

March 22, 2021

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in at least 119.2 million cases and over 2.6 million deaths worldwide¹. From decision-makers and doctors, to entrepreneurs and care providers, women have been at the forefront of the COVID-19 response. Despite their enormous contributions to mitigating the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, the crisis is threatening to erase decades of progress for women and girls. While men have been most affected in terms of fatalities, COVID-19 has exacerbated economic crises, care deficits and the 'shadow pandemic' of gender-based violence, with disproportionate impacts on women². Inequalities between groups of women based on race, disability, income, age and more have also been starkly apparent in both the spread and the impact of the virus.

Based on a unique database compiled by UNDP and UN Women, this factsheet provides an overview of the COVID-19 response so far of governments in the Arab States³ with a focus on measures aimed at addressing threats to gender equality across three key dimensions: the surge in violence against women and girls, the unprecedented increase in unpaid care work, and the economic insecurity caused by the large-scale loss of jobs, incomes and livelihoods. Overall, the region's gender response has been uneven across countries, and challenges have been compounded by low rates of testing and reporting, high levels of extreme poverty, ongoing regional conflicts and unmet COVID-19 funding needs⁴. Despite this, examples of innovative, gender-responsive measures continue to be implemented in a range of contexts.

BOX 1: COVID-19 GLOBAL GENDER RESPONSE TRACKER

Information in this factsheet is based on the [UNDP-UN Women COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker](#), which monitors policy measures enacted by national governments worldwide to tackle the COVID-19 crisis, and highlights responses that are gender-sensitive. In addition to policy measures, the tracker also monitors women's leadership and participation in COVID-19 task forces. Co-created by the two agencies, the tracker is coordinated by UNDP, with substantive leadership and technical contributions from UN Women. It is a living database with countries and measures being regularly added and updated⁵. Like all policy trackers, there may be gaps or biases due to a lack of available information, underreporting of measures being announced, overreporting of measures that have been suspended, or the lack of data on the gender components of existing measures. Overall, findings should be interpreted with caution. When considering the number of individual measures, for example, it is important to note that countries with few or no COVID-19-related measures may have pre-existing gender-sensitive policies in place that help mitigate the negative impact of the pandemic. Measures also vary significantly in scope. This factsheet therefore also provides information on the content of the measures, which should be considered alongside the aggregate totals. No attempt is made to rank countries, but there is great potential for countries to learn from one another to improve their policy responses for women and girls. More information about the classification of policies, the definition of gender-sensitive measures and the data collection and analysis process can be found in [the methodological note](#).

¹ As of 9am CEST on 19 March 2021. WHO Weekly Epidemiological Update. <https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/weekly-epidemiological-update---16-march-2021>

² UN Women. 2020. "From insights to action: gender equality in the wake of COVID-19." <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/09/gender-equality-in-the-wake-of-covid-19>; UNDP. 2020. "Gender Inequality and the COVID-19 Crisis: A Human Development Perspective." <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/gender-inequality-and-covid-19-crisis-human-development-perspective>

³ Arab states include countries that are members of the Arab League.

⁴ Karamouzian, M. and N. Madani. 2020. "COVID-19 response in the Middle East and North Africa: challenges and paths forward." *The Lancet*. 8(7), p. E886-E887.

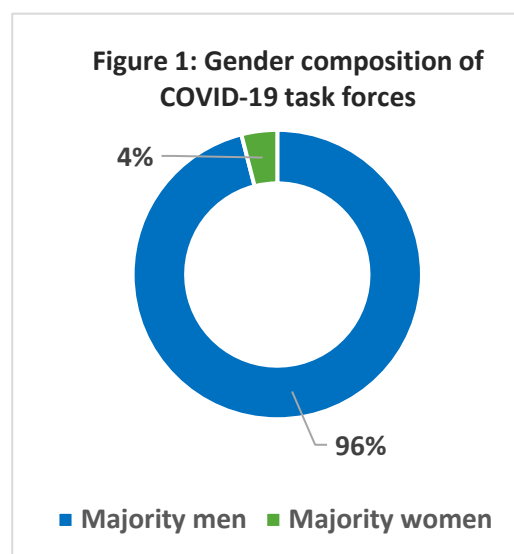
⁵ To provide information on national measures to be included in the UNDP-UN Women COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker please contact covid.gender.helpdesk@undp.org.

I. COVID-19 response planning and decision-making: where are the women?

In 2020, as the COVID-19 pandemic spread across the globe, countries rushed to create special governance and advisory mechanisms to help tackle a rapidly evolving health and socio-economic crisis in the midst of extreme uncertainty. To ensure an effective response under such circumstances, women's voices, needs and rights must be brought into pandemic response planning and decision-making. Their equal representation in COVID-19 task forces is a critical way to do so. Yet, while women have been at the forefront of fighting the pandemic—as educators, health workers and unpaid care providers—they have been relegated to the backseat when it comes to pandemic decision-making.

