced by local authorities through the years, including legislation, policies and provision of shelters, there still exist many gaps in terms of capacity and financing of shelters for survivors of violence in the region. More [here](#).

Estimating the Cost of Child Marriage in the Arab Region: Background Paper on the Feasibility of Undertaking a Costing Study

In partnership with the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) Center for Women and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) have developed a study which examines the cost of child marriage in the Arab States, in addition of identifying the causes and consequences of child marriage in the region. Among these, besides increasing gender-based violence and exploitation, child marriage can lead to serious sexual and reproductive health consequences as well as girls' socio-economic exclusion. Moreover, the microdata available tracks child marriage also in UNRWA fields of operations, including Jordan, the State of Palestine and Syria. More [here](#).

facts of the month

A child born to a mother who can read is **50 per cent** more likely to survive past age five.

Globally, **over 750 million** women and girls alive today were married before their 18th birthday

For more information, please contact s.jelassi@unrwa.org