

Stories from the field

INTERNATIONAL Women's Day



Sexual and reproductive health

A migrant's journey of hope in Libya



Gender-based violence (GBV) prevention and response

Women and Girls Safe Spaces in Libya: A story of courage and hope



Youth

Women and youth spearhead fight against COVID-19 in Libya

On International Women's Day, France announces scaling-up support to UNFPA gender-based violence response in Libya



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Tunis, 8 March 2021 – As a commitment to continue supporting the people of Libya in a humanitarian context marred by a decade-long instability further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, France provides UNFPA with EUR 285.000, to maintain and expand the Psychosocial Helpline.

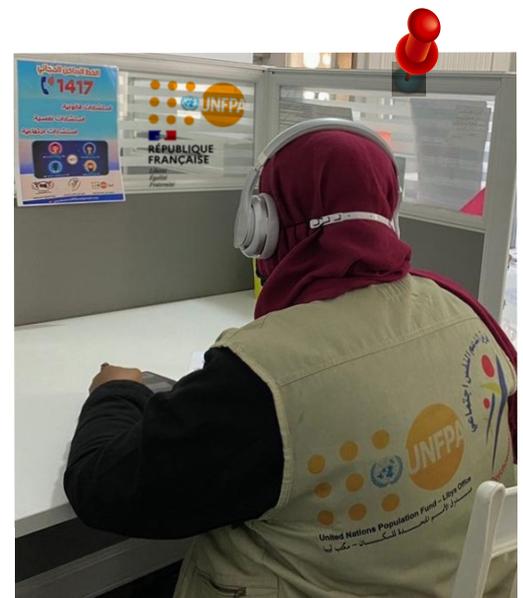
The '1417' helpline established by UNFPA with the support of France in 2019 has proved instrumental in providing psychosocial support and legal consultations on emotional, domestic and physical abuses to vulnerable communities, especially survivors of gender-based violence (GBV).

GBV remains an issue of concern worldwide. In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic further affected people's mental health and psychosocial wellbeing, particularly women, children, people with disabilities, migrants and refugees. In order to address an increasing demand, France and UNFPA agreed to continue and expand the project for another year.

"On International Women's Day, and as a further commitment to the UN 'Generation Equality Campaign' France is renewing its contribution to preventing GBV in cooperation with UNFPA, Libyan institutions, health personnel and civil society. By expanding the helpline's nationwide free services, France and its partner, UNFPA, seek to improve the quality and accessibility of services for GBV survivors, regardless of their status and nationality, and to raise awareness on violence against women, which continues to affect all our countries, stated Beatrice le Fraper du Hellen, The French Ambassador to Libya.

"In 2020, over 4,090 calls were successfully addressed related to psychosocial support and legal consultations on emotional, domestic and physical abuse issues. All individuals in need were referred for further specialized services to referral centers," said Asr Toson, Representative of UNFPA in Libya. "We are thankful to France for continuing their support to UNFPA to address the challenges around survivors' help-seeking behaviors and alleviate their suffering." said Toson.

UNFPA, in coordination and collaboration with the Ministry of Social Affairs in Libya and PSS Team organization, has been running the established national free psychosocial support hotline 1417 successfully since 2019. The project has been successful in providing multi sectoral services, including psychosocial and legal counselling, referral, case management and data management. The project will continue with the generous support of the French government.



UNFPA libya

Free Hotline 1417 for:

- Psychological support
- Counselling services

This project is funded by the Government of France

A migrant's journey of hope in Libya

"I came to Libya five years ago in the hope of finding a better future. However, surviving as a migrant and providing for yourself and your family is a continuous struggle. Recently, when I found that I have got pregnant, the fear of the future overcame the feelings of happiness." Hawa, a 28-year-old migrant is recounting how she came for her prenatal visit to AlQadsia Primary Health Centre (PHC) in Tripoli.

Migrant and refugee challenges

A migrant from Mali, Hawa's is one of the many untold stories of migrants and refugees in Libya. According to the 2021 Libyan Humanitarian Response Plan, there are an estimated 585,000 migrants and refugees in the country, all are at risk of natural and man-made calamities. The most at-risk group includes women severely affected by gender-specific vulnerabilities ranging from gender-based violence (GBV) to the lack of access to sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services. Recently, in the wake of the impact of COVID-19, migrants and refugees have had to bear the major brunt of the worsening socio-economic situation in Libya.

