



unrwa gender equality strategy
2016-2021:
annual implementation report
january-december 2020

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About UNRWA

UNRWA is a United Nations agency established by the General Assembly in 1949 and is mandated to provide assistance and protection to a population of some 5.7 million registered Palestine refugees. Its mission is to help Palestine refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip to achieve their full potential in human development, pending a just solution to their plight. UNRWA services encompass education, health care, relief and social services, camp infrastructure and improvement, microfinance and emergency assistance. UNRWA is funded almost entirely by voluntary contributions.

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Cover Photo: An UNRWA student at the Rimal Preparatory Girls' School "A" participate in a 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence campaign event in the occupied West Bank. © 2019 UNRWA Photo by Ibrahim Abu Usheiba

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chapter 1: background

The Agency's Gender Equality Strategy (GES) 2016-2021 is based on the Agency's 2007 Gender Equality Policy. It builds on the first Gender Mainstreaming Strategy 2008-2015 and is aligned with The Agency's Medium Term Strategy (MTS) 2016-2021. The GES adopts a 'dual-track' approach that focuses on creating mutually-reinforcing changes in the Agency's organization and programmes in order to achieve more inclusive and equitable services for Palestine refugee women, girls, men, and boys. To do this, the GES Theory of Change articulates four Drivers of Change:

- i. A strengthened gender architecture, to ensure that gender structures and coordinating mechanisms effectively provide technical inputs and facilitate gender mainstreaming activities;
- ii. A gender marker that effectively tracks the allocation and monitoring of financial resources for gender mainstreaming and ensures gender accountability;
- iii. Committed and supportive leadership, including senior and managerial staff, to enable changes in the The Agency's organizational culture and operations; and
- iv. Gender accountability, through the monitoring and evaluation of the Agency's gender mainstreaming activities.

To operationalize the GES 2016-2021 and measure the results of the Agency's gender mainstreaming efforts, time-bound Gender Action Plans were drafted in each field office. Following the formal adoption of the GES by the Executive Decision-Making Platform (EDMP) in late 2016, a 'kick-off' meeting chaired by the Deputy Commissioner-General was convened with all HQ Departments in February 2017, followed by a cascading series of presentations in all field offices and relevant parts of HQ. This report provides an overview of the work that has taken place through the different UNRWA programmes, departments and field offices to implement the GES in order to bring about a more gender inclusive organizational culture, as well as more inclusive service delivery with due consideration to the rights, needs, and experiences of Palestine refugee women, men, girls and boys.

mainstreaming gender in the COVID-19 response

This year, The Agency's activities have been disrupted by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Indeed, work became largely remote; training sessions, community-based activities and many services for Palestine refugees were taken online; and health centres and education facilities were closed down for a long period of time, following movement restrictions established by authorities in UNRWA fields of operation. In addition to the significant health risks the pandemic has imposed on everyone, COVID-19 has had a profound impact on women and girls in the region, including Palestine

refugees. Rapid socio-economic assessments undertaken by UNRWA showed that the pandemic has led to increased pressure, duties and responsibilities for women within the household, and increased rates of unemployment have led to increased tensions within the home.

From the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, UNRWA has adapted its service delivery to the pandemic context, and guidance was provided to fields and programmes on mainstreaming gender and gender-based violence (GBV) in their responses to the pandemic and its consequences. The guidance provided analysis of the differential impact of preventive measures on women, men, girls, and boys and detailed some of the vulnerable groups to be considered in service delivery, and specifically when implementing safe and accessible cash and food assistance programs.

In consideration of the reported increase in GBV occurrence and irritability, anxiety and distress created by forced coexistence, community closures, economic uncertainty and reduced family and community support, the guidance encouraged field teams to:

- Update the referral pathways and contacts of GBV focal points to ensure that GBV survivors have continued access to support; and
- Raise awareness on available remote GBV services amongst the Palestine refugee communities.

Because specific risks of cyber-violence have arisen amidst the pandemic, the guidance called for particular attention to girls in remote education, and highlighted the importance of disseminating information and providing support to children, their parents, and educational staff on the gendered risks and how to address them.

Finally, as 54 per cent of UNRWA staff is female, the guidance advised to take work-life conflicts and flexibility of work into account whenever possible in the work modalities established in response to the pandemic.

chapter 2: actions undertaken in support of the drivers of change

2.1. Gender Architecture

As required by the United Nations policy on gender equality, the main coordination mechanism for gender mainstreaming in UNRWA continues to be the Gender Task Force. It consists of 70 Gender Focal Points from the various programmes and field offices. Ordinarily, the Gender Focal Points would convene regularly at the field level and Agency-wide to coordinate gender mainstreaming activities and build capacities. In 2020, loss of staff and COVID-19 restrictions affected coordination mechanisms and capacity-building initiatives. Two meetings were organized remotely in the whole year at the Agency-wide level and focused on marking International Women's Day and including gender lenses in the COVID-19 response.