New data monitoring women's representation and leadership in 334 COVID-19 task forces across 187 countries, produced by UNDP and UN Women in partnership with the Gender Inequality Research Lab (GIRL) at the University of Pittsburgh, shows that women are significantly underrepresented in COVID-19 task forces. Of the 225 task forces with membership data globally, women make up less than a quarter (24 per cent) of members and are not represented at all on 12 per cent of all task forces (26 out of 225). Globally, there is gender parity in only 4.4 per cent of task forces (10 out of 225); while the overwhelming majority of task forces (84 per cent) are dominated by men.

For the Arab region, 33 taskforces are included in the tracker (See Annex I). Of the 23 task forces where membership data is available, women constitute 17 per cent of this membership which is lower than the global score and they are not represented at all in 9 per cent of them (2 committees). The overwhelming majority of taskforces (96 per cent) are dominated by men (Figure 1), except in one committee in Lebanon, where women constitute 58 per cent of the Vaccine National Coordinating Committee. There are no committees with gender parity⁶. Also noteworthy is the Technical Taskforce of Corona in Pregnancy in Lebanon. Although there are only 2 women out of 9 total members, it is one of the few task forces in the entire dataset that targets women's needs specifically⁷.



Women's exclusion from COVID-19 planning and decision-making leaves governments ill-equipped to respond effectively to the gendered social and economic fallout of the pandemic. For further details see the [Women's Participation and Leadership in COVID-19 Response Factsheet](#).

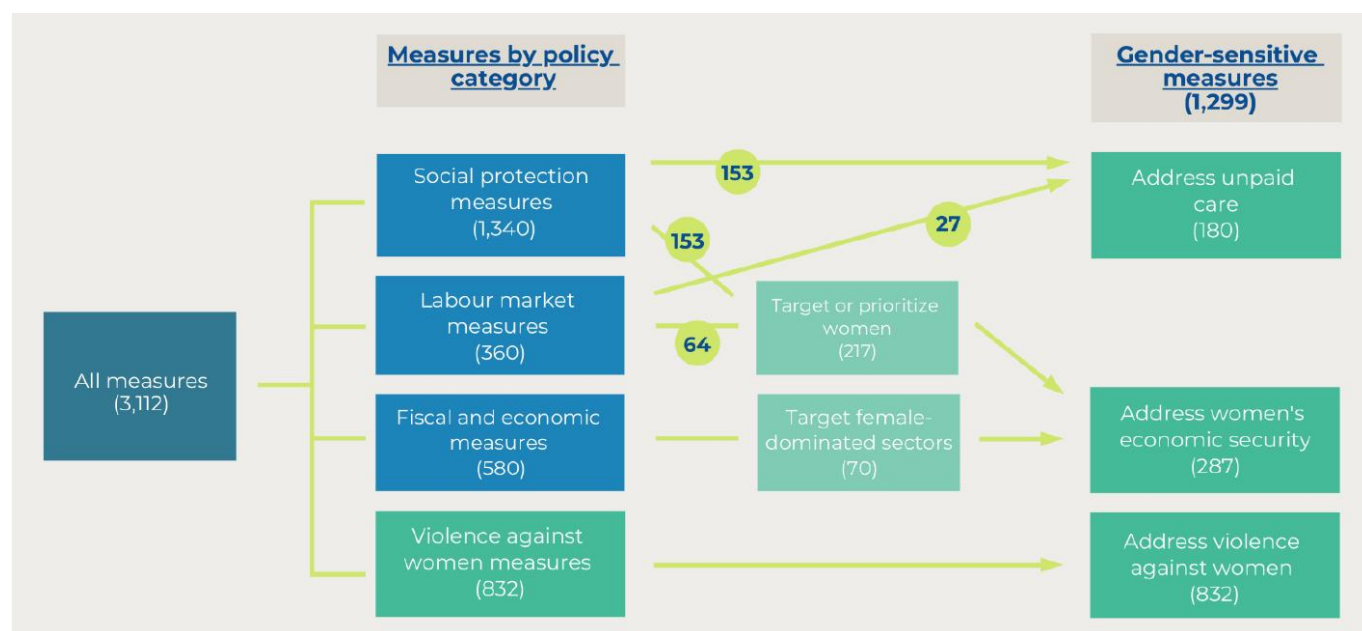
⁶ Parity is defined as 47-53% breakdown based on UN Secretary General definition. Majority men task forces are those with more than 53% men; majority women task forces are those with more than 53% women.

⁷ [https://moph.gov.lb/userfiles/files/HealthCareSystem/Mother%26ChildHealth/Protocols%20of%20the%20Treatment/Quick%20QA%20refer%20COVID-19%20for%20ObGyn%20%20%20%20%20April%207%2020%20-%20Eng%20\(1\).pdf](https://moph.gov.lb/userfiles/files/HealthCareSystem/Mother%26ChildHealth/Protocols%20of%20the%20Treatment/Quick%20QA%20refer%20COVID-19%20for%20ObGyn%20%20%20%20%20April%207%2020%20-%20Eng%20(1).pdf)

II. Policy response to the pandemic: how gender-sensitive is it?

The global tracker consists of a total of 3,112 measures taken in response to COVID-19 around the world. These measures fall into four main policy categories: social protection, labour markets, fiscal and economic policies and measures to address violence against women and girls (Figure 2). These measures were partly imported from other databases and partly collected by UNDP and UN Women ([see the methodological note](#)).

