Since the WHO declared that the COVID-19 outbreak is a pandemic, UNRWA areas of operations were affected as COVID-19 cases were detected and confinement measures established to circumvent the spread of the virus. UNRWA adapted its operations to provide essential services to Palestine refugees by shifting to emergency preparedness measures and protocols that will continue the provision of primary health care services, remote self-learning education, and cash assistance and the Gender Section is working on ensuring that gender is mainstreamed and GBV is addressed.

Ensuring gender lenses in the response to the COVID-19 pandemic

The UN Secretary General issues a policy brief that brings attention to the changes in women and girls’ lives in the face of COVID-19, and outlines priority measures to accompany both the immediate response and longer-term recovery efforts.

UNRWA also issued gender considerations to be taken into account in the Agency’s response to COVID-19. The recommendations include among others the need to:

- Review referral pathways to ensure that GBV survivors can access support and remote services and ensure that field-run hotlines have information and contacts for referrals and support.
- Ensure that vulnerable groups (women headed households, persons with disabilities and the elderly) are prioritized including other groups that are put at risk by the crisis.
- Ensure that distribution modalities are accessible and are not putting women and girls at risk of GBV.
- Dignity kits are to be included in aid distribution and made available in different structures that provide health care, including quarantine and triage centres.
- Provide information, and referral for reproductive health and GBV even if the focus is the response to COVID-19 in operating health care facilities.
- Education staff will pay specific attention to the participation of girls in the remote education modality, as they might not have an equal access to the internet or might find themselves involved in the house chores and neglect their education.
- Educators must to be aware of the risks of cyber-violence that are specific to girls and to boys and provide support and information to children and parents of both sexes.

Some of these recommendations are in place and specifically when it comes to response to GBV, all UNRWA fields of operations continued to identify and support survivors through hotlines and internal and external referrals. Coordination was reinforced with inter-agency mechanisms to ensure survivors can access external services. UNRWA frontline staff did not report a significant increase in the identification of GBV cases between January and March but reported an increase in the severity of the domestic violence and an increase in the case load in legal advice.
Women at the frontline of the global response to COVID-19: The COVID-19 pandemic is not just a health issue. It is a profound shock to our societies and economies, and women are at the heart of care and response efforts underway. As frontline responders women comprise the bulk of the world’s frontline health workers. With the novel coronavirus, women have played a central role. For example China, where 90 percent of the nurses and nearly half the doctors are female. Additionally, on the global political sphere, women leaders are doing a disproportionately great job at handling the pandemic. This is apparent in Taiwan, Germany and New Zealand’s response, all three places, all led by women, have received accolades for their impressive handling of the coronavirus pandemic.

**Inspiring story**

**Regional News**

“Barrier of love”: Dozens of Palestinian civilians deployed along rural roads in the West Bank to enforce coronavirus controls. The West Bank, which has been under near total lockdown for weeks, has 250 confirmed COVID-19 cases. Restrictions and chronic cash shortages faced by the Palestinian government, have hindered efforts to contain the virus. So, the Palestinian police have called on volunteers to help do the job. The Palestinian Interior Ministry has approved the scheme, calling it key to containment efforts. "We are trying to detect the virus as much as is possible with our limited means," said the volunteers. This entails villages with no COVID-19 cases to turn away residents from places that have recorded an outbreak. The volunteers by doing roadside monitoring are striving to protect the whole country from a full-scale epidemic.

**Reports & Resources**

**The impact of COVID-19 on women**

The UN Secretary-General published a policy brief on the impact of COVID-19 on women. The year 2020, marking the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action, was intended to be ground-breaking for gender equality. Instead, with the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, even the limited gains made in the past decades are at risk of being rolled back. The pandemic is deepening pre-existing inequalities, exposing vulnerabilities in social, political and economic systems which are in turn amplifying the impacts of the pandemic.

Across every sphere, from health to the economy, security to social protection, the impacts of COVID-19 are exacerbated for women and girls simply by virtue of their sex. This policy brief by the UN Secretary-General explores how women and girls’ lives are changing in the face of COVID-19, and outlines suggested priority measures to accompany both the immediate response and longer-term recovery efforts.

The policy brief emphasizes three cross-cutting priorities:

1. Ensure women’s equal representation in all covid-19 response planning and decision-making.
2. Drive transformative change for equality by addressing the care economy, paid and unpaid.
3. Target women and girls in all efforts to address the socio-economic impact of COVID-19.

**Events of Interest**

Webinar | “Build back better”: Shaping a gender-equitable post-COVID-19 world: International Gender Champions (IGC) is organizing the third webinar on 6 May 2020 at 3:00 p.m. (CET) on COVID-19 and gender equality. The outbreak will have seismic economic and social implications for millions of workers and their households. This webinar aims at presenting how we rebuild our societies, economies and public institutions to ensure that we leave no one behind. Participation is limited to the ICG network only. More [here](#).

Gender & Women’s Studies 2020 (GWS 2020) | Removing structural barriers to gender equality and women’s empowerment: GWS 2020 is an international conference, which will be held on 16-17 November 2020 in Singapore to derive inspiration from powerful women from around the globe while getting up to date on the latest research findings on Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment. New dates might be announced due to COVID-19 but GWD is still accepting abstract submissions. More [here](#).

**United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East**

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.

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

**Facts of the Month**

- **740 million** women globally work in the informal economy
- **Women spend 3x as many hours as men** in unpaid care and domestic work

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