In terms of structure, the five fields of operation continue to have limited capacity to coordinate and provide support to the implementation of the field gender action plan. Both Gaza and Jordan Field Offices lost their dedicated gender officer because of lack of resources, leaving the Agency with no gender expert in all the fields of operation.

2.2. Gender marker

The GES has included the establishment of a Gender Marker as part of its four Drivers of Change, which is a tool to track and monitor resources for gender mainstreaming and is a requirement under the UN System-Wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-SWAP).

UNRWA marked its programme budget in 2018 and the marking showed that more than 58 per cent of the budget contributes to gender mainstreaming. In 2019, and after introducing a gender marker for projects, the Gender Section developed a training aimed at building staff capacity to use the Gender Marker. In 2020, UNRWA continued advocating for the use of the gender marker through the Projects Review Committee.

2.3. Leadership

UNRWA senior managers continued to support internally and externally the promotion of gender equality and its importance for the Agency's work. In 2020, UNRWA launched an initiative for an inclusive organizational culture that included the promotion of gender equality and gender parity. Under this initiative, a number of male and female senior managers convened three times to discuss ideas and possible pilot initiatives that will lead to the change in organizational culture. These initiatives were presented to the Management Committee in October 2020.

2.4. Accountability

To further enhance accountability on gender in the Agency, UNRWA has continued its endeavors to mainstream gender in its audit and evaluation functions. In particular, the Internal Audit Division continued the consultation with the gender focal point as part of an on-going risk assessment, in accordance with the audit methodology, and included the principle of gender mainstreaming in the 2021 work plan where applicable.

Specifically, in 2020, the Internal Audit Division conducted an audit of the protection audits in UNRWA and assessed the Protection Audit Methodology, including its gender-related elements. As part of the systematic periodic reporting, including reporting on gender-related observations, DIOS will also include in the 2020 annual report the implementation of the recommendation issued as part of the audit of mandatory training that "HRD HQA should ensure necessary measures are taken to make gender training mandatory to all staff as per ECOSOC resolution." The "Gender Based Awareness" mandatory e-learning course was included as part of the mandatory training for all UNRWA staff in July 2020.

Upon finalization of the upcoming potentially multi-year audit plan for 2022 onwards, the Internal Audit Division will consider incorporating a targeted gender-related engagement, for example an assessment of the implementation of The Agency's Gender Parity Action Plan.

The UNRWA Evaluation Division is also closely working with the Gender Section on ensuring the United Nations Evaluation Group Guidance on Integrating Human Rights and Gender Equality in Evaluations are considered during all phases of any evaluation. In 2020, the Evaluation Division ensured that gender was mainstreamed in the evaluations that were undertaken by the Agency. This led to meeting performance on the UN-SWAP evaluation indicator.

chapter three: progress on the implementation of the ges 2016-2021

3.1. Gender mainstreaming in organizational practice: UNRWA organizational culture and management are more gender-sensitive when representing both staff and community (Outcome 1)

In 2020 the Human Resources Department, the Ethics Office, and the Gender Section launched a new initiative aimed at safeguarding a work environment that is friendly and favourable for all staff, especially women. The initiative reinforces The Agency's commitment to achieve gender parity for senior positions. It also contributes to the Management Initiatives led by the Executive Office that pertain to specific human resources practices such as staff engagement, capacity development, staff care and team building, transparency, and accountability. It is also aligned with The Agency's commitment to address sexual harassment and prohibit sexual exploitation and abuse. As a first step in this process, the Human Resources Department undertook a perception survey among staff who left the Agency in 2018 and 2019 after noticing a high women attrition rate. A second step after a discussion with senior management was to establish a consultative group comprising directors and deputy directors to support various initiatives aimed at changing the organizational culture.

3.1.1 Gender parity

In December 2017, UNRWA adopted a Human Resources Action Plan on Gender Parity in line with the United Nations Secretary-General's system-wide Strategy on Gender Parity. The Action Plan is designed to support the Agency in achieving and maintaining gender parity at all levels through the following two-pronged approach:

- i. A series of special measures in recruitment procedures are being applied to ensure that more female candidates are considered for and appointed to senior positions; and
- ii. A more enabling environment, and an organizational culture that is more conducive to the career advancement of female staff, are continuously being reinforced.

As of 31 December 2020, the Agency's overall international and area staff was 54 per cent female and 46 per cent male, which is identical to 2019. When looking specifically at women in senior positions:

- 39 per cent female for International staff (P-5 to UG) in 2020, a slight increase compared to 36 per cent in 2019;
- 31 per cent female for Area staff (G16 and above) in 2020, a slight increase compared to 30 per cent in 2019.

