

Regional Consultation Meeting on Online Violence in the Arab States

Date and time: Thursday, 10th March 2022 (12:00-13:45 Cairo time)

Background

Violence against women (VAW) is one of the most widespread violations of human rights. It can include physical, sexual, psychological and economic abuse, and it cuts across boundaries of age, race, culture, wealth and geography. It takes place in the home, on the streets, in schools, the workplace, in farm fields, refugee camps, during conflicts and crises.

The growing reach of the Internet, the rapid spread of mobile information and communications technologies (ICTs) and the wide diffusion of social media have presented new opportunities and enabled various efforts to address VAW. However, the online space has been used to inflict harm on women and to perpetrate VAW. Online and ICT facilitated -VAW is emerging as a global problem with serious implications for societies and economies around the world. This situation has been compounded with the COVID-19 crisis, which has initiated a shift to the online space and has fueled both online misogyny and ICT-facilitated violence.

In the Arab States, very limited data is available on the prevalence of online and ICT facilitated violence. A recent study conducted by UN Women Regional Office to document the impact of COVID-19 on women and girls in 9 countries in the region highlighted that online violence was the highest reported form of violence by respondents who witnessed or knew a woman who was subjected to violence during the lockdown.¹ The same trend was noted by civil society organizations in the region as they pointed out an increase in online violence against women².

With the generous funding of the government of Japan, UN women Regional Office for Arab States (ROAS) in the international day for the elimination of violence against women, launched the findings of a regional research study on online violence. The study contributed to reveal the prevalence, impact and consequences of online violence on women and girls in the Arab states and deepen the understanding of the barriers that women survivors face to report this type of violence and access services. During this event, ROAS organized a panel discussion, shared the preliminary findings of the research study, and initiated a regional dialogue on the recommendations to address online violence in the region with key stakeholders.

To build on the initiated regional dialogue that took place in November 2021, ROAS organized a consultation meeting with the key stakeholders from government, internet intermediaries, and civil society organizations (CSOs). The regional consultation aimed to present the regional desk-research comprehensive mapping of laws and services related to online violence in the region, and identify the key priorities to address online violence in the Arab States.

¹ UN Women, rapid assessment, the effects of covid-19 on violence against women and gendered social norms, a snapshot from nine countries in the Arab states, 2020, available at: <https://arabstates.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/08/brief-the-effects-of-covid-19-on-violence-against-women-and-gendered-social-norms>

² The Impact of COVID-19 on Violence against Women and Girls in the Arab States through the Lens of Women's Civil Society Organizations, available at <https://arabstates.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/12/brief-the-impact-of-covid19-on-vaw-in-the-arab-states-through-the-lens-of-women-csos>

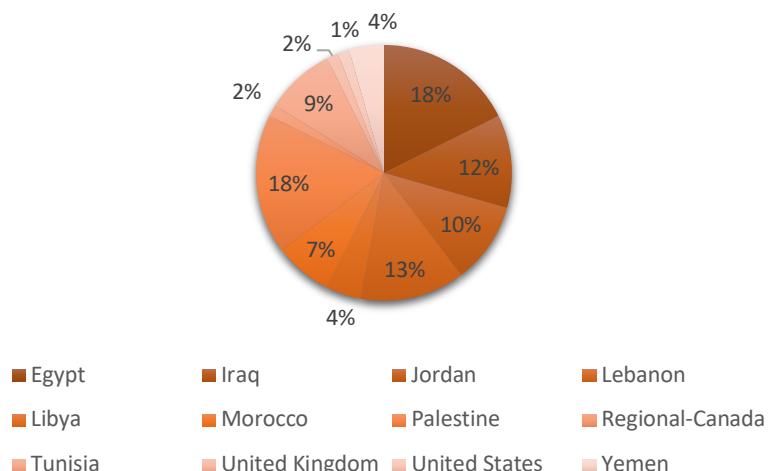
Meeting Objectives:

- Present the findings of the desk-research comprehensive mapping of laws and services related to online violence in the region to validate the collected data with the key stakeholders.
- Learn from the field experience of the stakeholders about the existing solutions in different Arab countries.
- Construct with stakeholders from government, CSOs, media and internet intermediaries a comprehensive roadmap of key priorities to respond to online violence in the region.

