



For International Women's Day, UNRWA Relief and Social Services Program held a dialogue session for women leaders in Syria. © 2021 UNRWA photo

monthly updates on gender issues in unrwa and the region

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update of the month

On 8 March, UNRWA observed International Women's Day, for which this year's theme was 'Women in Leadership: Achieving an Equal Future in a COVID-19 World.' Activities carried out celebrated the crucial efforts by women and girls at the forefront of the battle against COVID-19, as frontline and health sector workers, scientists, doctors, teachers, camp officers, social workers, and caregivers - among others.

stories from unrwa

In his International Women's Day statement, Philippe Lazzarini, the UNRWA Commissioner-General (CG), thanked all female UNRWA staff for their invaluable contribution to the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. He recognized the frontline role that women continue to play as health sector workers, scientists, doctors, and caregivers in their communities.

To mark the Day, the CG met with UNRWA female staff from the Gaza Field Office to exchange with them on gender equality, gender parity in senior positions, inclusive work environments and women's representation in unions. Amal Abu Shawareb, the Associate Protection and Neutrality Officer at GFO, who attended the meeting, says that the women talked about challenges in reaching senior positions, including feeling discouraged by the patriarchal society in which they live and in which women are not accepted as leaders. Amal also says that the women brought up the need for more technical and academic training and capacity-building for female staff to enable them to reach senior positions more easily. They emphasized the need for UNRWA to advocate for change for certain laws to ensure that women's rights are preserved, especially regarding gender-based violence (GBV). Finally, the women highlighted the important responsibilities they have both at work and at home.

Manar Bsharat, the Community and Camp Services Officer in Jalazone Palestine Refugee Camp

For International Women's Day 2021, UNRWA released a [video](#) honouring female staff in the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The video features Manar Bsharat, the Community and Camp Services Officer in Jalazone Palestine refugee camp in the occupied West Bank. She is one of thousands of UNRWA

female staff who has made tremendous contributions to her community. The video highlights her and her team's efforts to keep refugees safe amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, through hygiene and sanitation, education, food assistance, psychosocial support services.

Field Office Activities

UNRWA Field Offices celebrated International Women's Day 2021 through a wide range of different activities. Social media posts were published highlighting success stories from female frontline staff during the COVID-19 pandemic, and awareness-raising sessions were organised in the community and in schools around the themes of GBV, women's rights in the different national jurisdictions, international women's rights, and women's health, amongst other topics. Psychological support as well as recreational activities were also organised for community members.

march celebrations

1 March: Zero Discrimination Day
8 March: International Women's Day
20 March: International Day of Happiness
21 March: International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination



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inspiring story

Take Five: "Women Should Lead the Conversation on Gender Equality"

Hayat Mirshad, a Lebanese feminist, human rights activist, and gender, communications and advocacy expert, co-founded the feminist collective FE-MALE in Lebanon and is a member of UN Women's Gender Innovation Agora. She started her career by volunteering at the Global Campaign for Equal Nationality Rights in Lebanon. In this interview, Hayat highlights the challenges linked to toxic masculinity in reaching gender equality in her country, and underlines the importance of overturning power dynamics through the media, education, laws, and parenting. Read more about her work [here](#).

events of interest

Gender Summit 2021, 14-16 April 2021, Munich (virtual)

This year's theme, 'Gender Equality, Diversity, Inclusion Post-Corona: Quo Vadis?', will bring international decision-makers, policy representatives, funders, scientists and scholars together to 'develop a more equal, inclusive, and sustainable vision of excellence in science.' Workshops will be organized around different topics, including diversity and inclusion, collection methods for gender data, intersectionality in research, gender stereotypes, and violence against women in girls. Learn more [here](#).

Generation Equality Forum, 29-31 March 2021, Mexico City (virtual)

The Generation Equality Forum is convened by UN Women and co-chaired by the governments of France and Mexico. It will bring civil society, governments, businesses, cities, parliaments, trade unions and other stakeholders together to discuss GBV, economic justice and rights, bodily autonomy and sexual and reproductive health and rights, feminist action for climate justice, technology and innovation for gender equality, and feminist movements and leadership. Find out more [here](#).

regional news

Palestine

On International Women's Day, Jamal Al-Khudari MP addressed the 80 per cent unemployment rate among Palestinian women, underlined women's double burden in society, and emphasized the importance of engaging Palestinian women in politics. Read more about this [here](#).

Lebanon

As noted by Human Rights Watch, the *Law to Criminalize Sexual Harassment and for Rehabilitation of Its Victims* passed in Lebanon in December 2020, 'notes that sexual harassment can occur through speech, actions, and electronic means,' and protect victims of sexual harassment from retaliation. However, the Law does not address prevention or monitoring mechanisms in regards to sexual harassment, and includes neither labor law reforms nor civil remedies for victims. Find out more [here](#).

reports & resources

Strengthening Gender Measures and Data in the COVID-19 Era: An Urgent Need for Change

In this brief, UN Women calls attention to the lack of available gender data, which 'impedes our ability to measure, preempt and respond' to the disproportionately negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women. The brief calls on the disaggregation of all COVID-19 data, the collection of standardized, comparable, and non-traditional gender data, the expansion of access and use of gender data, and the strengthening of data infrastructures. Read more [here](#).

Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate

In this re-published edition of her 1992 book, Leila Ahmed discusses women, sexuality and patriarchy in the ancient Arab world, the historical roots of Islam, and modern discourses on women. She addresses the idea that Islamic societies are inherently oppressive to women and discusses colonialism and patriarchy and its long-term effects on the Muslim world. Read more about her work [here](#).

facts of the month

As of 2021, there are 13 countries in which women hold 50 per cent or more of ministerial positions

In the MENA region, Lebanon currently has the largest share of women ministers at 31.6 per cent



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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 5.7 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.

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