The Department of Human Resources enacted the special measures for gender parity and is issuing score cards to each department showing baseline and targets yearly.

In 2020, UNRWA worked on various measures related to an enabling environment in support of accelerating gender parity. These measures were accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

In March 2020, UNRWA adopted its tele-working policy (International Personal Directive n. 403). On 19 March 2019, the Director of Human Resources sent out a message to all staff highlighting the role of managers in supporting their staff in the tele-commuting experience, including taking into account the balance between family responsibilities and work expectations.

On 31 March and under the "you matter initiative" the Director of Human Resources encouraged staff and managers not to send, respond to, or expect responses to emails after working hours and during week-ends.

UNRWA staff's Well-Being Programme organised a yoga session for women for International Women's Day. It also scaled up its support during the COVID-19 pandemic, offering support to staff and taking into account the increased stress generated by the pandemic on staff, and specifically on female staff, who are culturally expected to deal with family care burdens in addition to their professional responsibilities.

Fields cascaded well-being initiatives with Gaza's RSS department, conducting self-care and stress-management sessions for its staff, reaching a total of 19 women in 2020.

RSS in the WBFO also organized 'Staff-Care Sessions' for 160 staff members (63 women and 97 men), aimed at identifying the pressure staff are subjected to in emergency situations, providing staff with stress-management, creating an empowering work environment, and supporting the staff's psychological needs.

Best practice from Gaza Field Office:

During 64 ,2020 career development opportunities were given to female staff in different departments, including senior positions to build their capacity and ability to move their careers.

UNRWA field offices continued to work specifically on improving women access to senior positions. In 2020, in Gaza, departments actively provided opportunities to female staff members to further develop their leadership potential and compete for senior positions. During 2020, 64 development opportunities were given to female staff in different departments, including senior positions. Half of the Area Focal Points for food distribution throughout the COVID-19 response in Gaza were women, and Human Resources (HR)

female staff are members of various Field Committees. Gaza's Health Programme stands as an exemplary representation of gender parity, with half of the senior positions currently occupied by females. Work to achieve gender parity will continue in Gaza's Education, Relief and Social Services (RSS), Infrastructure and Camp Improvement (ICIP), Microfinance, and Management Information Systems (MIS) programmes.

3.1.2. Staff capacity and awareness

In 2020, capacity building activities were reduced and moved to remote modalities because of the pandemic. Capacity building continued to focus on addressing GBV, addressing sexual exploitation and abuse, and building minimal awareness of gender equality requirements.

In July, a mandatory gender awareness e-learning course for all UNRWA staff was launched. With the overall aim of building a more gender-sensitive organizational culture, the course seeks to inform staff on:

- i. What gender means and how to promote gender equality;
- ii. Gender mainstreaming, gender analysis and the practical strategies for integrating a gender perspective into UNRWA service delivery; and
- iii. The principal international standards on women's rights and gender equality.

By end of 2020 403 UNRWA staff completed Level 1; 3,368 completed Level 2; and 3,392 Level 3. These numbers significantly increased in early 2021, and as of 14 March 2021, the number of staff that have completed the course stands as 1,221 for Level 1; 8,650 for Level 2; and 9,367 for Level 3.

In Gaza, a total of 15 face-to-face and virtual training courses on women's rights and GBV were provided to 390 teachers (130 men and 260 women) in partnership with the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights. Although the COVID-19 restrictions and the lack of funding resulted in less opportunities for staff capacity-building, all staff members took part in a number of mandatory e-courses on sexual exploitation, GBV, harassment and abuse. Additionally, 327 staff members (165 men and 162 women) from RSS participated in e-learning courses on gender and GBV in Gaza, and the Health programme implemented a number of GBV training sessions for area management teams, shelter managers and deputies, and psychological counsellors. 56 midline managers (29 women and 27 men) are currently participating in the Leadership Across Borders Training Programme (LAB 2) in Gaza to develop the skills needed to become effective leaders within UNRWA.

Gaza's HR Department delivered training sessions to 173 UNRWA staff members (52 women and 121 men) from the five governorates on self-care and staff-care amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, including work/home balance, healthy relationships, and supporting colleagues.

In Lebanon, the Education Programme conducted GBV training for 48 school counsellors and the Protection Unit

provided GBV training for 5 clerical assistants. The Youth Unit trained 12 of their staff members on gendered barriers to employment and 18 staff members on gender equality and identification of GBV. RSS also trained 45 staff members on various topics related to GBV. Finally, 34 high-graded LFO staff, camp management and Chief Area Officers were trained on The Agency's Regulatory Framework, Obligations and Commitments in Relation to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Sexual Harassment.