Figure 2: Structure of the COVID-19 gender policy response dataset



What is a gender-sensitive measure?

Gender-sensitive measures (1,299 in total) are a subset of all measures – those that seek to directly address the specific risks and challenges that women and girls face as a result of the pandemic, including:

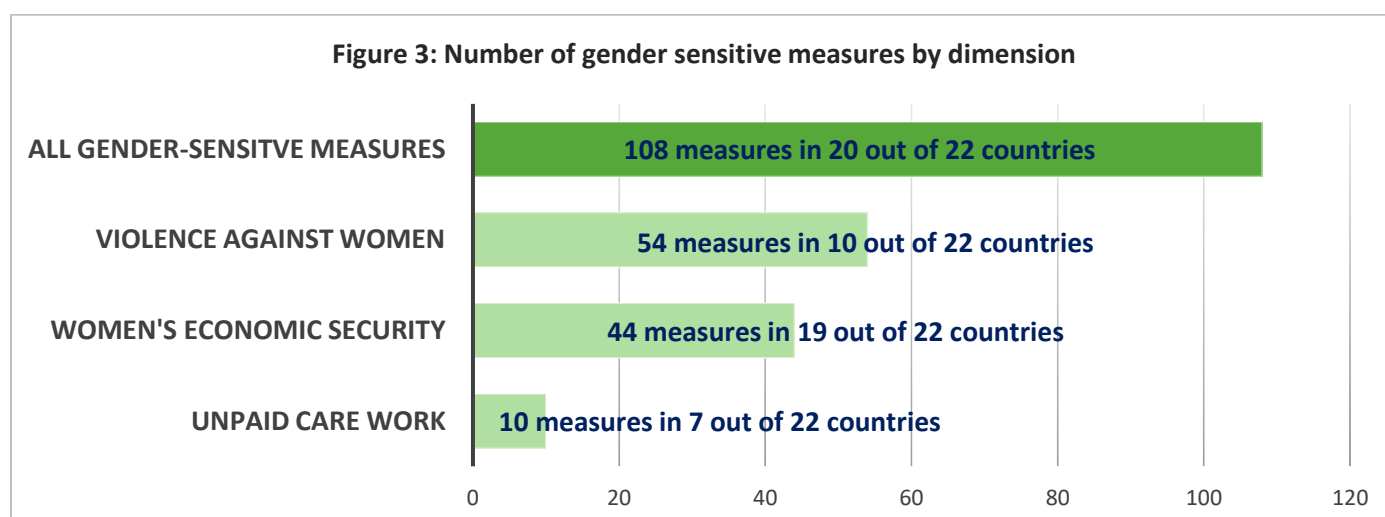
- All violence against women measures are categorized as gender-sensitive by default
- Social protection and labor market measures are defined as gender-sensitive if they target women's economic security or address unpaid care.
- Fiscal and economic measures are defined as gender-sensitive if they provide support to female-dominated sectors of the economy, on the assumption that this is likely to protect women's employment and thereby their economic security⁸.

⁸ Given the different data collection and analysis processes used for identifying violence against women measures, on the one hand, and women's economic security and unpaid care measures, on the other, the three areas are not strictly comparable. While women's economic security and unpaid care measures have been located within a broader universe of social protection, labour market, fiscal and economic measures, violence against women measures have no such point of reference.

The assessment is conducted based on the available information about policy design. An assessment of the implementation or gender impact of these measures is not included.

III. The regional picture

Across the Arab States Region, 20 countries out of the 22 analysed have taken a total of 108 gender-sensitive measures in response to COVID-19 (Figure 3, see Annex II for the full list). Echoing global trends, the highest number of gender sensitive measures in the region addresses violence against women (54 measures across 10 countries), followed by measures to ensure women's economic security (44 measures across 19 countries). Measures to address unpaid care work (10 measures across 7 countries) are much fewer in number.



Measures that target women's economic security and address unpaid care also make up only a fraction of the total social protection and labour market response, on the one hand, and the fiscal and economic response, on the other:

- In total, all 22 countries in the Arab States region have adopted 225 social protection and labour market measures in response to COVID-19. However, only 24 per cent of these measures (53) are gender-sensitive in 19 countries in that they strengthen women's economic security (43) or address unpaid care (10) (Figure 4).
- Similarly, 13 countries in the Arab States region have adopted 38 fiscal and economic measures to help businesses weather the crisis, but only one measure or 3 per cent of these measures aim to strengthen women's economic security by channeling resources to feminized sectors (Figure 5).

