

*Permanent Mission of the Arab Republic of
Egypt to the United Nations Office, WTO
and International Organizations
in Geneva*



البعثة الدائمة لجمهورية مصر العربية
لدى الأمم المتحدة
ومنظمة التجارة العالمية والمنظمات الدولية
الأخرى في جنيف

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The Permanent Mission of the Arab Republic of Egypt to the United Nations Office, the WTO and other International Organizations in Geneva presents its compliments to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (Special Procedures Branch), and has the honor to attach herewith a copy of the report by UN Women and UNDP report on “COVID-19 Global Gender Responsive Tracker: Northern Africa and Western Asia” to the attention of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, and the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls.

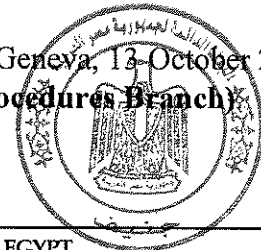
The report, highlighted that only one country in the region “Egypt” registers a holistic response to deal with the pandemic with measures that span at least three dimensions, namely women’s economic security, unpaid care, and combating violence against women. The tracker records 38 measures taken by Egypt in response to COVID-19. Of these measures, 21 have been coded as gender-sensitive, that made Egypt on the top of the chart, 10 points ahead of the second place. Moreover only two countries in the region (Egypt and Palestine) have taken measures to improve the collection and use of violence against women data in the COVID-19 context. The report confirms Egypt's leadership in the region and the state's interest in taking into account women's needs and supporting them during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Permanent Mission of the Arab Republic of Egypt to the United Nations Office, the WTO and other International Organizations in Geneva avails itself of this opportunity to renew to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (Special Procedures Branch), the assurances of its highest consideration.

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Geneva, 13 October 2020

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COVID-19 GLOBAL GENDER RESPONSE TRACKER

Factsheet: Northern Africa and Western Asia

Version 1 (September 28, 2020)

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in at least 27 million COVID-19 cases and over 900,000 deaths worldwide.¹ Despite their enormous contributions to mitigating the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, the crisis is threatening to erase decades of progress for women and girls. While men have been most affected in terms of fatalities, COVID-19 has exacerbated economic crises, care deficits and the 'shadow pandemic' of gender-based violence, with disproportionate impacts on women.² Inequalities between groups of women based on race, disability, income, age and more have been starkly apparent in both the spread and the impact of the virus. Based on a unique database compiled by UNDP and UN Women, this factsheet provides an overview of the COVID-19 response so far of governments in Northern Africa and Western Asia, with a focus on measures aimed at addressing threats to gender equality across three key dimensions: the surge in violence against women and girls, the unprecedented increase in unpaid care work, and the economic insecurity caused by the large-scale loss of jobs, incomes and livelihoods. Overall, the region's gender response has been uneven across countries, and challenges have been compounded by low rates of testing and reporting, high levels of extreme poverty, ongoing regional conflicts and unmet COVID-19 funding needs.³ Despite this, examples of innovative, gender-responsive measures continue to be implemented in a range of contexts.

BOX 1: COVID-19 GLOBAL GENDER RESPONSE TRACKER

Information in this factsheet is based on the [UNDP-UN Women COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker](#), which monitors policy measures enacted by national governments worldwide to tackle the COVID-19 crisis, and highlights responses that are gender-sensitive. Co-created by the two agencies, the tracker is coordinated by UNDP, with substantive leadership and technical contributions from UN Women. It is a living database with countries and measures being regularly added and updated.⁴ Like all policy trackers, there may be gaps or biases due to a lack of available information, underreporting of measures being announced, overreporting of measures that have been suspended, or the lack of data on the gender components of existing measures. Overall, findings should be interpreted with caution. When considering the number of individual measures, for example, it is important to note that countries with few or no COVID-19-related measures may have pre-existing gender-sensitive policies in place that help mitigate the negative impact of the pandemic. Measures also vary significantly in scope. This factsheet therefore also provides information on the content of the measures, which should be considered alongside the aggregate totals. No attempt is made to rank countries, but there is great potential for countries to learn from one another to improve their policy responses for women and girls. More information about the classification of policies, the definition of gender-sensitive measures and the data collection and analysis process can be found in the [methodological note](#).

