



“COVID-19 has only made gender-based violence more glaring in Libya”



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1. What are the challenges posed by COVID-19 to your work on gender and violent extremism in Libya?

In the South of Libya, efforts are carried out to end violence against women and implement the Women, Peace and Security agenda, but there are still many gaps and more work needs to be done in this space.

The government has introduced safety measures to limit the spread of the pandemic, such as quarantining and social distancing, and organizations like ours have been working in shifts and following strict health and safety precautions when carrying out workshops and other activities. We have been able to host roundtables with women to discuss challenges faced during the pandemic including gender based violence or the emergence of violent extremist rhetoric within communities. Through these discussions we can help women play a role in fighting these issues as well as provide help and support during this time. However, technical issues make it difficult to carry out this work. The internet connection is really weak in the South of Libya and platforms such as Zoom are still not commonly used, with many women lacking the knowledge needed to use such software.

2. How has the pandemic impacted the situation of women in Libya?

Women’s roles in society have been weakened. While violence against women and girls existed before the pandemic, COVID-19 has compounded domestic violence. Women are now stuck in their homes for days and weeks, with no economic independence and no outlets, causing them to become easy targets for domestic and gender-based violence. We need more data and research in this sphere to better understand the effects of COVID-19 on violence as well as the types of violence women are facing.

3. What have been the consequences of COVID-19 on the spread of violent extremism and hate speech based on your experience?

Discrimination and hate speech have increased due to people having more free time coupled with a sense of emptiness. Strange ideas and rhetoric, both new and old, have been introduced into society and they are spreading fast. This was also seen in the rise of religious rhetoric aimed at further oppressing and controlling women. For example, old stereotypical ideas of what women should wear and how they should talk and what is appropriate or not have been re-emerging. Civil society work had almost completely stopped during the pandemic and this made it difficult to tackle these trends as they emerged.

4. What are the long-term impacts of the pandemic on violent extremism and how do you think we can combat it during and after the pandemic?

Right now, the most important issue is violence against women, because this violence can also be linked with hate speech, discrimination and violent extremism. Currently, women in Libya are facing a serious crisis on several fronts. There is the ongoing conflict, widespread proliferation of weapons as well as the pandemic with its repercussions such as economic hardship and movement restrictions. Unless gender issues and violence against women is properly prioritized and addressed, current extremist rhetoric against women could have long term effects.

Over the past few years, UN Women and CTED have partnered to establish an Expert Platform on Gender and Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism in North Africa. The COVID-19 pandemic has negatively impacted research, and civil society and governments' action aiming to prevent violent extremism. To shed light on the consequences of COVID-19 on violent extremism in North Africa, UN Women and CTED give a voice to members of the Platform, in order to better understand how the pandemic has changed their work.

[Find out about the Expert Platform on Gender and Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism in North Africa, and read other experts' interviews.](#)