Figure 4: Proportion of gender-sensitive measures out of total social protection and labour market response

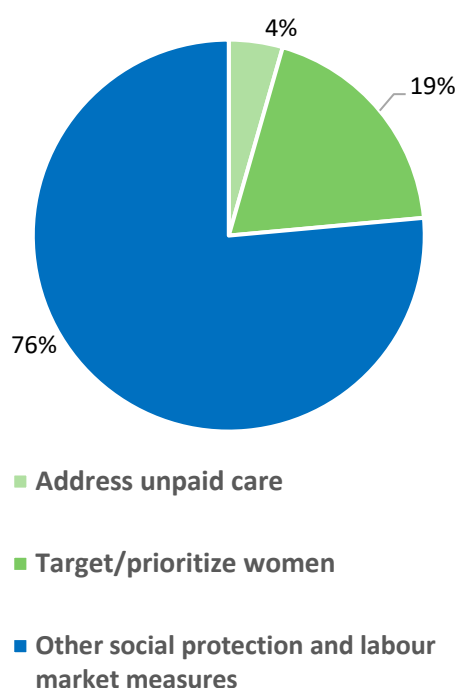
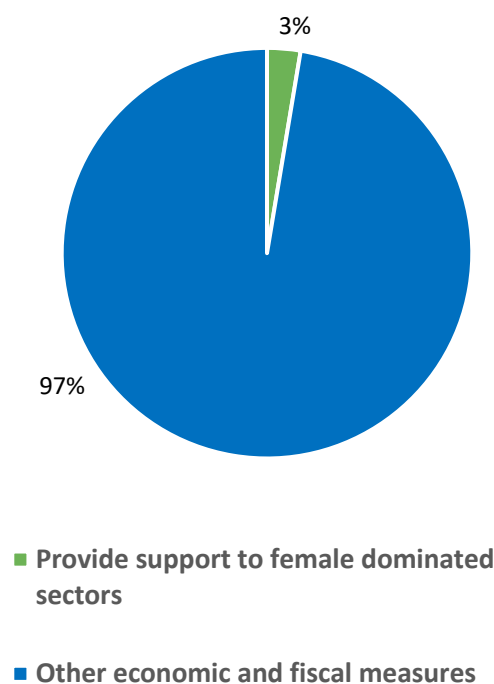


Figure 5: Proportion of gender-sensitive measures out of total fiscal and economic response



Overall, Egypt, Palestine, Jordan and Bahrain register a holistic response with at least one measure that spans each of the three dimensions (see Annex II). Countries with the highest number of gender-sensitive measures are Egypt, Palestine, Tunisia and Morocco. There are 2 out of 22 countries analyzed in the region that register no gender-sensitive measures in response to COVID-19 (Libya and Comoros).

BOX 2: THE TWO COUNTRIES WITH THE HIGHEST NUMBER OF MEASURES SPANNING THE THREE DIMENSIONS

For Egypt, the tracker records 48 measures taken by Egypt in response to COVID-19. Of these measures, 25 have been coded as gender sensitive. This includes nine measures targeting women's economic security, four measures addressing unpaid care work, and 12 measures responding to violence against women.

For Palestine, the tracker records 34 measures taken by Palestine in response to COVID-19. Of these measures, 19 have been coded as gender sensitive. This includes six measures targeting women's economic security, one measure addressing unpaid care work and 12 measures responding to violence against women.

COVID-19 GLOBAL GENDER RESPONSE TRACKER

Factsheet: Arab States Region

How is the Arab states region doing compared to other regions?

The gender response to the COVID-19 crisis varies widely across countries and regions, signalling differences in political commitment as well as fiscal and administrative capacity (Table 1). As a percentage of total gender-sensitive measures, the region has paid higher attention to women's economic security measures when compared to other regions which prioritized violence against women in the response (Figure 6).

Table 1: Number of gender sensitive measures by type and region

	Violence against women	Women's economic security	Unpaid care work	Gender sensitive measures
Central, Southern Asia and West Asia (excluding Arab countries)	101	33	7	141
Eastern Asia, South Eastern Asia and Oceania	97	20	18	135
Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand	279	36	113	428
Latin America and the Caribbean	208	92	27	327
Sub-Saharan Africa (excluding Arab countries)	93	62	5	160
The Arab Region	54	44	10	108
Total	832	287	180	1,229

Figure 6: Arab States priorities in the gender-sensitive response to Covid-19 compared to other regions (Percentage of each type of measure as a percentage of gender sensitive measures in each region)

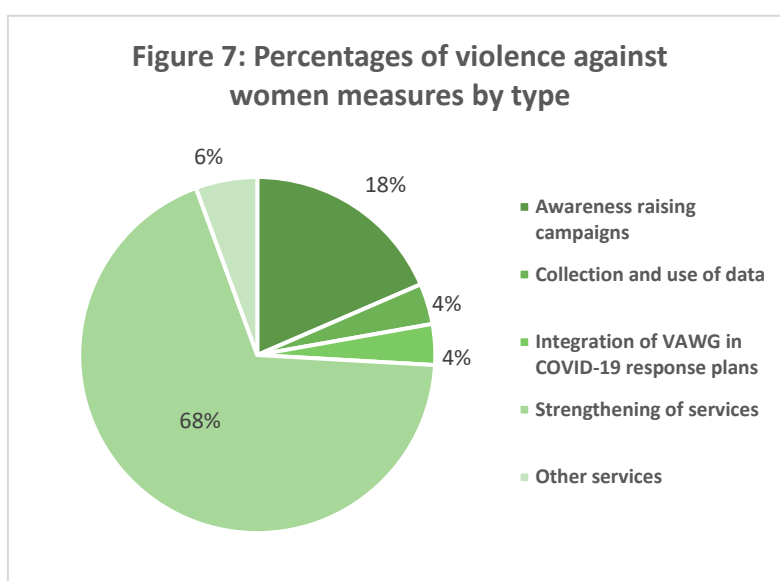


IV. Which gender policies are governments prioritizing?

Violence against women and girls (VAWG)

50 per cent of all gender-sensitive measures in the Arab States region (54 measures across 10 countries) focus on preventing and/or responding to violence against women and girls across different sub-measures (Figure 7). The countries that have taken such measures are Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine, Tunisia, Saudi Arabia and Syria.