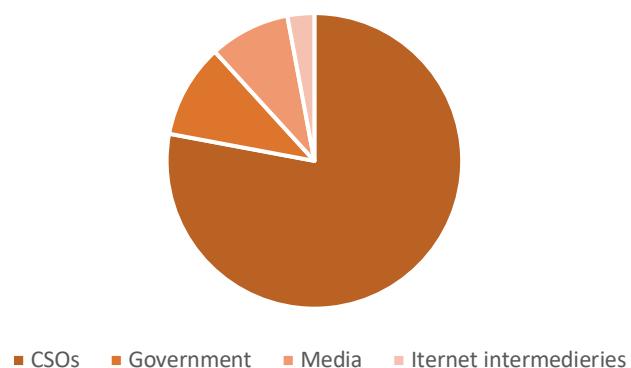
Participants Profiles:

Participants of the meeting varied from government, CSOs, media and internet intermediaries' companies. A total of sixty-eight participants have joined the event from all over the Arab countries and some global internet companies such as Meta in United Kingdom and United States.

Geographic Distribution of Participants



Participants' Affiliations



RoadMap set of Priorities and Recommendations:

During the meeting participants were divided to three breakout rooms to discuss the main priorities of actions/interventions, owning stakeholders and timeframe to respond to online violence against women in the Arab state countries. The groups were divided to cover the following areas a. Legal Framework; b. Services and Reporting mechanisms; and c. Changing the Social Norms. Below are the main outcomes and suggestions from the research and participants:

I. Legal Framework			
#	Action/Intervention	Stakeholder(s)	Timeframe
1	<p>Introduce specific gender sensitive legislative frameworks and measures on online violence against women at the national level./ Preferably within a comprehensive law that refers specifically to Online Violence Against Women (VAW).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Activate Arab countries international agreements and commitments to enable law enforcement for eliminating VAW. Put a clear definition of online violence in the law, in order to complete the pillars of the definition of crime (This will guarantee freedom of expression and clarify the exact acts of online violence) Link the legal framework to the social framework of the abused women to put the social context in consideration while developing the laws (based on national/country contexts). 	Ministry of Justice and other Judicial Authorities. Ministry of Interior Affairs The Parliaments, and the Legislative Authority in the Country Concerned	The time frame is determined when obtaining approvals and support from the legislative authorities.
2	<p>Support the introduced laws by a comprehensive and horizontal strategy and costed implementation plan with indicators and capacity building elements that facilitate strict enforcement of laws by the police and justice bodies.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Determine the competent/specialized government agencies to enforce online violence laws Build the capacity through customized training for all relevant stakeholders on issues of online VAW and the use of technology from a gender justice perspective and using survivor centered approach. This includes actors from the law enforcement and judiciary, and the police. 	Ministry of Justice and other judicial authorities Ministry of Interior Affairs Security Authorities (e.g., Public Prosecution) Countries' Relevant Executive Authorities	Depends on the government priorities of the country concerned
3	<p>Repeal discriminatory provisions in criminal law, in particular the broad laws that facilitate crimes against women in the name of honour or violating family values and principles; ensure the equal treatment of women before the law and the abolition of the diluted criminal-law liability and</p>	Ministry of Justice and other Judicial Authorities.	The time frame is determined when obtaining approvals and support from the

	<p>strengthen the penalties imposed on perpetrators of VAW, including OVAW; and ensure alignment of cybercrime laws with international good practices with specific definitions and mandate so they are not used against women as a form of political violence (especially activists) and don't hinder freedom of expression.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clarify and define political violence and demonstrate the links between it and online violence 	<p>Ministry of Interior Affairs Legislative Authority in the Country Concerned</p>	legislative authorities.
4	<p>Advocate for legal change</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organize national awareness campaigns to act as a pressure force that tightens the penalties for digital violence. Coordinate efforts to ensure prevention before damage occurs. 	<p>Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) Security Authorities (e.g., Police, Family Protection) Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs Media agencies Ministry of Education</p>	Continuous, but it should be focused over a period of time according to the national framework and the need (Suggesting that 6 months to a year to lobby, advocate and raise awareness).