¹ As of 10am CEST on 6 September 2020. WHO Weekly Epidemiological Update. https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/situation-reports/20200907-weekly-epi-update-4.pdf?sfvrsn=f5f607ee_2

² UN Women. 2020. "From insights to action: gender equality in the wake of COVID-19." <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/09/gender-equality-in-the-wake-of-covid-19>

³ Karamouzian, M. and N. Madani. 2020. "COVID-19 response in the Middle East and North Africa: challenges and paths forward." *The Lancet*. 8(7), p. E886-E887.

⁴ To provide information on national measures to be included in the UNDP-UN Women COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker please contact covid.gender.helpdesk@undp.org.

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I. What is a gender-sensitive measure?

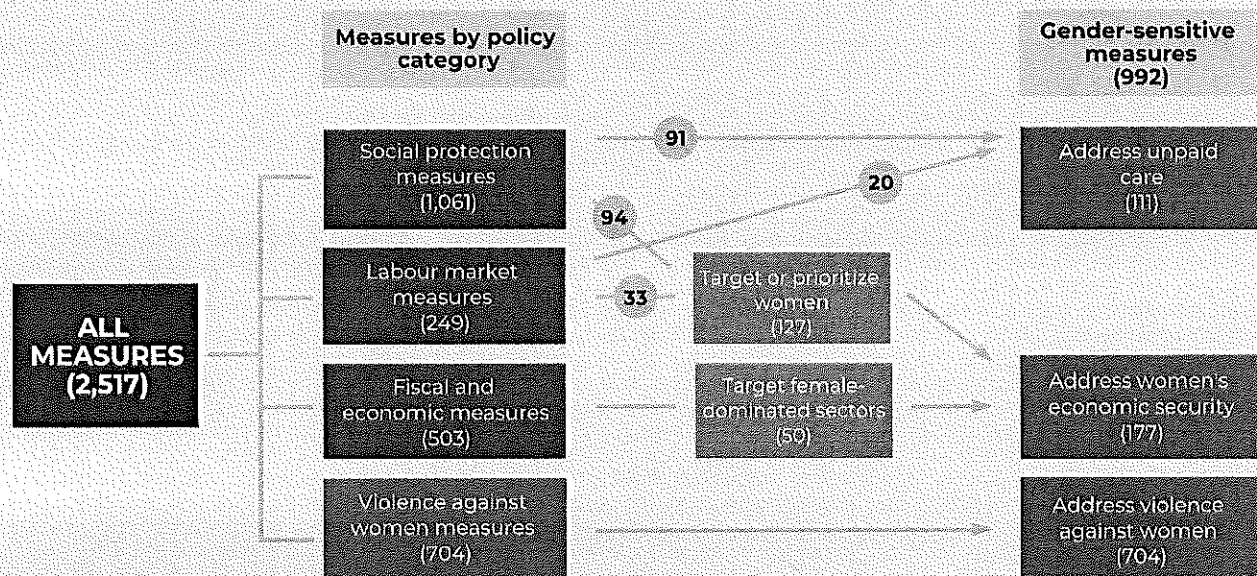
The set of all measures contained in the tracker consists of 2,517 measures taken in response to COVID-19. These measures fall into four main policy categories: social protection, labour markets, fiscal and economic policies and measures to address violence against women and girls (Figure 1). These measures were partly imported from other databases and partly collected by UNDP and UN Women (see [methodological note](#)).

Gender-sensitive measures (992 in total) are a subset of all measures – those that seek to directly address the specific risks and challenges that women and girls face as a result of the pandemic, including:

- all violence against women measures are categorized as gender-sensitive by default
- social protection and labour market measures are defined as gender-sensitive if they target women's economic security or address unpaid care
- fiscal and economic measures are defined as gender-sensitive if they provide support to female-dominated sectors of the economy, on the assumption that this is likely to protect women's employment and thereby their economic security.⁵

The assessment is conducted based on the available information about policy design. An assessment of the implementation or gender impact of these measures is not included.

