



Ministero degli Affari Esteri
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IMPACT ASSESSMENT ON **WOMEN'S** INVOLVEMENT IN PEACEBUILDING PROCESS

Assessment of the WPS Agenda and
NAPs in Lebanon, Tunis, Iraq, and Libya





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Preface

Since the adoption of UNSCR 1325 in 2000, the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda has been instrumental in advancing the meaningful participation of women in peace and security processes globally. In the MENA region, with its complex political landscapes and ongoing conflicts, the agenda faces both significant challenges and unique opportunities. While progress has been made, evidenced by the adoption of National Action Plans (NAPs) in eight MENA countries, systemic barriers, entrenched cultural norms, and limited resources continue to impede its full implementation. This study critically examines the localization and sustainability of the WPS agenda within this context, shedding light on its achievements and the challenges that remain.

This research evaluates the implementation and impact of the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, with a particular focus on National Action Plans (NAPs). Centering on Lebanon, Tunisia, Iraq, and Libya, the study examines how these plans have advanced gender equality, protected women in conflict settings, and strengthened their roles in peacebuilding efforts. The findings aim to provide stakeholders with insights into best practices, persistent challenges, and actionable recommendations to enhance the WPS agenda in diverse, conflict-affected contexts.

The assessment delves into the development, implementation, and outcomes of the WPS agenda and NAPs in Lebanon, Tunisia, Iraq, and Libya. It contextualizes these frameworks within the socio-political and economic realities of each country and evaluates their effectiveness in addressing gender-specific challenges. The study examines achievements and gaps in policy development, institutional mechanisms, grassroots engagement, and the regional adaptation of WPS principles. Through this analysis, it offers a comprehensive understanding of the agenda's impact across diverse settings.

This research utilized a mixed-methods approach to examine the implementation and impact of the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda and National Action Plans (NAPs) in Lebanon, Tunisia, Iraq, and Libya. The study began with a comprehensive desk review, analyzing policy documents, reports from international organizations, and academic studies to establish a contextual foundation. This was followed by data collection through focus group discussions (FGDs) with women leaders, civil society activists, and marginalized groups, capturing grassroots perspectives on the successes and challenges of the WPS agenda. Additionally, key informant interviews (KIIs) were conducted with government officials, civil society leaders, and representatives of international organizations to gain deeper insights into policy development and implementation processes.

Data from these sources were analyzed using a thematic approach to identify key challenges, policy gaps, and opportunities for strengthening the WPS agenda. Ethical considerations were central to the research, with all participants providing informed consent and their data anonymized to ensure confidentiality. Triangulation of data from desk reviews, FGDs, and KIIs enhanced the reliability and validity of the findings, offering a nuanced understanding of the WPS agenda in diverse and complex socio-political contexts. This methodology provided a balanced perspective, integrating both policy-level analysis and the lived experiences of those directly affected by the agenda.

The research recognizes several challenges and limitations in its scope and execution. One of the key limitations lies in the diverse and complex socio-political contexts of the studied countries—Lebanon, Tunisia, Iraq, and Libya—which pose difficulties in drawing uniform conclusions. Each

country has unique challenges, including varying levels of political stability, institutional capacity, and societal attitudes toward gender equality. These differences call for a detailed and context-specific analysis, which inherently limits the generalizability of the findings.

Additionally, the availability and reliability of data posed significant challenges. The research relies on secondary data sources, including government reports, focus group discussions, and key informant interviews. While these methods ensure a multi-faceted perspective, gaps in data—such as inconsistent monitoring and reporting mechanisms for the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda—may affect the comprehensiveness of the findings.

Another limitation is the contextual sensitivity of the WPS agenda. The terminology and frameworks associated with UNSCR 1325 are often perceived as foreign constructs in the MENA region, leading to resistance in implementation and acceptance. This study acknowledges the cultural barriers that can influence how the WPS agenda is localized and perceived.

Lastly, the research timeline and resource constraints restricted the depth of fieldwork, particularly in accessing grassroots-level insights in conflict-affected areas. While the study captures a broad range of perspectives, future research would benefit from more extensive field studies and longitudinal assessments to track the long-term impact of the WPS agenda and National Action Plans.

Despite these limitations, this research strives to provide actionable insights and recommendations for strengthening the WPS agenda's implementation in the region.

Foreword

Since its adoption in 2000, United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 has laid the foundation for the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda, reshaping how gender roles are understood in the context of conflict and peacebuilding. Over the past two decades, this agenda has evolved from acknowledging women as victims of war to recognizing their critical contributions as agents of peace, security, and resilience. This shift represents not only a milestone in international discourse but also a framework for embedding gender equality into global and national peacebuilding processes.

Yet, as wars and crises continue to evolve, the WPS agenda faces persistent challenges and requires a critical re-evaluation. The disconnect between global frameworks and local realities often weakens its impact. Structural inequalities entrenched cultural norms, and reliance on external funding have all hindered the localization and sustainability of the agenda. While it has advanced gender inclusion within existing systems, it has yet to fully address the root causes of conflict or challenge the structures that perpetuate violence and inequality. Central to this effort is the active involvement of women in demilitarization processes, moving beyond integrating women into existing militarized structures and toward transforming these systems to prioritize peace and justice.

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, with its complex socio-political landscapes, stands as a vital testing ground for the WPS agenda. In Lebanon, Iraq, Libya, and Tunisia, women's rights organizations and feminist movements have emerged as key drivers, bridging local initiatives with global human rights principles. Their efforts underscore not only the importance of amplifying marginalized voices but also the need to reimagine peace and security frameworks to reflect the realities of those they aim to serve. A key component of these efforts is ensuring that women play a leading role in demilitarization, challenging militarized systems and advancing sustainable, inclusive, peacebuilding approaches.

