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UN Volunteers Entissar El Mokhtar (third from left) and Sophia El Caidi (fourth from right) taking part in the UN Women launch of the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence campaign in Marrakesh, Morocco.

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Assessing and addressing the gender impact of COVID-19 in Morocco

The COVID-19 pandemic poses immense challenges across the world, impacting on societies, economies and political systems. In the Arab States, as in other parts of the world, women and girls are disproportionately affected, as they are more exposed to health risks and loss of income, take on a larger share of unpaid care work, and face heightened threat of gender-based violence during social confinement measures. UN Women is coordinating a multi-sectoral response to the crisis, utilizing the support of three currently serving UN Volunteers.

These are just examples of why gender equality matters in the context of COVID-19, emphasizing the need to ensure the world's response to the pandemic is gender-sensitive.

In Morocco, data from 2019 shows that the prevalence [rate of domestic violence](#) was 52 per cent (representing 6.1 million women affected). That number is likely to have climbed higher after the COVID-19 outbreak, UN Women warns.

Economically, World Bank estimates from 2019 suggest that Moroccan women are largely [outside the labor force](#), with only 21 per cent of women aged 15 years and above participating in the country's labour force (compared to 70 per cent participation rate among men).

At the same time, women are disproportionately concentrated in the informal sector, with 54 per cent of employed women [working in the agricultural sector](#). This makes women more likely to be affected by job losses and reduced income caused by the pandemic-induced economic crisis.

In response to the multiple challenges Moroccan women are facing as a result of COVID-19 outbreak, UN Women is coordinating a multi-sectoral response to the crisis, utilizing the support of three currently serving UN Volunteers.

Sacha Belle-Clot (France) serves as a UN Volunteer Programme Assistant in support of the implementation of the Gender Responsive Budgeting Programme. She also supports partnerships with Morocco's Department of Reform of the Administration to strengthen gender equality in the public service.

“ During the outbreak, I am working on a study of the economic impact of COVID-19 on women in Morocco. In addition to evaluating its effect on their economic activity and employment, this study assesses existing social protection measures from a gender lens, and seeks to provide recommendations on gender-responsive recovery measures and policies. --Sacha Belle-Clot, UN Volunteer with UN Women, Morocco

Entissar El Mokhtar serves as a national UN Volunteer Project Associate within the project, Men and Women for Gender Equality. She is currently contributing to UN Women's research on a benchmark of worldwide responses to women's situations under COVID-19. Simultaneously, she is supporting an awareness campaign on positive masculinities, promoting shared household responsibilities between men and women during the lockdown.

Entissar had a firsthand experience with limited access to healthcare due to COVID-19 lockdown. Her message to all women facing violence is that help is still available during these difficult times.

“ You are strong and you are not alone. Don't be afraid to reach out for

“ help when you need it. --Entissar El Mokhtar, UN Volunteer with UN Women, Morocco

Sofia El Caidi, who serves as a Programme Assistant within another project, Enhanced Prevention and Intervention in Cases of Violence Against Women in Morocco, observes that COVID-19 has placed a great strain on resources available to support women and girls. Organizations now face the challenge of doing more with fewer resources, leading to restrictions on essential services, even while the risk of domestic violence rises.

Mobile listening services can provide a lifeline for women facing domestic violence at home. Sofia is supporting UN Women's response by regularly updating a [list of phonelines](#) available to support women victims of violence. She is also coordinating UN Women's technical support for the *Kolona Maak* [Arabic for 'we are all with you'] platform, which provides 24/7 support and guidance for victims and connects them with the available support services.

“ For decision-makers, there is one major lesson to be learned from this unique and pathbreaking experience: during any crisis (humanitarian, economic, political...), women victims of violence should be prioritized. Guaranteeing them essential services is very important. --Sofia El Caidi, UN Volunteer with UN Women, Morocco

Beyond these efforts, UN Women's Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (EVAWG) department has created [a sensitization campaign](#) to promote positive masculinities. The campaign aims to encourage positive behaviour, which is especially important during confinement.

While COVID-19 has presented many difficulties, it also offers an unprecedented opportunity to address deep-rooted inequalities that affect women's lives. Prioritizing women's voices and targeting their socio-economic empowerment will be essential to achieve meaningful solutions.

 Arab States

• COVID-19 • Coronavirus • gender equality • France

Sustainable Development Goal: **SDG 3: Good health and well-being** **SDG 5: Gender equality**
SDG 17: Partnerships for the goals