Figure 1. Structure of the global COVID-19 gender response database

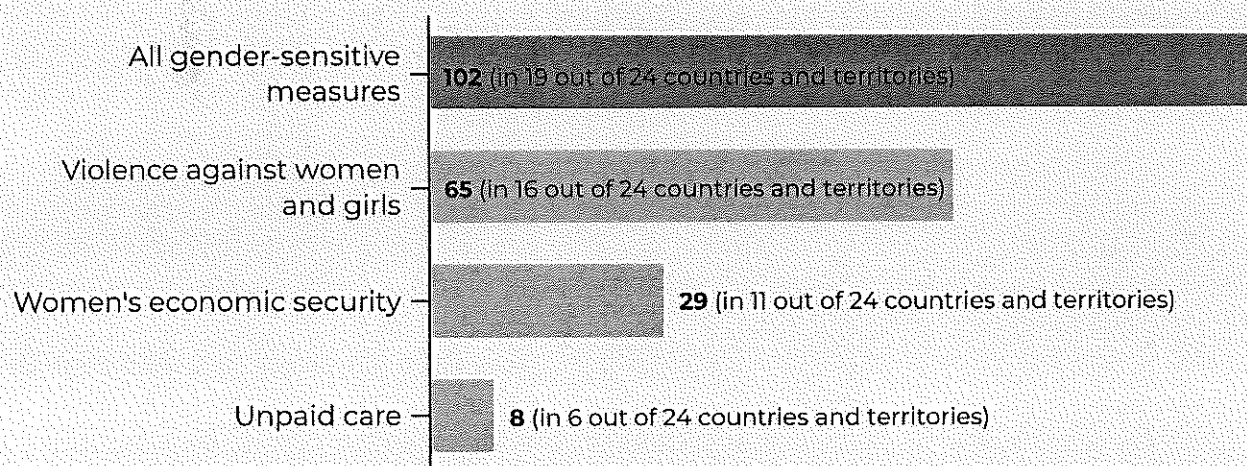


⁵ Given the different data collection and analysis processes used for identifying violence against women measures, on the one hand, and women's economic security and unpaid care measures, on the other, the three areas are not strictly comparable. While women's economic security and unpaid care measures have been located within a broader universe of social protection, labour market, fiscal and economic measures, violence against women measures have no such point of reference.

II. The regional picture

Across the Northern Africa and Western Asia region, 19 countries and territories (see Annex I for the full list) out of the 24 analysed have taken a total of 102 gender-sensitive measures in response to COVID-19. Echoing global trends, most measures in the region address violence against women (65 measures across 16 countries), followed by measures to ensure women's economic security (29 measures across 11 countries), with the lowest number of measures to address unpaid care work (eight measures across six countries) (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Number of gender-sensitive measures in Northern Africa and Western Asia, by dimension



Measures that target women's economic security and address unpaid care also make up only a fraction of the total social protection and labour market response, on the one hand, and the fiscal and economic response, on the other:

- In total, 23 countries and territories in Northern Africa and Western Asia have adopted 200 social protection and labour market measures in response to COVID-19. However, only 17 per cent of these measures (33) are gender-sensitive in that they strengthen women's economic security or address unpaid care (Figure 3).
- Similarly, 19 countries and territories in Northern Africa and Western Asia have adopted 52 fiscal and economic measures to help businesses weather the crisis, but only 8 per cent of these measures aim to strengthen women's economic security by channelling resources to feminized sectors (Figure 4).

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Overall, only one country in the region (Egypt) registers a holistic response with measures that span at least three dimensions (see Annex I and II). Worryingly, 5 out of 24 countries and territories analysed in the region register no gender-sensitive measures at all in response to COVID-19.