II. Services and Reporting mechanisms

#	Action/Intervention	Stakeholder(s)	Timeframe
1	<p>Provide holistic services through government agencies that specialize in online VAW using survivor-centered approach and include psychological, health and legal support for women victims of online VAW, online and offline.</p>	<p>Ministry of Interior and Security Units Ministry of Justice Public Prosecution CSOs</p>	Continuous
2	<p>Build the capacity through customized training for all relevant stakeholders. This includes actors from the health-care professionals, education professionals and service providers.</p>	<p>Ministry of Interior Ministry of Justice CSOs</p>	Continuous
3	<p>Develop and disseminate accessible information on the legal pathways and services. For example, Developing online websites and one-stop shops for information provision and reporting incidents, with developed reporting mechanisms and referral services.</p>	<p>Civil society (and grassroots institutions to reach distant places) Women Activists Media via electronic, radio and television channels,</p>	Continuous

		Ministry of Women Ministry of Justice Directorate of National Security Private sector/Internet intermediaries The Ministry of Education	
4	Use artificial intelligence customized to the Arab region and the language to ensure deducting online violence and providing customized services to the region through collaborations between governments, CSOs and internet intermediaries	Internet Companies Government- Ministry of Justice; Ministry of Interior and National ICT agencies CSOs	Continuous

III. Changing Social Norms

#	Action/Intervention	Stakeholder(s)	Timeframe
1	Organize community and media initiatives that aim to eradicate gender stereotypes and discrimination against women, foster gender equality in society and support the empowerment and representation of women online <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Carry out media campaigns to challenge the social norms and stigma facing victims of online VAW. Also, to combat online VAW and explain available reporting services. Mobilize innovative techniques in community mobilization and awareness, such as involving social media influencers and using art to change social norms. 	CSOs - Service Providers Governmental and Security Forces Media Outlets	Continuous
2	Conduct studies on social norms and how they contribute to increased VAW, and document regional best practices .	CSOs Government, Universities and Research Centers.	Continuous
3	Establish schools' programmes that offer digital security knowledge and basic education on online safety for the young generation.	CSOs Community-based Entities and Official	Continuous

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organize social initiatives through schools that engage youth to promote equality and end online VAW. 	Education Entities (e.g., Municipality, Scouts, etc.) Ministry of Education	
4	Forge partnerships between CSOs, government agencies and internet providers in order to develop an appropriate and holistic interventions to changing the social norms related to online VAW.	CSOs Government Internet Intermediaries	Continuous

Annex 1: List of Participants and their affiliations

Name	Organization	Job Title	Country
Parez Gardi	High Council for Women and Development (HCWD)	Program Officer	Iraq
Maha Al-Raei	Culture & Free Thought Association (CFTA)	Wessal Network Director - CFTA	Palestinian Territories
Halez Hussein	HCWD	Director of Research and Studies	Iraq
Yasmine Zeid	UN Women Regional Office	Programme Analyst	Egypt
Ahmad Hafez	SB Overseas	communication Officer	Lebanon
Noha Ismaeel	Multilingual	Interpreter (English Arabic)	Egypt
Hany William	Multilingual	Interpreter (English Arabic)	Egypt
Feras AL-RASHID	Individual		
sami zouari	un women	project coordinator	Tunisia
Wafa Dahmani	National Agency for Computer Security (ANSI)	Director	Tunisia
Bochra Abdou	Association Tahadi pour l'Egalité et la Citoyenneté	Manager	Morocco
Ismail Mostafa	UN Women Regional Office	IT Support	Egypt
Hoda Rouhana	UN Women Palestine	Programme Analyst	Palestine
Eman Al Hourani	UN Women Jordan	Program Analyst	Jordan

