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YOUTH VOLUNTEERS COMBAT ONLINE MISINFORMATION ON COVID-19 IN ARAB STATES

Photo: UN Women/Emad Karim

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, emerging evidence shows that underlying gender inequalities are exacerbated by this crisis. As observed in previous pandemics, women are—and will be—disproportionately affected in myriad ways, including by an increased incidence of domestic violence, loss of jobs and an increased unpaid care burden. Previous experiences also indicate that failing to collect gender-disaggregated data can have a negative impact in the effectiveness of response and recovery efforts.

Noting the lack of accurate, reliable and up-to-date information on the impact of COVID-19, particularly for women and girls in the region, the HerStory network established a taskforce to monitor mass and social media, gather stories of the gender impacts of the pandemic, and track occurrences of misinformation and harmful gender stereotyping.

HerStory is a youth-led initiative supported by the UN Women Regional Office for the Arab States and launched in 2016 to help close the gender knowledge gap on Arabic Wikipedia. This work is done by youth volunteers who produce, edit and disseminate articles about gender equality and women and girls' rights, experiences and contributions in Arabic language. With volunteers present in 15 countries across the Arab States region, HerStory has created or translated over 5,000 articles as of December

Photo above: *HerStory volunteers at work during a Wikipedia editathon on women's health. Cairo, September 2019.*

2019. Under this initiative, over 300 volunteers from across the Arab States region are documenting reports of misinformation as well as collecting news concerning the COVID-19 impact on women's livelihoods, women in

PARTNERS FOR CHANGE

HerStory is a collaboration between the **UN Women Regional Office for the Arab States** with **Wikimedia**, **Empower Women**, the **UN Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth** and a group of volunteers.

This work is possible due to the support of the **Swedish Embassies in Amman**, **Baghdad**, **Cairo**, **Iraq** and **Rabat**; the **UN World Food Programme (WFP)**; **Fe-Male**; the **Swedish Institute in Alexandria**, the **United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)**; the **United Nations International Telecommunication Union (ITU)**.

Regular resources provided the basis for launching this initiative, funding productivity studies that generated strong evidence for designing it in line with a need to increase the content on Wikipedia related to women and gender equality.

For more information about UN Women and our work, see the Annual Report 2019-2020 and the Regular Resources Report 2019.

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humanitarian contexts, violence against women and girls during emergencies and the contributions of women supporting an emergency response.

In addition, volunteers are updating Arabic Wikipedia articles on COVID-19 to share simple and accurate information on how to prevent it at the local level. Volunteers are also participating in training sessions to advocate on issues of gender equality and COVID-19, to counter fake news and dismantle harmful gender stereotypes in the media.

> **"Unfortunately, the crisis is translating into an increased rate of violence against women in many forms: bullying, social stigmatizing, and gender stereotyping. We all must ensure the protection of women's rights."**
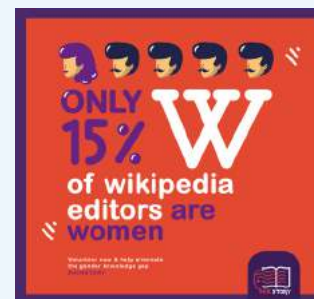
Moez Doraid, UN Women Regional Director for the Arab States praised the volunteers for their commitment to addressing misinformation and harmful stereotypes: "I am proud of these volunteers who are working to ensure easier access to clear and accurate information in Arabic on COVID-19 and its disproportionate impact on women and girls. The compilation and analysis of reported cases of discrimination and violence against women in the region in the context of COVID-19 will support all responsible actors to respond effectively."

"Women are at the frontlines of containing the spread of the pandemic and highlighting their needs and leadership will strengthen the response to the crisis," said Amani Aruri, a member of the UN Women-supported Gender Innovation Agora, based in the State of Palestine. "Unfortunately, the crisis is translating into an increased rate of violence against women in many forms: bullying, social stigmatizing, and gender stereotyping. We all must ensure the protection of women's rights—this is everyone's responsibility," she added.

In the first three months of the taskforce work since March 2020, the volunteers documented more than 1,000 stories from mass and social media. It is expected that this material will be used to inform programme interventions to combat harmful stereotyping of women and men, and to address misinformation around COVID-19 and its impacts on women and girls.

CLOSING THE GENDER KNOWLEDGE GAP ON ARABIC WIKIPEDIA

- Wikipedia is the sixth-most-visited website on the internet.

- As of 20 January 2018, there were 23,676 articles related to women on Arabic Wikipedia, representing only 4.2% of all the articles on Arabic Wikipedia compared to a global average gap of 15%. In 2019 the gap was decreased to 9% thanks to HerStory and other Wikipedia volunteers.

- In 2019, Arabic Wikipedia became the 17th largest Wiki in terms of the number of articles.

- While the number of Arabic speakers is estimated at 290 million persons, for every million Arabic speakers there are only two registered Wikipedia editors.

ONLY 15% of wikipedia editors are women

Hebatullah saber Tawfik, a HerStory volunteer in Egypt expressed her concerns: "From all the news stories we collected in the Arab States, women were the most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, mostly by domestic violence which could lead to femicide. We need to stop and think about the importance of raising awareness on gender equality, granting women their basic rights and enforcing laws that allow them to live in a healthy and safe society."

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