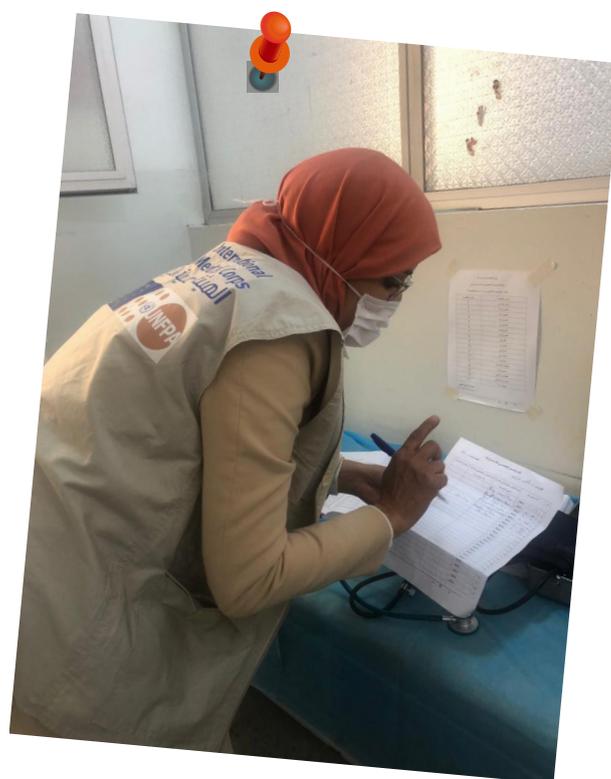
PHCs providing much needed support

"At first, I was following up with a doctor in a private clinic but we could not afford it and also the services at the facility were not adequate. When I came to know about the cost-free services UNFPA and International Medical Corps (IMC) are providing at this PHC, I started coming here. I was very happy to know that everything, including pregnancy tests, routine examinations and medicines are without charge. Most importantly, the warm welcome and care I receive from the staff and doctors makes me feel as an equal to others," Hawa says.

The PHC is one of the few facilities where UNFPA and IMC have deployed trained mobile health teams to deliver basic reproductive, maternal and newborn health services to migrants, refugees and vulnerable members of host communities living in remote and conflict-affected areas, especially along the routes commonly used by migrants and refugees.

Discrimination against migrants and refugees

Dr. Radna Al-Zanati, a gynecologist at the Alqadsia PHC says: "most of the women who come here cannot afford treatments at private clinics or they find all the services they need here free-of-cost. We provide services for medical examination,



investigation, ultrasound and medication, which other PHCs do not offer. We take care of all the patients irrespective of their origin and nationality. Many migrants and refugee women come to us as they feel welcomed, treated equally as others and receive quality guidance and services."

Refugees and migrants reported having previously contended with severe barriers such as discrimination in accessing healthcare services. Other setbacks included a lack of qualified SRH workforce and inadequate skill mix, shortages in medicines and medical equipment, and mismanagement of medical supplies and security issues, all of which were putting extra health and associated financial burdens and pressures on vulnerable communities. Against this backdrop, UNFPA partnered with IMC to identify government health facilities that would enhance provision of safe and timely access to comprehensive integrated GBV and SRH services for migrants and refugees.

Hopes for the future

While stepping out of the PHC building, Hawa endorses the service and treatment the facility offers her and other migrants and refugees.

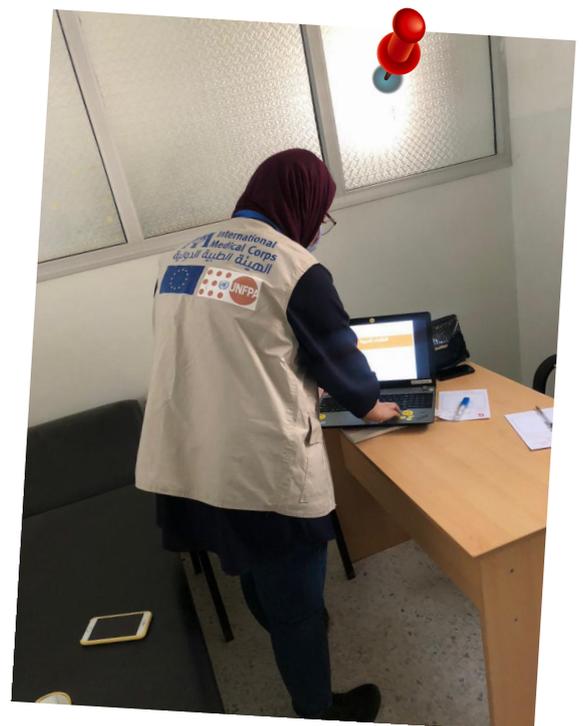
"In the eight months of my pregnancy, I now feel relaxed and i am looking forward to becoming a mother soon. This facility has been a remarkable support for me and my family. Many women from migrant and refugee communities are coming to this PHC and getting excellent care and treatment. This has brought us hopes for a better future."