Of all VAWG measures in the region, 68.5 per cent (37 in 10 countries) are aimed at strengthening services for survivors, including through hotlines and other reporting mechanisms (9 measures in 7 countries); expansion of shelters (8 measures in 6 countries); coordinated accessible services (8 in 5 countries) and police and judicial responses (7 measures in 4 countries), provision of psychological support (4 in 4 countries) and 1 measure that guarantees continuity of health sector support (Figure 8) For example:



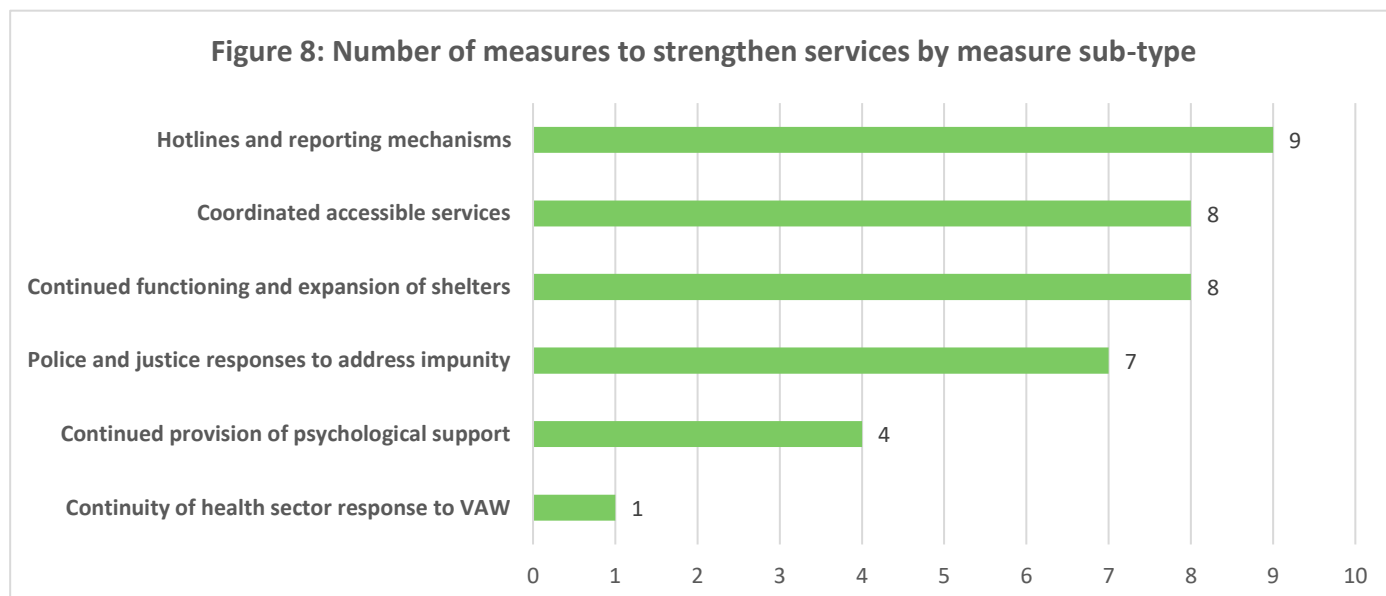
- In **Egypt**, a hotline was established at the Human Rights Department of the Ministry of Interior to provide a response to women survivors of violence. Additionally, a hotline was established at the National Secretariat of Mental Health to provide psychological support to people impacted by COVID-19. Other existing helplines and reporting mechanisms extended working hours. The National Council for Women has been promoting the essential service packages for any potential violence against women case since the start of the COVID-19 outbreak.

In **Jordan**, during the lockdown, an emergency response team, with female police officers at its core was formed and trained to respond to the crisis, including by conducting home visits to gender-based violence survivors in order to safely refer them to essential services, including psychosocial support. Police would also accompany survivors to the police station or court to ensure they could travel safely while movement restrictions were in place.

- In **Bahrain**, shelters remained open and functional and crisis centers established with school buildings and hotels repurposed for expanded capacity.
- In **Lebanon**, the National Commission for Lebanese Women, in cooperation with the Internal Security Forces (ISF), set up a new domestic violence hotline following a surge in domestic violence claims

reported since the beginning of the lockdown. The phone line, directly linked to the ISF's operations room, aims at facilitating a quick response to cases of domestic violence.