Figure 3. Proportion of gender-sensitive measures out of total social protection and labour market response in Northern Africa and Western Asia

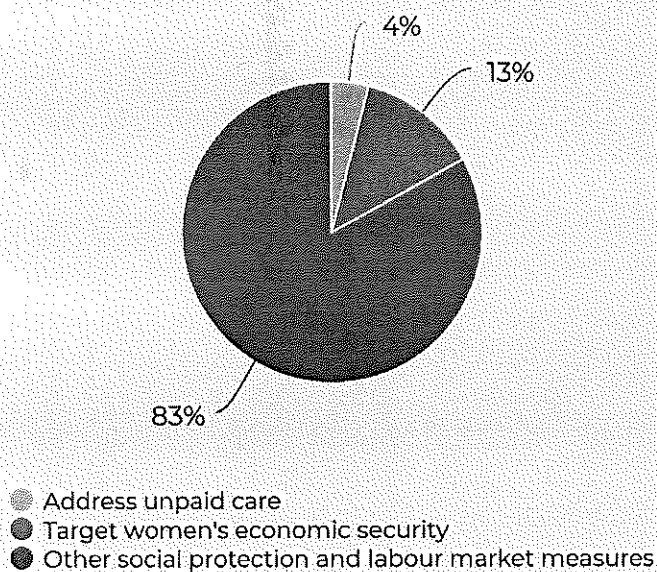
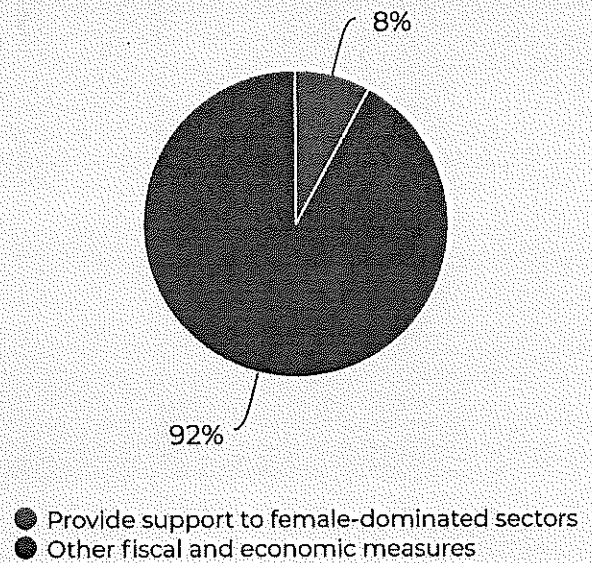


Figure 4. Proportion of gender-sensitive measures out of total fiscal and economic response in Northern Africa and Western Asia



III. Which gender policies are governments prioritizing?

Violence against women and girls (VAWG)

Some 63 per cent of all gender-sensitive measures in Northern Africa and Western Asia (65 measures across 16 countries) focus on preventing and/or responding to violence against women and girls. Most of these measures (31 out of 34), have been taken in Western Asia. In Northern Africa, the countries that have taken such measures are Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia.

Of all VAWG measures in the region, 69 per cent (45 in 15 countries) are aimed at strengthening services for survivors (Figure 5), including through shelters (12 measures in nine countries), police and judicial responses (10 measures in seven countries), helplines and other reporting mechanisms (nine measures in eight countries). For example:

- In **Jordan**, an emergency response team with female police officers at its core was formed and trained to respond to the crisis, including by conducting home visits to gender-based violence survivors in order to safely refer them to essential services, including psychosocial support. Police also accompany survivors to the police station or court to ensure they can travel safely while movement restrictions are in place.
- In **Lebanon**, the National Commission for Lebanese Women, in cooperation with the Internal Security Forces, have set up a new domestic violence hotline, following a surge in domestic violence reports since the beginning of the lockdown.
- In **Morocco**, digital services are being provided by the Ministry of Justice via a website, which includes the option to file a complaint via email. A system was also developed to link telephone hotlines to all courts, complemented by the use of a mobile app that allows victims to submit urgent complaints without having to present themselves in person at a court or at a police station.
- In **Tunisia**, a hotline was established at the Human Rights Department of the Ministry of Interior to support survivors of violence.
- In **Turkey**, a total of 40 facilities have been repurposed in 36 provinces to house survivors of violence in the COVID-19 context.