The West Bank RSS's programme, "Promoting Gender Equity within UNRWA schools: Alternative Masculinities," has continued to build staff capacity on the promotion of gender equality and addressing GBV amongst Palestine refugee communities through a number of training sessions that targeted 1,502 UNRWA staff and focused on the roots of GBV as well as case-management. In 2020, the Crisis Intervention Unit (CIU) launched a Community-Wide Initiative benefitting 744 individuals, which trained a group of women on psychosocial aid, crisis-management and self-care.

Finally, the West Bank's Women Programme conducted a 'Gender Mainstreaming and Response in Emergency Management Training – COVID-19' in 8 camps, which trained 95 individuals on situation analysis, division of roles and responsibilities, standards and needs, and the importance of taking gender into account in crisis management.

In Syria, one virtual GBV training was conducted in 2020 for 7 female case managers and psychosocial support (PSS) counsellors.

3.1.3 Staff safety and security

To ensure staff safety amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, all UNRWA frontline staff was provided with PPE, including health and sanitation workers and all other staff providing direct services to Palestine refugees. In Syria, 435 health workers (57 per cent female) were provided with PPE, and there was an increase in deep cleaning and disinfection in health centres to reduce the risk of transmission for both staff and patients. In Jordan, 270 male and 410 female frontline staff were provided with masks, gloves, face shields, eye goggles, gowns and other PPEs, along with hygiene products and disinfectants.

GFO conducted training sessions for all school staff regarding COVID-19 health protocols, safety and security. GFO specifically considered female staff when making flexible work arrangements amidst COVID-19, giving women the opportunity to work from home to reduce exposure risks. Everyone was provided with personal protective equipment (PPE), and female staff members were encouraged to reach out to psychological counsellors and legal aid advisors when needed.

The Department of Security and Risk Management enhanced its outreach efforts to UNRWA staff after appointing an Internal Communications Consultant, with the objective of increasing awareness among staff on safety and security incidents,

including gender-based violence, such as sexual harassment, intimidation, and assault. In December 2020, the Department worked on issuing a message to all staff during the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence campaign, providing safety tips, steps to report GBV incidents, and information on available support to GBV survivors.

In Gaza, The UNRWA Department of Security and Risk Management conducted security trainings during 2020 – 100 per cent of female security staff members participated, and 35 per cent of participants outside of the security department were female staff members.

In Jordan, a Women Security Awareness training was delivered in July 2020, which was attended by a number of field staff members, including 7 internationally-recruited staff.

A Women Security Awareness training was also conducted in Syria for 50 female staff members during the first quarter of 2020. Unfortunately, due to COVID-19 restrictions, the training was suspended for the remainder of the year.

3.1.4 Monitoring and evaluation

UNRWA continued working on improving the inclusion of gender analysis and sex-disaggregated data in its planning. Discussions were held on possible improvement with different departments, and a dashboard with sex-disaggregated data will be developed for 2021.

In 2020, UNRWA reported on its performance under the UN system-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-SWAP 2.0). The Agency met or exceeded requirements for 10 of 17 performance indicators, an improvement over 2019, when only seven indicators met or exceeded requirements. This progress was made despite no additional resources being dedicated to gender equality. Performance against three indicators that missed requirements in 2019 improved, including Performance indicator 1 on “Strategic planning gender-related SDG results”, Performance indicator 2 on “Reporting on gender-related SDG results” and Performance indicator 14 on “Capacity assessment,” which were respectively upgraded to approaching, exceeding, and meeting requirements. Furthermore, Performance indicator 11 on “Gender Architecture” was assessed as meeting requirements, an improvement from approaching requirements in 2019. In their assessment of the Agency’s performance against the UN-SWAP 2.0 indicators, UN Women encouraged UNRWA to prioritize the implementation of Performance indicator 10 on “financial resource tracking”, the only indicator still classified as missing requirements, and the five indicators approaching requirements.

Field Offices continue to work on the inclusion of women’s and girls’ perspectives in their planning and monitoring processes. In Lebanon, the Protection Unit conducted a series of focus group discussions (FGDs) with 127 women to better understand the impact of the recent crisis on GBV, women and girls’ feelings of safety, and access to services. The results

of these FGDs will largely inform GBV programming in 2021.

Aware of the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 on Palestine refugees, UNRWA also undertook rapid socio-economic assessments in Jordan and Syria to assess the impact of the evolving context on Palestine refugees and their emerging vulnerabilities, and to inform the adjustments to be made in the Agency’s response. Gender perspectives were taken into account in both assessments, which identified structural challenges to the further inclusion of women’s and girls’ perspectives.