Figure 8: Number of measures to strengthen services by measure sub-type



The second most common type of VAW measures taken in the region (18.5% of all VAW measures) was awareness-raising and campaigns (10 measures in 8 countries). For example:

- In **Saudi Arabia**, the Family Affairs Council set up campaigns on social media to raise awareness on the threat of domestic violence.
- In **Tunisia**, for an ongoing campaign, the Ministry of Women's Affairs developed two videos: one is on prevention and response to VAW and the other is on changing masculine behaviors during confinement. There are also audio spots on the radio in Tunisia to increase awareness on services provided to women.

Only two countries in the region (**Egypt and Palestine**) have taken measures to improve the collection and use of data on violence against women in the COVID-19 context.

- In **Egypt**, the National Council for Women produced a policy paper entitled "Egypt's Rapid Response to Women's Situation during the COVID-19 Outbreak" that covers: a) impact on human endowment; b) women's voice and agency; c) impact on economic opportunities for women, and d) promoting data and knowledge. The paper also calls for additional measures to be taken in each of these areas.
- In **Palestine**, the Police's Family and Juvenile Department collected data on a monthly basis and compared them with the same period in the previous year to track trends in cases of VAWG.

Services to respond to and prevent VAWG must be treated as essential services and as an integral part of national and local COVID-19 response plans. However, according to the tracker, only two countries (**Morocco and Palestine**) in the region have taken this step. This is worrying, since the pandemic will have long-lasting consequences that increase the risk of violence for women and girls, and only commitments that are part of

government's sustained and long-term planning and policies can help to address these. The tracker registers no measures to address online violence in this region, which evidence shows has increased during the pandemic⁹, and very few measures to reach the most marginalized women.

10 countries

Have adopted measures to **strengthen services** for women survivors of violence

8 countries

Conducted **awareness raising campaigns** connected to violence against women

2 countries

Have integrated **VAW measures as essential in COVID-19 response plans**

2 countries

Have measures to **collect, analyze and use data on VAW** in the context of the pandemic

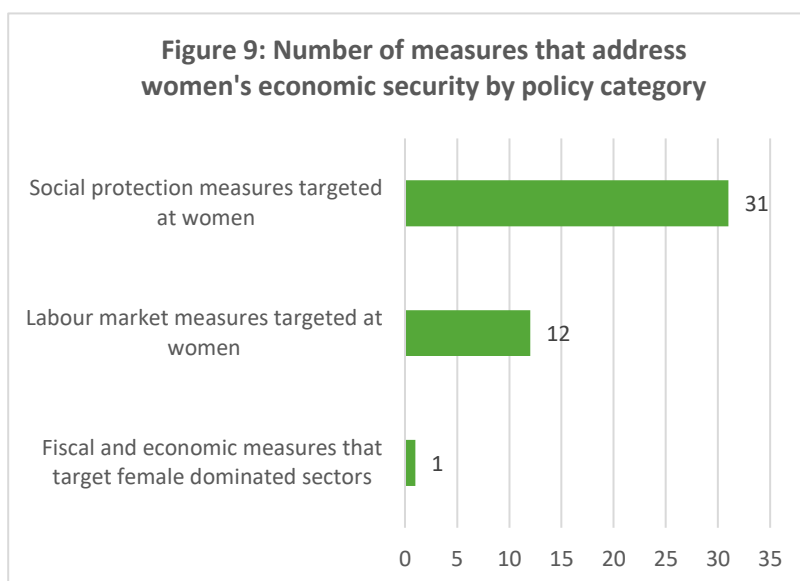
Women's economic security

Out of the 263 fiscal and economic, social protection and labour market measures registered for 22 countries in the Arab States region, 44 measures across 19 countries address women's economic security. Although these measures are widely adopted (i.e. undertaken in all the countries in the region with the exception of Libya, Iraq and Comoros), they amount to just 17 per cent of the total fiscal, economic, social protection and jobs response. The distribution of these measures is in figure 9.

Of the 44 measures, 31 fall under the **social protection** category, 23 of which are social assistance measures while 8 are social insurance measures. The main social assistance measures that Arab governments have used to strengthen women's economic security in the context of COVID-19 are cash transfers (11 measures in 9 countries) and food assistance or other forms of in-kind support (8 measures in 6 countries) that prioritize women as the main recipients. Other measures include utility, housing support or one-off cash support. For example:

⁹ United Nations, Violence against women and girls and COVID-19 in the Arab Region <https://arabstates.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/12/violence-against-women-and-girls-and-covid-19-in-the-arab-region#view>

- In **Somalia** the first ever cash transfers program in the country was launched. The Baxnano program (cost of 65 million USD) is intended to provide cash transfers to targeted poor and vulnerable households and establishes the key building blocks of a national shock-responsive safety net system. The program is anticipated to target 270,000 poor and vulnerable households (approximately 1.2 million individuals or 9.6 percent of the population) across the Federal Member States of Somalia and provide them with nutrition-linked cash transfer. The families will be able to use the money for their immediate needs, such as food and basic services. This program will be executed in areas of fragility due to widespread poverty, acute drought and long-drawn-out conflicts and insecurity. In an effort to address the gender gap, particularly in terms of access to income, women are the primary recipients of the transfers in eligible households.