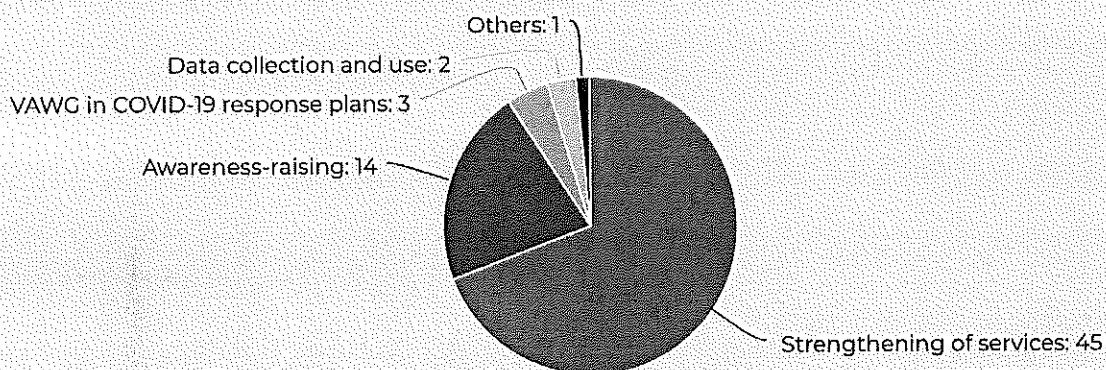
The second most common type of measure taken in the region was awareness-raising and campaigns (14 measures in 12 countries). For example:

- In **Georgia**, the Ministry of Internal Affairs has sent out messages to the population at large (in Georgian, Armenian and Azerbaijani) about the emergency hotline and a relevant mobile application for survivors of violence against women. Public service announcements with the participation of high-level officials have also been produced, calling on the public to report incidents of violence against women.
- In the **Syrian Arab Republic**, the Ministry of Social Affairs, Syrian Commission for Family Affairs and Planning, and the Ministry of Health have used different media channels (TV, Radio and Facebook) to create awareness and messaging to influence social norms and practices to prevent VAWG.

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Figure 5. Number of violence against women measures, by type



Only two countries in the region (Egypt and Palestine) have taken measures to improve the collection and use of violence against women data in the COVID-19 context.

- In **Palestine**, for example, the Police's Family and Juvenile Department collected data on a monthly basis and compared them with the same period last year to track trends in cases of VAWG.

Services to respond to and prevent VAWG must be treated as essential services and as an integral part of national and local COVID-19 response plans. However, according to the tracker, only three countries (Georgia, Morocco and Palestine) in the region have taken this step. This is worrying, since the pandemic will have long-lasting consequences that increase the risk of violence for women and girls, and only commitments that are part of governments' sustained and long-term planning and policies can help to address these. The tracker registers no measures to address online violence in this region, which evidence shows has increased during the pandemic,⁶ and very few measures to reach the most marginalized women.

⁶ UN Women. 2020. "Brief: Online and ICT-facilitated violence against women and girls during COVID-19." April. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/04/brief-online-and-ict-facilitated-violence-against-women-and-girls-during-covid-19>

