



6 January 2020 – Almost one year has passed from the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic and consequent social restrictions measures adopted by government to limit the spread of the infection.

During these months, the world witnessed what has been called a ‘shadow pandemic’, namely the increased violence against women and girls, in particular domestic violence, as a consequence of measures taken to restrict movement and ensure social isolation. Restricted movement, isolation and stay-at-home measures to control the pandemic increased dramatically the chances of women and children’s exposure to violence. Family members spend more time in close contact and household stress intensifies; and the risk grows even greater when families also need to cope with potential economic or job losses. In the Eastern Mediterranean Region, evidence from countries indicates an increase in cases of violence of 50–60%, based on survivors’ calls to women’s organizations’ hotlines requesting help.

To discuss the pernicious impact of COVID-19 and the impact of subsequent lockdowns on violence against women and girls, and shed light on the responses of governments and civil society organizations, WHO together with United Nations sister agencies lead by UN ESCWA and UN Women developed a unified multisectoral policy brief on [Violence against Women and Girls and COVID-19 in the Arab Region](#)

(also published in

[Arabic](#)

). Other agencies contributing to this joint effort are Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, OHCHR, UNAIDS, United Nations Development Fund, United Nations Population Fund, UNICEF, UNODC, and World Food Programme.

The policy brief indicates that violence against women and girls increases during emergencies, including health emergencies and that, all too often, necessary and life-saving services for women and girls subjected to violence are not available or deemed non-essential in an overwhelmed health system. While providing important data and information on the impact of the pandemic on the increased risk of violence for women, the policy brief also reiterates the appeal of the United Nations Secretary-General in April 2020, urging all governments to make preventing and addressing violence against women a key part of their national COVID-19 response plans.

This document builds upon a previous multi-agency brief that explored the [Impact of COVID-19 on Gender Equality in the Arab Region](#)

, including health care, poverty and economic opportunities, food insecurity and malnutrition, access to information, and gender-based violence and the impact of COVID-19 in humanitarian settings.

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