- In **Sudan**, with help of international partners, the government has announced the Family Support Programme "Samarat" and a pilot was launched in several states. The programme aims to reduce the impact of economic reforms on low-income families by providing cash transfers and improving social protection systems and safety nets. It is expected that about 11.3 million people will benefit from the first phase of the project, which represents 33 per cent of the total number of beneficiaries of the programme. Where possible, a female member of each family will be the default recipient of the programme's benefits on behalf of the family, after appropriate verification. Although registration will be made by the head of the family (male in most cases, but the family will designate a woman as the recipient). Families will be encouraged to open joint bank accounts for both wives and husbands.
- In **Djibouti**, tax measures initiated by the Ministry of Women and Family have been approved by the Ministry of Budget. The measures consist of reducing the tax rate on sanitary pads (from 33% to 0%), baby nappies and infant formula (from 33% to 10%) which are historic measures.

Of the 44 measures, another 12 measures in six countries aim to address women's economic security through **labour market** measures.

- In **Morocco**, the Ministry of Tourism, Handicrafts, Air Transport and Social Economy has introduced a certification system for cooperatives to produce 30,000 reusable masks per day. Some 15 cooperatives have been certified with a total of 103 members, 100 per cent of whom are women.

- In **Palestine**, the Palestine Monetary Authority launched a low-cost financing programme, “*Istidama*”, to support the sustainability of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), including women-run SMEs, with a total value of USD 3 million to address the economic consequences of COVID-19.
- In **Syria**, the cabinet adopted the plan of the Ministry of Agriculture to enhance agricultural production as part of the pandemic response. 1.5 billion pounds was allocated to expand rural women's development projects and provide the local market with agricultural products under the existing conditions in addition to a decision to import 1,000 agricultural tractors for distribution to farmers with an appropriate loan mechanism.

Finally, of the 44 measures, only one country in the region registered one **fiscal measure** to support a feminized sector of their economies – that is, sectors that absorb a higher proportion of women compared to that of men which is tax exemption for the health sector in Tunisia.

Despite the fact that countries in the region have prioritized economic recovery measures more than other regions in the world, the emphasis was mostly on social protection, while labour market and fiscal and economic measures remain low which is a cause for concern. The emerging evidence suggests that women's employment has been hit hard by the pandemic, with women losing their jobs and unemployment rising despite that pre-COVID-19, 4 out of 5 women in the Arab region were not active in the economy and unemployment among women was about 3 times that of men. Stronger action is needed to ensure that women can keep their jobs or re-enter the labour market if they have lost jobs as a result of the pandemic.

17 countries

Have **social protection measures** that target or prioritizes women

6 countries

Have **labour market measures** that target or prioritize women

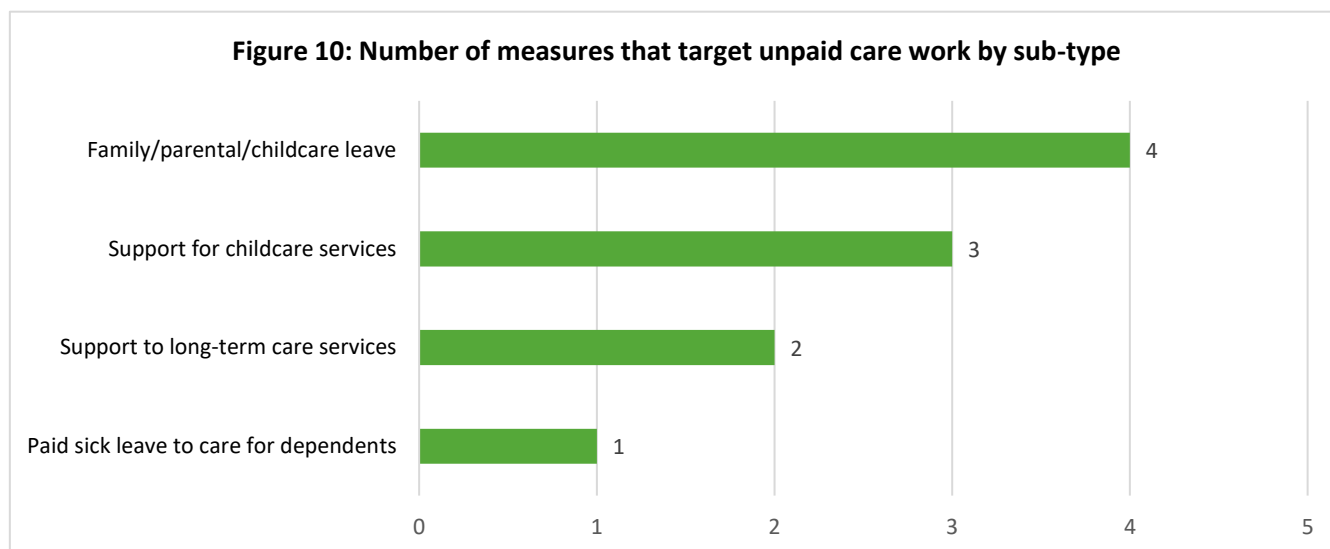
1 country

Has **fiscal measures** that channel resources to female-dominated sectors

Unpaid care

Measures to support unpaid care in the COVID-19 response include the provision of paid family leave, cash-for-care programmes, flexible and shorter work-time arrangements or continued provision of childcare services, including for essential workers (Figure 10). Such measures are extremely scarce in the Arab States region, accounting for only 4 per cent (10 measures in 7 countries) of the total 225 social protection and labour market measures in the region. Only 7 of the 22 countries in the Arab States region have taken measures to address unpaid care and these are Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Palestine and UAE.