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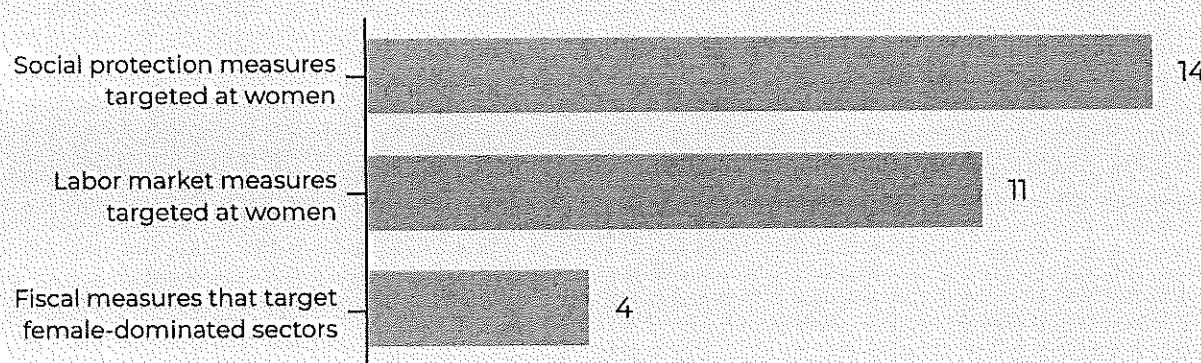
Women's economic security

Out of the 252 fiscal and economic, social protection and labour market measures registered for 23 countries and territories in Northern Africa and Western Asia, only 29 measures across 11 countries and territories address women's economic security – amounting to just 12 per cent of the total fiscal, economic, social protection and jobs response.

Of these measures, 14 fall under the **social protection** category (Figure 6). The main social protection programmes that Northern African and Western Asian governments have used to strengthen women's economic security in the context of COVID-19 are cash transfers (seven measures in five countries) and food assistance or other forms of in-kind support (four measures in four countries) that prioritize women as the main recipients. For example:

- In **Azerbaijan**, more than 100,000 food and hygiene kits were disseminated across the country, especially to women-headed households, internally displaced persons, refugees and other vulnerable groups. Elsewhere, measures have been taken to expand existing cash-transfer schemes.
- In **Egypt**, the Ministry of Social Solidarity is planning to add 60,000 families to the Takaful and Karama cash-transfer programmes, with another 100,000 households to be added in the budget for the 2021 fiscal year. Among others, the programmes mainly target women heads-of-households (see In Focus section below).
- In **Georgia**, in-kind social assistance programmes have provided close to 500,000 food and hygiene kits across the country to women-headed households, single parents, ethnic minorities, LGBTIQ+ community members, Roma settlements and other vulnerable groups (see In Focus section below).

Figure 6. Number of measures in Northern Africa and Western Asia that address women's economic security, by policy category



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Another 11 measures in six countries aim to address women's economic security through **labour market** measures.

- In **Morocco**, the Ministry of Tourism, Handicrafts, Air Transport and Social Economy has introduced a certification system for cooperatives to produce 30,000 reusable masks per day. Some 15 cooperatives have been certified with a total of 103 members, 100 per cent of whom are women.
- In **Palestine**, the Palestine Monetary Authority launched a low-cost financing programme, "*Istidama*", to support the sustainability of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), including women-run SMEs, with a total value of USD 3 million to address the economic consequences of COVID-19.
- In **Turkey**, the Ministry of Trade announced a grant programme for women cooperatives aiming to alleviate the economic impacts of COVID-19, where each cooperative could appeal for up to TRY 150,000 (USD 19,000) under the Cooperatives Support Programme of the Ministry.

Finally, only two countries in the region register four **fiscal and economic measures** to support feminized sectors of their economies – that is, sectors that absorb a higher proportion of women's compared to that of men. These measures account for less than 10 per cent of all fiscal and economic measures adopted in the region.

- **Armenia** has provided public support to the agricultural sector through targeted loans in the form of co-financing and (or) loan/leasing interest rate subsidies. Agriculture accounts for 32 per cent of women's and 26 per cent of men's employment in Armenia.
- In **Jordan**, there have been measures taken to support the health sector, including assistance for purchasing medical equipment and tax exoneration for entities in the medical supply chain. Human health and social work activities account for nearly 13 per cent of women's and nearly 3 per cent of men's employment in Jordan.

Overall, the low number of labour market, fiscal and economic measures aimed at strengthening women's economic security or to support sectors that employ them signals a major gap in the response so far. More needs to be done to ensure that women can keep their jobs or re-enter the labour market if they have become unemployed as a result of the pandemic.