3.2. Gender mainstreaming in programmes: UNRWA programmes and service delivery are tailored to the needs and rights of women, men, girls and boys (Outcome 2)

3.2.1. addressing gender-based violence

Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, UNRWA has focused on continuing both gender-mainstreaming and addressing GBV. UNRWA staff pivoted to offer remote assistance, WhatsApp check-ins, and adapted referral pathways. All UNRWA fields of operation continued to identify and support survivors of GBV through hotlines and internal and external referrals. Coordination was reinforced with inter-agency mechanisms to ensure survivors could access external services. In 2020, UNRWA assisted 3,325 GBV survivors through services including mental health and psychosocial support, legal aid, case-management, medical care, and emergency cash assistance.

Best practices from the UNRWA Department of Health:

During 2020, a survey on GBV perception during the first months of the pandemic among staff and community was conducted at UNRWA health centres reaching out to 805 health staff members and 1,326 community members.

During 2020, an assessment for GBV services was conducted at UNRWA health centres to explore the perceptions of 805 health staff members and 1,326 community members towards GBV during the COVID-19 pandemic. Results indicated a perceived increase in the number of domestic violence cases, specifically towards women and children. Health staff perceived a particular increase in psychological and physical violence, as well as denial of resources. The community indicated they would be most likely to seek GBV help and assistance from UNRWA health staff or from NGOs in general.

In Gaza, the Health Department identified a total of 1,432 cases of GBV. 252 cases of GBV were identified through the hotlines established during the lockdown. 1,092 cases of GBV (psychological and physical violence, forced marriage, sexual abuse, rape) were identified and taken on by RSS legal counsellors. Support sessions were organised for women,

aimed at awareness-raising and at encouraging possible GBV survivors to seek psychological assistance, and a GBV Manual was created and shared with women by health counsellors. Finally, Facebook and WhatsApp groups were created as support forums for women to connect with each other during the pandemic.

In the West Bank, UNRWA case managers have contacted and checked up on GBV survivors with recent history of domestic violence since the beginning of the pandemic, and continued to deliver case-management to 303 women to provide them with different GBV services and resources, including awareness sessions and free legal consultations. The Women Programme staff communicated with 850 women during 2020 to follow-up on their situations and needs.

In Lebanon, a total of only 53 GBV survivors were assisted in 2020. The limited number of cases can be attributed to the general underreporting of GBV, amongst other factors. In fact, women and girls in FGDs reported that violence within the home is being normalized, and that they would be unlikely to report violence out of fear of retaliation, losing their children, economic restrictions, or the stigma attached to divorce. However, women did report an increase in domestic violence amidst the pandemic, with negative effects on children at home. In FGDs, women told UNRWA that male family members were expressing their helplessness, frustration, and inability to fulfil their responsibilities through violence. They also reported an increase in inter-sibling violence and an increase in control by their fathers and brothers, resulting in limited movements and surveillance.

Although the level of access to services varies between areas in Lebanon, there is a general lack of knowledge on UNRWA services amongst the refugee population and a lack of trust regarding the confidentiality of services provided inside the camps. Awareness-raising sessions on GBV and COVID-19 were conducted through WhatsApp for 1,344 women to strengthen resilience and increase knowledge on UNRWA services. In addition, remote awareness-raising sessions were organised for 399 men to discuss healthy and positive stress-management and prevent GBV.

In a rapid impact assessment conducted by UNRWA in Syria from April to July 2020, key informants (KIs) reported that domestic abuse had increased during the lockdown due to food insecurity, lack of livelihoods and restrictions of movement. The assessment also revealed that during the curfew period in Syria, GBV support requests increased. 3 per cent of surveyed households reported that a female in the household had encountered a type of violence, including verbal violence (90 per cent), abuse or neglect (21 per cent), burdening with additional domestic duties (17 per cent), physical violence (14 per cent) and deprivation of some rights (17 per cent). Although many protection mechanisms and crucial services were disrupted due to the pandemic, UNRWA social workers provided GBV survivors and other vulnerable groups with support through WhatsApp.¹

In May 2020, UN-Women conducted a study in Jordan to better understand the effects of COVID-19 on livelihoods, health and violence using a gendered perspective. The study used a patent for an innovative technique in which random Internet users could access the questionnaires without having to show their address, in an effort to protect women from being subjected to further violence.

Results

Women reported witnessing different types of violence, including general domestic violence, online violence, violence in camps, or rape. 25 per cent of respondents stated that women requested help for the violence they were subjected to. More than 50 per cent of respondents agreed that violence against women and girls (VAWG) had increased during the pandemic, and that this should be dealt with as a priority and as a national responsibility. However, there was also high agreement that women should tolerate the violence to help their families cope with the challenges of COVID-19.