EUTF support yielding results

The medical facilities and services provided at Alqadsia PHC are part of a programme designed to continue to support interventions for vulnerable migrants, refugees and their host communities under the aegis of the European Union Emergency Trust Fund (EUTF) in Libya.

The overall objective of the programme is to strengthen protection and the resilience of vulnerable migrants and migrants at risk, refugees and host communities, including IDPs in Libya. It also aims to support efforts to improve migration management along the migration routes in the country. This includes basic services such as health, psycho-social support, as well as specialized protection services like integrated sexual and reproductive health (SRH) and GBV prevention and response services.

In 2020, with the support of EUTF, 4,878 people, including 4,444 women, 454 migrants and 140 IDPs, were provided with essential reproductive, maternal health services through mobile medical teams deployed in support of three primary healthcare centres in Tripoli and Sabha.



Women and Girls Safe Spaces in Libya: A story of courage and hope

The decade-long conflict in Libya has been a source of violence and unrest causing displacements, and loss of precious human lives and livelihood opportunities. The turbulent period has resulted in an extra pressure on the public services structure, including the health care services. The already marginalized women and girls segment was the first to bear the major brunt of rising insecurities, including GBV.

There are different approaches to address this reality. It begins with providing psycho-social support to survivors of violence, building their capacities to become economically independent, and helping protect their human rights to ensure a better future for them and their families.

Implementing these approaches in its GBV programming, UNFPA established three Women and Girls Safe Spaces (WGSS) in the East, West and South of Libya. The safe spaces provide psychosocial support and counseling services along with livelihood training to gender-based violence survivors.

In 2020, more than 13,000 women and girls utilized the in-house and remote services provided by the WGSS.

The journey begins...

"In the beginning, I looked for ways to give back to my community, I asked myself 'what am I good at?'. Being a nurse for over 30 years, and knowing that many women willing to join nursing as a profession required capacity building, I decided what needed to be done," says Intisar Alabyad, a full time nurse and trainer at one of the UNFPA-supported Women and Girls Safe Spaces in Tripoli. "I started working in the humanitarian sector after the conflict broke out in Libya." she adds.

Intisar started volunteering; she trained less privileged women on nursing, helping them to earn their own living while building their capacities to provide quality health care support and filling the gaps in the sector.

In 2018, she joined a UNFPA-supported Women and Girls Safe Space, run by Al-Bayan organization and started providing training to women and girls who had interest in nursing. The one-year training course launched in collaboration with the Ministry of Labour provides the trainees with a professional nursing diploma.



WGSS objectives are multifaceted

"The WGSS serves two purposes. It not only provides psychosocial support to GBV survivors, but it is also a source of empowerment, as it provides them with vocational and life skills training to earn a living. By doing that we are also supporting different sectors in Libya by strengthening capacities of the much-needed human resource. This is the best way to help our communities." says Intisar.

A robust support system

"My role does not end by giving nursing classes. I come here every day to meet other women and socialize with them. We became friends, we are like a family," adds Intisar when speaking about her daily routine at the safe space. "By virtue of many services offered in the safe space, I got trained in sewing and now I help the sewing trainer with her class. The safe space offers cooking classes, outdoor activities like sports, and recreational activities as part of livelihood and psychosocial support for gender-based violence survivors. It also provides more tailored services to those who are in need," says Intisar.

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Our relation with the women in the safe space goes beyond that of givers and service receivers. We consider ourselves a family, and I am proud to say that most of our students from last year found employment in hospitals and clinics. It is a great feeling to see them supporting themselves and their families. I remember one of my students from last year who was last to join the class. I got to know a little bit of her background. She got married at an early age and dropped. It was her dream to resume education, but she was shy due to her age. We encouraged her to do so by providing the homeschooling option. We helped her study in the Safe Space and pass the exams; that was how she achieved her dream and success. That is what I love about my job, because it is not really just about providing women with skills, but it is about solidarity and union, mutual growth, and happiness.”