Unpaid care

Measures to support unpaid care in the COVID include the provision of paid family leaves, cash-for-care programmes, flexible and shorter work-time arrangements or continued provision of childcare services, including for essential workers. Such measures are extremely scarce in Northern Africa and Western Asia, accounting for only 4 per cent (eight measures in six countries) of the total 200 social protection and labour market measures in the region. Six out of the 24 countries and territories in Northern Africa and Western Asia have not taken any measures at all to address unpaid care.

Most of the measures fall into the social protection category and are related to family leaves. For example:

- In **Cyprus**, a “Special Leave” was granted to parents who are employed in the private sector for the care of children up to 15 years old, due to the closure of schools, nurseries and kindergartens.
- In **Egypt**, pregnant women, or those looking after one or more child younger than 12 years old, were granted exceptional leave and job protection for the duration of the lockdown.
- In **Jordan**, the Government applied flexible working arrangements for parents with children under the age of 11 during the initial re-opening phase, since childcare centres remained closed.
- In the **United Arab Emirates**, a new regulation states that the spouse of any sick employee will be paid in full during hospitalization or quarantine due to COVID-19, enabling greater flexibility in care responsibilities.

Overall, with less than one-quarter of countries and territories in the region (6 out of 24) taking action to support unpaid care, the response has been woefully inadequate to address the severe care crisis that COVID-19 has catalysed.

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Annex I: Number of gender-sensitive measures registered by type and country

Country/territory	Women's economic security	Unpaid care	Violence against women	Total gender-sensitive
Algeria	2	1	0	3
Armenia	4	0	2	6
Azerbaijan	1	0	3	4
Bahrain	0	0	1	1
Cyprus	0	1	4	5
Egypt	7	3	11	21
Georgia	3	0	4	7
Iraq	0	0	3	3
Israel	0	0	1	1
Jordan	0	1	5	6
Kuwait	0	1	0	1
Lebanon	1	0	6	7
Morocco	3	0	4	7
Saudi Arabia	0	0	2	2
State of Palestine	3	0	8	11
Syrian Arab Republic	0	0	2	2
Tunisia	2	0	4	6
Turkey	2	0	5	7
United Arab Emirates	1	1	0	2
TOTAL	25	8	65	102

Annex II: Countries in focus

Egypt

The tracker records 38 measures taken by Egypt in response to COVID-19. Of these measures, 21 have been coded as gender-sensitive. This includes seven measures targeting women's economic security, three measures addressing unpaid care work, and 11 measures responding to violence against women. As of 18 September, Egypt had 5,715 recorded deaths from COVID-19.⁷

To support women's economic security during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ministry of Social Solidarity (MoSS) is planning to add 60,000 families to Takaful and Karama cash transfer programmes, increasing its budget from EGP 18.5 billion to EGP 19.3 billion (USD 1.75 billion to 1.22 billion) and reaching a total of 3.6 million households by 2021 (including around 16 million beneficiaries). These programmes mainly target women heads-of-households. Some 200,000 households (approximately 1 million beneficiaries) will receive a cash payment of EGP 450–500 (USD 28.5–32) for three months in addition to potential in-kind benefits, with priority given to older persons, orphans, persons with disabilities and female-headed households. In-kind support in the form of food and poultry is being targeted towards widows, female heads-of-households, the elderly and people with disabilities, provided by the Tahya Masr Fund in collaboration with MoSS and the Ministry of Local Development.

To support women's employment, the micro, small and medium-sized enterprises agency has allocated a financing portfolio amounting to 5.4 billion (USD 343 million) to finance projects for women in particular in border and upper governorates. It is expected that 216,000 micro-projects will be implemented over five years, and 250,000 jobs and projects will be funded through banks and civil society organizations that cooperate with the agency. In addition, the Ministry of ICT launched a package of educational programmes for women to prepare them for entry into the labour market. Through its Women Business Development Center, and a project called AlMashghal, the National Council for Women (NCW) has connected with women from different governorates to produce masks that can be sold to the public.