3.2.2. Including men in pre-conception care (pcc) and family planning

UNRWA is committed to improving gender-sensitive health services and responding to the varying needs of women, men, boys and girls. As part of its efforts to enhance coverage and quality of maternal and child health services, a priority intervention for the Agency is to include men in pre-conception care (PCC) and family planning (FP).

In Gaza, 44 pre-conception sessions were arranged and conducted during the first quarter of 2020, which included 528 male and female participants. Unfortunately, due to COVID-19 restrictions, PCC services and consultations were only available over the phone for the remainder of the year.

In the West Bank, PCC and FP services were provided only to high-risk cases to minimise the number of patients visiting health centres. Despite the challenges encountered in 2020, 1,782 women are newly-enrolled in the West Bank's PCC services, and 21,192 women are actively using their family planning services.

3.2.3. Economic empowerment and leadership

During 2020, 9,865 women accessed loans through the Agency's Microfinance programme in four areas of operation (Gaza, West Bank, Jordan, and Syria), which represented 91 per cent of the 2020 target number for women. In comparison, during 2019, 16,052 women accessed loans through The Agency's Microfinance programme in these same areas, which represented 83 per cent of the target number for women. Although the percentage of women clients from the total portfolio increased from 2019 to 2020, the number

number of loans accessed by women declined by 38.5 per cent as a direct result of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, in an effort to support its clients during the pandemic, the Microfinance programme implemented a deferral of loan repayments for all of its clients without additional charges.

The field distribution of microfinance loans to women in 2020 was:

- 744 loans disbursed to women in Gaza;
- 1,980 loans disbursed to women in the West Bank;
- 3,865 loans disbursed to women in Jordan; and
- 3,276 loans disbursed to women in Syria.

In Lebanon, the loans provided to the Palestine refugees by the Microcredit and Community Support Program (MCSP) were suspended due to the degradation of the economic situation and to COVID-19. A review of the programme will be carried out in 2021.

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) has been identified as a crucial vehicle for achieving youth employment, social inclusion, resilience-building and long-term recovery and stability for communities. In 2020, 45 per cent of the 7,980 students enrolled in the eight UNRWA Vocational Training Centers (VTCs) were female. In 2020, 68.3 per cent of female VTC graduates from 2019 were employed, despite the negative impact of COVID-19 on the region's economy. To address the existing gendered division of labour, the TVET program continues to diversify and modernize its courses to facilitate higher female enrolment.

In 2020, GFO worked on a project aimed at providing around 100 Palestine refugee youth with TVET in the field of solar photovoltaic energy. This project offered equal opportunities for young women and men, with a special focus on empowering vulnerable women. Approximately 25 per cent of participating students were female. GFO's Women Programme Centres integrated 180 women into various vocational trainings. The Job Creation Programme in Gaza, however, is lagging behind because of the limited amount of lower and intermediate-skill employment opportunities for women. The Programme is committed to finding ways to alleviate this gap by prioritising mappings, needs assessments and project proposals.

In Lebanon, the Youth Unit-led Cash for Work (KFW) and the Innovation Labs Programme (GIL) were both impacted by COVID-19 and were taken online. Female participation in KFW reached 68.3 per cent during 2020: 575 female youth were provided with 40 days of employment, and 21 young women kept their jobs afterwards. The KFW programme also delivered 'Life in the Workplace' and 'Life Skills for Employability' training sessions, for which female participation reached 68.3 per cent and 71.5 per cent, respectively. The trainings included topics such as life skills, positive leadership, decision-making, teamwork, and the 'right to work' for Palestine refugees. Female

participation in GIL reached 63.25 per cent, providing young women with courses on social entrepreneurship and digital skills. Placement and Career Guidance (PCG) Assistants in all fields of operation, and employment centre in Lebanon, continue to promote female employment.

In the West Bank, 71.2 per cent of Vocational Training Centre (VTC) female graduates were employed in 2020. RSS continued to give priority to female-headed households in its two cash transfer programmes. The West Bank's CIU offered cash assistance to mothers of persons with disabilities, and in 2020, 529 women benefited from the CIU's cash assistance. Finally, in 2020, the Child and Family Protection Program (CFPP) delivered emergency cash assistance to 53 high-risk cases, including GBV survivors. The team is currently working on a feedback tool to monitor the efficiency of cash assistance in empowering GBV beneficiaries during COVID-19.