Maram Alakrout	UN Women	Program Associate	Libya
Mayssa Zerzri	IPASSS	Expert	Tunisia
shahd fawzi -	Solidarity Is Global Institute - SIGI	HR & Project Officer	Jordan
May Ghanem	UN Women	programme analyst	Lebanon
abir (Carla Alameddine)	Union of Relief and Development Associations	SGBV Social Worker	Lebanon
Estelle Gagnebin	UN Women Regional Office	Programme Analyst	Egypt
Shahd Ezzeddine	Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)	HPA	Lebanon
Nadia Shamroukh	Jordanian Women's Union	project manager	Jordan
Abdalhadi Abdalhadi	CFTA - Culture & Forethought Association		Palestine
Manal Benkirane	UN Women Regional Office	Head of the ending violence against women unit	Egypt
Amira Albaldawi	Umelyateem for Development Foundation	NGO Director	Iraq
Muhammed Elmustafa	UN Women Libya	Programme Analyst	Libya
Melkar Khoury	ABAAD	Gender and Policy Coordinator	Lebanon
KHALIDA ALTWAL	UNWOMEN	National Consultant on Gender and Security Sector Reform- Women, Peace & Security	Jordan
Amal Cheikh	Aswat Nissa	Chargée de plaidoyer et de mobilisation	Tunisia
Salma Nasser	UN Women	Programme Analyst	Egypt
diyar jassem	General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers / Department of Empowerment of Iraqi Women	Director of the Department of Community Development	Iraq
Safaa Abdelhamied	Media women organization	Exuctive manager	Egypt

Rasha Hasheim	Individual	Independent Journalist	Egypt
Hala Mansour	Individual		Palestine
bissan gabasa	Alriada center	Project manager	Libya
Leila Mnekbi	Salamat - The Sec Dev Foundation	National Coordinator	Tunisia
Layla jaroshi	Assiwar	Project's Coordinator	Palestinian Territories
Magdoleen Assaf	Palestinian National Information Center		Palestine
houda rami	Association ADALA	Chargée de mission d'accompagnement - clinique juridique	Morocco
Shimaa Ali Farghly	Media Foundation	Specialist in digital media and digital security	Egypt
Nancy Nahhas	Un women	Programme Assistant	Lebanon
fahema obaid			
Jana Al Ashkar	Islamic Welfare Association - Vision Academy	Partnerships Coordinator	Lebanon
Suzan Elsayed	Meta	Safety Policy Manager - AMET	United Kingdom
Isadora de Moura	UN Women	head of programmes	Tunisia
manar elzohery	Egyptian Women Journalists Foundation for Development	Responsible for the Programs and Training Committee at the Egyptian Women Media Foundation for Development	Egypt
DAREEN SALHIEH			Palestine
Laila Majdouli	Solidarité Féminine	Secrétaire Générale	Morocco
salwa Abu Marzouq	Association of Culture and Free Thought		Palestine
sufian abu zahira	Palestinian National Information Center		Palestine
Ari Rafiq			Iraq
Amal Syam	Women's Affairs Center - Gaza	Director of Women's Affairs Center - Gaza	United States

Bahia El-Saqaf	Pass Foundation		Yemen
saida kouzzi	Mobilising for Rights Associates (MRA)	Founding Partenaire	Morocco
Laila Lutf	Sam for peace and human rights intuitive	head manager	Egypt
Mohammad Hazaimeh	Family Protection and Juvenile Department (FPJD)	Head of IT section	Jordan
Sozan Ismail	Dak Organization for Ezidi Women Development	Fonder of Dak	Iraq
Hana Zant	Women's Affairs Center Gaza	Information management Coordinator	Palestinian Territories
Andalib Adwan	Community Media Center	Director	Palestinian Territories
Heyam Al ABSI	Peace partner Alliance	coordinator	Yemen
haya abusal	Palestinian National Information Center		Palestine
Nouran Reda	UN Women Regional Office	Communication- Translation	Egypt
Suhaib Rababah	Intermediaries Of change Center for Sustainable Development - ICC	Executive Director	Jordan
Farah Ismail	Danish Refugee Council	Protection Team Leader	Lebanon
Rawan Sarieddine	Abaad Resource Center for Gender Equality	Digital Media Officer	Lebanon
hayat ndichi	Aspirations Féminines		Morocco
reem mohamed	The secdevelopment foundation	Deputy Program Manager	Regional-Canada
Awatif ALMUSTAFA	Altaqwa association for women and child Rights	Head of NGO	Iraq