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Intisar Alabyad

What's next?

"Along with continuing existing services at the safe space, we have plans to empower more women and girls by offering English learning, computer skills and other courses in demand. For these plans to materialize, we need more funding and continued support." says Intisar while talking about the future.

We, in UNFPA, are able to support women and girls in Libya through implementing partners, including Albayan organization, and with funding from the European Union Trust Fund for Africa. There is a lot more work to do to empower thousands like Intisar to fulfill their potentials, and safeguard women and girls from violence. In the meantime, we continue to empower them to contribute to their families and marginalized communities.



Women and youth spearhead fight against COVID-19 in Libya

Like the rest of the world, the stilled town of Suluq in Eastern Libya has been grappling with the lethal threat of COVID-19 transmission and death. However, thanks to the relentless efforts of a youth-inspired team of volunteers, the town is emerging from the trauma of the pandemic.

General health issues

"There is a large number of patients especially women with chronic health issues such as breast cancer and cervical cancer in the region. Given the inadequate health facilities and a general lack of awareness about COVID-19, their weakened immunity level could pose life-threatening situations for them, for their families, and for their communities. Taking all this into account, I determined something had to be done", Dr Faiza Alfakhry", declares. She is a 35-year-old, youth leader, a resident of the town, and a professor in the University of Benghazi

Youth Against COVID Fund

COVID-19 has caused widespread concern in Libya, with authorities and communities alike struggling to address the pandemic and curtail its spread. In April 2020, UNFPA established its Youth Against COVID-19 Fund, set up specifically to harness the energy, creativity and commitment of young people in a range of specifically focused outreach activities intended to help minimize and mitigate the impact of COVID-19 in Libya.

The Libyan Red Crescent (LRC), UN Women and UNESCO joined the initiative to strengthen and empower the vital role young people would play. As a result, with the Fund's support, various micro-ventures are combating the COVID-19 pandemic by increasing community awareness, promoting innovative prevention measures and supporting frontline health workers. The Fund has awarded micro-grants to 12 of the most promising and innovative ideas.

Awareness campaigns are multifaceted

Dr. Faiza one of the micro-grant recipients, spells out how she and a team of volunteers and doctors have applied themselves in approaching the task. "I believe that young people have the strength and the potential to lead the change. I have been working as a volunteer with LRC myself since 2017. As a team of LRC volunteers and doctors, we planned and implemented week-long awareness-raising events on COVID-19 prevention measures and public health sessions related to women followed by a free medical examination to detect early symptoms of breast or cervical cancer."

Success is sweet

More than 300 women attended the awareness sessions and came for early examination for detection of cancer. Because of the project, a considerable number of cases were detected at an early stage and referred to more specialized services. At the same time, the community was sensitized about COVID-19.

Need to do more

"I am really thankful to UNFPA, the Libyan Red Crescent, UN WOMEN and UNESCO for establishing this Fund. I am hopeful that more funds will be available for youth- and women-led initiatives to bring a positive social change in Libya." Dr. Faiza says.



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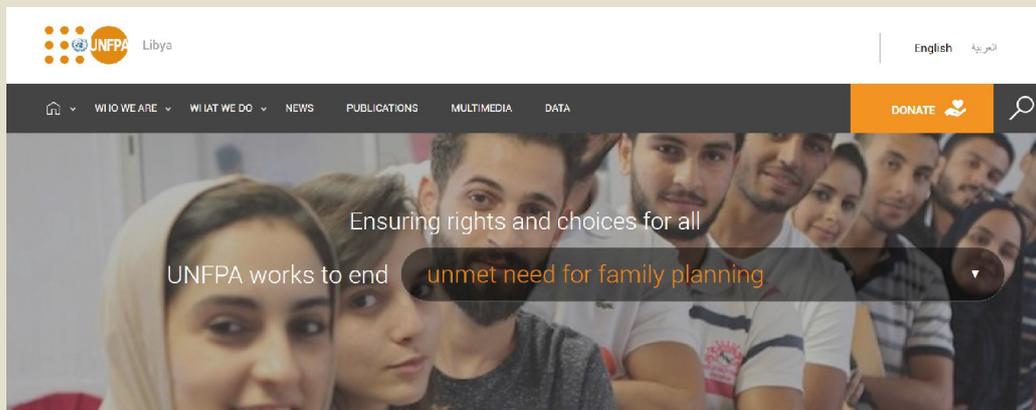
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