In a rapid COVID-19 impact assessment conducted in Syria, only 8 per cent of Palestine refugee households reported that a female family member was working, out of which 50 per cent stated that this woman's job had been affected by the pandemic. A key informant explained that because Palestine refugee women were mostly employed in health or education, and because of their domestic responsibilities, they were the most affected by COVID-19 preventative measures. A similar rapid impact assessment conducted in Jordan revealed that only 29 per cent of Palestine refugee households had women as main breadwinners. 75 per cent of these working women stated that their work would be disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, compared to only half for men. Of the respondents who stated that they had lost their job due to the pandemic, 84 per cent of women stated that they were not confident that they would be able to go back to the same activity, compared to 55 per cent for men. In another study² by UN-Women aimed at understanding the gendered effects of COVID-19 on livelihoods, health and violence in Jordan, evidence showed that women shoulder a bigger part of the pandemic's impact than men, as higher numbers of women expressed losing their jobs, being forced to take unpaid leave, or working remotely. Widowed or divorced women are particularly vulnerable.

3.2.4. Addressing school drop-out

In 2020, despite the COVID-19 pandemic, the cumulative drop-out rate showed Agency-wide improvement for elementary school and preparatory school students compared to 2019. This improvement may be linked to the decision for automatic grade level promotion, which may have motivated students to stay in school. However, this improvement was not shown for all students. Indeed, drop-out rates increased in Lebanon and Jordan for elementary school students for both boys and girls. For both male and female preparatory school students, the drop-out rate increased in Lebanon, and the drop-out rate increased Agency-wide for female preparatory school students.

Due to COVID-19, UNRWA schools and VTCs closed in all 5 UNRWA fields of operation in March 2020, and the Agency had to reconceptualise its overall Education in Emergency (EiE) approach to support learning continuity. The focus was on supporting learning remotely. However, a May 2020 phone-based survey conducted by UNRWA found that although 96 per cent of UNRWA students have at least one internet-capable device, only 57 per cent of them are able to use a smartphone on a daily basis. Minimal gender differences were found in smartphone use overall in younger children (grades 1 to 6), but they increased with age, with girls using smartphones more than boys on average, across all fields of operation. The Agency is aiming to conduct a survey directly with students in early 2021 to verify whether there may be any gender gaps in access to technology or remote learning which may affect students' educational outcomes. UNRWA is also currently reviewing results on key indicators such as dropout and grade repetition in 2020 to identify any trends of concern for boys and girls.

The start of the new 2020/21 school year continued to be uncertain regarding the possible modalities of learning (i.e. remote, face to face, or hybrid/blended) amidst the constantly-evolving context of COVID-19. In Jordan, the school year began with a blended learning modality and then moved to full remote learning. In Lebanon, the school year started using a hybrid/blended learning modality, with some shifts to fully remote. The West Bank followed the hybrid/blended model. Syria was the sole UNRWA field where students returned to full school-based, face-to-face learning. In Gaza, the school year started through remote learning, then shifted to the hybrid model, but eventually went back to being fully remote.

In order to support these different learning models, and with an emphasis on student self-learning during the course of the health pandemic, Education HQ and IMTD worked together to put in place an Agency-wide safe and accessible Self Learning Platform to support students in remote learning. In December, the system went into its next stage of development, with Field materials being uploaded for Education HQ review. This review is a key element of the design of the Self Learning Platform to ensure that all materials are in line with UN values, with a key focus on gender as a main component in the review criteria.

To ensure the equity and inclusivity of this new system, elements of accessibility for students with disabilities, privacy and security, and child safeguarding were integrated into the Platform.

It must be noted that the COVID-19 pandemic may impact girls' and boys' education differently. For girls, challenges may arise due to parental concerns surrounding their safety, or to social and economic difficulties leading girls to drop out from schools to assist in housework or be married early. In Lebanon, for example, women reported an increase in child marriages as a negative coping mechanism in the face of economic burden. Boys, on the other hand, may drop out from school to help support their family economically. A

rapid impact assessment conducted by UNRWA in Syria, for example, revealed that, due to challenges in covering basic needs, negative coping strategies such as child labour have emerged: 8 per cent of Palestine refugee households reported that children below 18 are working, with no relevant gender differences noted. Both boys and girls may face challenges in staying safe online, and both may have higher exposure risks to domestic violence.

Additionally, as part of its Agency-wide Human Rights Education and Conflict Resolution Programme, UNRWA focused on bullying prevention in schools. During the pandemic and the lockdown, children spent a lot of time at home using digital platforms, which has exposed them to a higher risk of cyber-bullying. In Gaza, Education staff participated in a virtual meeting discussing online safety in remote education. In Lebanon, girls reported an increase in online harassment and blackmailing through social media. At LFO, The Agency's Protection and Education departments developed a partnership with Dawaer, a local NGO that has supported bullying prevention in UNRWA schools since 2018. This partnership resulted in training sessions for youth on bullying and violence prevention, how to protect themselves online, ensure their privacy and other digital issues. A significant majority of the parents and students reached through these sessions were women and girls (2 fathers and 66 mothers, 59 boys and 89 girls).