All of the measures fall into the social protection category and most are related to family leave. For example:



- In **Algeria**, an executive decree on Sunday, 22 March 2020, brought a series of so-called exceptional measures, applicable to the entire national territory for a period of fourteen (14) days. Under the terms of the said decree, at least 50% of the staff of each institution and public administration shall be placed on exceptional paid leave for the aforementioned period. Exceptional paid leave is granted for all working mothers without exception. Pregnant women and women raising children are also priority for this leave. The measure was then extended to both public and private sector employees by the executive Decree of 24 March 2020.
- In **Jordan**, Government's social protection regulation 93 for the year 2020 issued in September, stipulated childcare allowances for working mothers with maternity insurance under the social security corporation and children aged under 60 months. Monthly allowances with varied amounts depending on income level and location of childcare (in a center or at home) would be granted for the duration of six months following the maternity leave.
- In **Kuwait**, three-months' worth of support/meals for people living in nursing homes and who need social care were provided by the government. Workers in these nursing homes also receive food support. General Authority for Disability Affairs—The 'Friends of PwD' team distributed 1,200 food baskets to persons with disabilities.
- In the **United Arab Emirates**, a new regulation states that the spouse of any sick employee will be paid in full during hospitalization or quarantine due to COVID-19, enabling greater flexibility in care responsibilities.

- In **Bahrain**, the Supreme Council for Women provided educational support to children of women working on the frontline to help them with distance learning. This support is represented by assigning volunteering educational cadres from the Bahrain Education Trade Union to present and explain lessons to the children of female health workers. Those academic experts communicate with male and female students via distance education technologies to help them complete their academic requirements for the current year. The support also included providing smart tablets and laptops to the children of needy families that are supported by women, in order to ensure their right to education, whose methods have changed overnight.

Overall, with 7 countries in the region (out of 22) taking action to support unpaid care, the response has been woefully inadequate to address the severe care crisis that COVID-19 has catalysed.

3 countries

Have strengthened **childcare services**, including for essential workers

2 countries

Have strengthened **family/parental sick leave provisions**

2 countries

Have strengthened **long-term care for older persons and Persons with Disabilities**

COVID-19 GLOBAL GENDER RESPONSE TRACKER

Factsheet: Arab States Region

Annex I: COVID-19 Task Forces in the Arab States Region, recorded in the UNDP-UN Women COVID-19 Gender Response Tracker

	# TFs	# TFs w/leadership data	# TFS w/women leaders	#TFs w/composition data	Average share of women on TFs (%)
Algeria	1	1	0	1	0.00
Bahrain	1	1	0	1	21.43
Comoros	1	0	...	1	5.71
Djibouti	2	2	0	2	13.33
Egypt	3	3	1	3	28.68
Iraq	2	2	0	1	4.00
Jordan	1	1	0	1	9.09
Kuwait	1	1	0	1	10.00
Lebanon	4	4	0	4	29.96
Libya	2	2	0	2	12.50
Mauritania	1	1	0	1	16.67
Morocco	3	3	0	2	19.09
Oman	1	1	0	1	10.00
Palestine (state of)	1	1	0	0	...
Qatar	3	3	1	1	6.25
Saudi Arabia	2	2	0	1	0.00
Sudan	1	1	0	0	...
Tunisia	2	2	0	0	...
United Arab Emirates	1	1	0	0	...
Total	33	32	2	23	12.45

COVID-19 GLOBAL GENDER RESPONSE TRACKER

Factsheet: Arab States Region

Annex II: Number of gender-sensitive measures recorded by type and country

	Violence against women	Women's economic security	Unpaid care work	Total # of gender sensitive measures	Total # of measures	Integral response
Algeria	0	1	1	2	9	0
Bahrain	1	3	1	5	13	1
Comoros	0	0	0	0	1	0
Djibouti	0	2	0	2	9	0
Egypt	12	9	4	25	48	1
Iraq	3	0	0	3	12	0
Jordan	5	1	1	7	25	1
Kuwait	0	1	1	2	16	0
Lebanon	5	2	0	7	16	0
Libya	0	0	0	0	2	0
Mauritania	0	1	0	1	10	0
Morocco	5	4	0	9	22	0
Oman	0	1	0	1	7	0
Qatar	0	1	0	1	4	0
Saudi Arabia	2	3	0	5	22	0
Somalia	0	1	0	1	2	0
Palestine (state of)	12	6	1	19	34	1
Sudan	0	2	0	2	4	0
Syrian Arab Republic	2	1	0	3	10	0
Tunisia	7	3	0	10	31	0
United Arab Emirates	0	1	1	2	18	0
Yemen	0	1	0	1	2	0
Total	54	44	10	108	317	4