Egypt has also bolstered leave provisions for women at this time. According to Decree No. 719 of 2020, pregnant women or those looking after one or more child younger than 12 years old will be granted exceptional leave for as long as the decree remains in force. Furthermore, women employees looking after their children with disabilities will be granted leave, without losing their jobs.

The country's measures to tackle violence against women during the pandemic are broad ranging. In consultation with UN Women, UNFPA, the World Bank and other actors, the National Council for Women in Egypt produced a policy paper titled "Egypt's Rapid Response to Women's Situation during the COVID-19 Outbreak". Egypt is currently updating the referral pathway for survivors of violence, to include hotlines and newly introduced response and reporting mechanisms. A hotline for women survivors of violence was established at the Human Rights Department of the Ministry of Interior. The Ministry of Social Solidarity kept eight women's shelters open for women and their children, providing a range of services including consultation, legal and psychosocial support, including free of charge online therapy for women. The

⁷ <https://ourworldindata.org/covid-deaths?country=~EGY>

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Ministry of Justice is proceeding with family court cases (such as on alimony payments, child custody and residence) to support women custodians during the pandemic. Courts are attended with sanitary and precautionary measures in place.⁸

Georgia

The tracker records 26 measures taken by Georgia in response to COVID-19, of which seven are gender-sensitive (27 per cent). Three measures address women's economic security and four address violence against women. There are no measures that directly address unpaid care work in Georgia's COVID-19 response, nor that target feminized sectors of the economy. As of 18 September, Georgia had just 19 confirmed deaths from COVID-19.⁹

To address violence against women, the Ministry of Internal Affairs implemented a proactive approach, including developing a new methodology for detecting and responding to domestic violence cases. From the beginning of the crisis, the Agency for State Care and Assistance for the (Statutory) Victims of Human Trafficking restructured the model of service-provision for all 10 state-run crisis centres and shelters, thereby ensuring continual access to free services for survivors. In order to prevent the spread of COVID-19, new arrivals are temporarily accommodated in separate spaces. Some of the services are being provided remotely, and staff are regularly supplied with hygiene and personal protective equipment. To raise awareness of violence against women, the Ministry of Internal Affairs has sent messages to the population at large (in Georgian, Armenian and Azerbaijani) regarding the emergency hotline and a relevant mobile application for survivors of violence against women and domestic violence. Public service announcements have been broadcast with the participation of high-level officials calling on the public to report incidents of violence against women. Regarding ongoing access to justice for survivors, the courts have been operating remotely. After a risk assessment, on 18 May reporting at probation bureaus resumed for those accused of family violence.

To support women's economic security, assistance has been provided in the form of in-kind food distribution. To mitigate the most pressing needs for vulnerable families, close to 500,000 food and hygiene kits were distributed across the country to women-headed households, single parents, ethnic minorities, LGBTIQ+ community members, Roma settlements and other vulnerable groups. Relevant public bodies, such as the Office of the State Minister of Georgia for Reconciliation and Civic Equality, Tbilisi Mayor's Office, local municipalities, and the Prime Minister's Human Rights Council have been actively participating in the process.

The Government has also taken steps to ensure women's economic empowerment through small grants and economic programmes. To mitigate the socioeconomic effects of COVID-19, the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development has expanded economic support programmes, such as Enterprise Georgia (which provides loans to entrepreneurs). As a result, some preconditions and barriers to the programme were eliminated to allow more women to apply. Moreover, women-run businesses and women applicants will receive extra points during the assessment.

⁸ Information for this case study is generated in part from the National Council for Women's "Gender and COVID" Policy Tracker which regularly outlines Government of Egypt gender-responsive measures to mitigate the impact of COVID-19.

⁹ <https://ourworldindata.org/covid-deaths?country=~GEO> Limited testing and challenges in the attribution of the cause of death means that the number of confirmed deaths may not be an accurate count of the true number of deaths from COVID-19.