3.2.5. Awareness of women's rights

Across the Agency, UNRWA continued to raise awareness on the rights of Palestine refugee women, girls, boys and men in various advocacy activities during International Women's Day. The theme for the 2020 campaign was "I am Generation Equality: Realizing Women's Rights" and supported women's demands for equal pay, healthcare benefits, an end to sexual harassment and violence, and their equal participation in political life. As it did for previous years, UNRWA integrated activities marking International Women's Day in all of its fields of operation. In Gaza, yoga sessions were organized for more than 90 women to acknowledge staff efforts and commitment, and to advocate for better general wellbeing. Gaza's Women Programme Centres organized activities including awareness-raising on civilian law, family law and women's rights which targeted 637 women, girls and men. Trainings and capacity-building activities were also organised in partnership with The Right to Play for education staff, including workshops to raise awareness on gender equality and gender mainstreaming.

From November to December 2020, UNRWA took part in the annual 16 Days of Activism against GBV. This year's theme was "Safety is Everyone's Right: Safety at Home, Safety at Work, Safety on the Streets, Safety Online and Safe Reporting." Across all five fields of operations, UNRWA organized more than 35 online and offline activities around this theme, including sessions on cyber-bullying in schools and educational videos on GBV.

In Gaza, activities were organised including awareness-raising seminars discussing gender stereotypes, child marriages, stigmatisation of GBV survivors and the impact of GBV on the community. Out of 1,350 that participated in GFO's campaign activities, 901 were female. The West Bank also participated in the 16 Days Campaign by displaying its work through a success story on GBV remote case-management and follow-up services during the COVID-19 pandemic. For the campaign, LFO made and distributed over 1000 cotton face-masks to women, with the GBV hotline number on the inside as well as the campaign hashtag 'Safety is Your Right' on the outside.

In Gaza, RSS legal counsellors also organized collective legal awareness-raising sessions as part of their GBV-prevention activities, which targeted 648 women and 31 men.

Throughout the year in Lebanon, The Agency's Legal Aid Unit organised awareness-raising sessions on family law in 12 refugee camps, which reached 195 women. Topics covered included women's rights and obligations related to divorce, custody rights, alimony rights, proof of paternity, travel bans and financial rights.

In the West Bank, Health Programme trainings were organised for 5 groups of Palestine refugee women in distress and 6 groups of girls to raise awareness on physical and psychological violence against women amidst the COVID-19 pandemic and to teach them about positive coping mechanisms.

chapter four: progress on the implementation of the ges 2016-2021

4.1. Lessons learned

The COVID-19 pandemic increased the vulnerability of women and girls as shown by the various assessments that were undertaken by fields and programmes. The various studies, assessments, and calls from different stakeholders helped in raising awareness among UNRWA middle managers and technical staff of the need to include gender lenses and address GBV in the COVID-19 response. This was supported by the call to report on gender mainstreaming and GBV made by senior management.

During the response to the pandemic, field offices have learned the importance of keeping in touch with women on the ground to effectively identify their needs and support them. Field offices have also identified the need to strengthen referral pathways between service providers, and the need to update and improve the dissemination of information on availability of services.

For GBV survivors in particular, field offices have identified the need to adopt a combination of remote and in-person services in order to reduce the impact of COVID-19 restrictions.

Finally, the COVID-19 pandemic, with its movement restrictions and confinement, created new risks for women, girls, and the most vulnerable. These were different from risks generated by conflict and natural disasters and needed new measures to respond and prevent GBV.

4.2. Challenges

Financial constraints and limited capacity continued to limit the capacity for gender mainstreaming in UNRWA services delivery in times of heightened needs. UNRWA continued to further mainstreaming processes in its service delivery and in organizational structures, with new initiatives on fostering an inclusive organizational culture, women's access to senior positions, or mainstreaming the response to GBV in the Health programme. The lack of technical expertise for an agency the size of UNRWA continues to be the major challenge for making a difference for Palestine refugees women, men, boys, and girls.

footnotes

1 UN Women. (2021) A Study on the Impact of COVID19 on Health, Violence Against Women and Economy in Jordan from a Gender Perspective, available at: <https://jordan.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2021/a-study-on-the-impact-of--covid19-on-health-vaw-and-economy-in-jordan-from-a-gender-perspective>

2 UN Women. (2021) A Study on the Impact of COVID19 on Health, Violence Against Women and Economy in Jordan from a Gender Perspective, available at: <https://jordan.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2021/a-study-on-the-impact-of--covid19-on-health-vaw-and-economy-in-jordan-from-a-gender-perspective>



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اللاجئين الفلسطينيين في الشرق الأدنى