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UN Volunteers Celine Rabbat (left) and Line Bayram (right) continue work rotationally from home/office due to COVID-19 measures.
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Protecting human rights in the time of COVID-19

UN Volunteers Celine Rabbat, Line Bayram and Zein Ayoub are supporting Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) as Associate Human Rights Officers with the Regional Office for the Middle East based in Beirut, Lebanon. They conduct media monitoring and research to document the measures countries have taken to contain the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent impact of these measures for vulnerable groups. In addition, they report incidents such as hate speech, which have increased in recent months, particularly towards migrants.

Worldwide, over [65 million](#) people have contracted the COVID-19 virus and 1.5 million have lost their lives. In the haste to contain this pandemic, resources for many community-based programs and supportive services have been reduced, halted or reallocated toward the emergency response. Lockdown measures and travel restrictions have also been mandated. These have led to school closures, decreased commercial activity and a subsequent global economic downturn that threatens the right to education and right to work. Although these restrictions were mandated to decrease the spread of the disease, in

some instances, they also denied the freedoms of assembly, speech and movement - raising human rights concerns.

Further, conditions for the most vulnerable including refugees, migrants and informal laborers, have become more dire. Therefore, the pandemic has accelerated vulnerabilities, exposed pre-existing social and economic inequalities and narrowed social services.

UN Volunteers are working to protect human rights amid this unprecedented circumstance. They are monitoring conditions on the ground and developing youth networks that will help increase access to underserved areas and improve services for the most vulnerable.

Line is monitoring the right to education, work, housing and health especially in Lebanon, where the recent explosion at the [Port of Beirut](#) has been devastating for both local and migrant populations.

Celine works on an institutional level, with an eye toward youth engagement. She helps ensure youth networks are sustainable and supported by local institutions, via collaborating with universities in Lebanon to launch human rights clubs.

Line and Celine are jointly addressing human rights concerns, by raising awareness of human rights among youth. They have helped to organize informal discussions with youth aged 16-30, including two webinars with representatives from 16 countries across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. Over 60% of the participants were female and were offered a safe platform to talk about the challenges they were facing and develop youth-centered policy recommendations for OHCHR's pandemic response.

Zein is monitoring human rights developments in justice systems. He is currently performing a comparative legal analysis that examines recent developments in sentencing for incarcerated persons in relation to relevant UN conventions and international human rights law.

As part of his work, Zein deals with issues related to the rights of migrants, who are in an especially precarious position because they have been [stigmatized as carriers and spreaders of the virus](#) and ostracized in certain segments of society.

“ Social welfare benefits have been distributed to citizens in many instances. However, these were not provided to the same degree for migrants. Therefore, migrants can no longer afford the costs of living, including housing, education, food and other necessities. Thus, we have to increase our advocacy for this population. --Zein Ayoub, UN Volunteer Associate Human Rights Officer, OHCHR Regional Office for the Middle East

These Associate Human Rights Officers are part of a cohort of 33 UN Volunteers supporting OHCHR in the region, informing United Nations Country Teams, national governmental units, Civil Society and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). They also help lead awareness campaigns that educate and activate underrepresented groups, whilst countering misinformation and hate speech. These activities make the COVID-19 response more inclusive and ensure no one is left behind.



• [Human Rights Day](#) • [COVID-19](#) • [Coronavirus](#)

Sustainable Development Goal: [SDG 10: Reduced inequalities](#) [SDG 16: Peace, justice and strong institutions](#) [SDG 17: Partnerships for the goals](#)