This report offers a critical assessment of the WPS agenda's implementation in the MENA region, examining its achievements and the structural barriers that persist. It delves into the challenges of adapting international frameworks to local contexts and highlights the transformative potential of feminist movements and women-led initiatives in reclaiming the agenda. By addressing not only gender inequality but also systemic factors such as poverty, political instability, and exclusionary policies, the WPS agenda can become a powerful tool for sustainable peace and inclusive security.

As we approach a future where the global order is increasingly shaped by localized conflicts and socio-political challenges, the WPS agenda must remain firmly rooted in its principles of equality and justice while evolving to meet the needs of diverse and complex contexts. This report is both a reflection on the past and a call to action for the future. It reminds us that the pursuit of peace is inseparable from the pursuit of justice and that women's leadership must remain at the core of our collective efforts to build a more equitable and peaceful world.

Dr. Khouloud Al Khatib

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Introduction

UNSCR 1325 and Women, Peace and Security Agenda

The adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 in October 2000 marked a transformative milestone in the global recognition of the critical role women play in peace and security. It was the first resolution to explicitly link gender equality with international peace and security, emphasizing the disproportionate impact of conflict on women and girls while highlighting their indispensable contributions to conflict prevention, resolution, and post-conflict reconstruction. UNSCR 1325 calls for the full and meaningful participation of women in all aspects of peace processes, the protection of women and girls from gender-based violence during conflict, and the integration of gender perspectives into peacekeeping and recovery efforts. This landmark resolution has since served as the foundation for the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda, inspiring subsequent resolutions and national efforts to ensure that peacebuilding is inclusive and sustainable. Its adoption underscored the understanding that achieving lasting peace requires addressing the unique needs and perspectives of women, alongside fostering their leadership in conflict-affected settings.

Since its adoption, UNSCR 1325 has been reinforced by subsequent Security Council resolutions, each addressing critical dimensions of the WPS agenda. UNSCR 1820 (2008) recognized sexual violence as a tactic of war and called for its prevention and accountability. UNSCR 1888 (2009) established mechanisms to combat such violence, including the appointment of a Special Representative, while UNSCR 1889 (2009) emphasized women's participation in post-conflict recovery and the development of progress indicators. UNSCR 1960 (2010) introduced monitoring and reporting mechanisms for conflict-related sexual violence, and UNSCR 2106 (2013) and UNSCR 2122 (2013) further advanced accountability measures and women's leadership in peacebuilding. UNSCR 2242 (2015) linked the WPS agenda with counter-terrorism efforts and called for enhanced funding and partnerships to improve implementation. UNSCR 2467 (2019) advocated for survivor-centered approaches to addressing sexual violence, while UNSCR 2493 (2019) reinforced the call for full implementation of the WPS agenda by urging states to meet their commitments. Together, these resolutions have expanded the scope of the WPS agenda, addressing prevention, protection, and participation across all stages of conflict and peacebuilding.

This study explores the implementation and challenges of the WPS agenda in the MENA region, focusing on Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, and Tunisia. These countries' National Action Plans (NAPs) vary in content and scope but share a common aim of integrating gender perspectives into peace and security efforts.

FACTS

108 UN member States (56%) have adopted UNSCR 1325 national Action Plan

Eight countries in the MENA region have adopted UNSCR 1325 national Action Plan

UNSCR 1325 National Action Plans

Member States bear the primary responsibility for achieving gender equality and upholding human rights. In a 2004 presidential statement, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) encouraged national-level implementation of UNSCR 1325, the landmark resolution of the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) Agenda, including through National Action Plans (NAPs) to implement the four pillars of the resolution. It also encouraged Member States to collaborate with civil society, particularly with local women's networks and organizations, on the implementation of UNSCR 1325.

National Action Plans for the implementation of UNSCR 1325 are national-level strategy documents that outline a government's approach and course of action for localizing action on the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda. These documents outline objectives and activities that countries take, both on a domestic and international level, to secure the human rights of women and girls in conflict settings; prevent armed conflict and violence, including against women and girls; and ensure the meaningful participation of women in peace and security.

The first National Action Plan was developed in 2005. As of 2024, 108 UN member States (56%) have adopted UNSCR 1325 national Action Plan. Iraq adopted its first National Action Plan (NAP) in 2014 for the period 2014–2018, making it the first country in the MENA region to adopt a NAP. Numerous countries have also developed second, third, and even fourth-generation NAPs, building on the work and lessons learned from previous plans. Frequently, NAPs are aligned with national development agendas, gender equality policies, and other relevant policy frameworks. However, countries have taken very different approaches to NAP planning, development, and implementation. NAPs vary a great deal in terms of focus, timeline, content, budget, and monitoring and evaluation frameworks.

Over the past 24 years, the implementation of the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda has progressed beyond National Action Plans (NAPs) to encompass regional and local levels. Regional Action Plans (RAPs) have been established by entities such as the African Union and the European Union, reflecting a broader commitment to integrating gender perspectives into peace and security frameworks. Notably, the League of Arab States, in collaboration with UN Women and the Arab Women Organization, developed the “Executive Action Plan to Protect Women in the Arab Region: Peace and Security 2015–2030”. This framework addresses the impact of conflict, occupation, and terrorism on women and girls in the Arab region, emphasizing protection, prevention, participation, and relief and recovery efforts to ensure women's security and empowerment. In some countries, the development of NAPs has been done in parallel with Local Action Plans in particular cities or regions of a country. Many National Action Plans also provide directives for government agencies and bodies to develop their own plans for mainstreaming WPS across their work.

WPS Evolution in the MENA Region

In the MENA region, a context marked by complex political landscapes and ongoing security challenges, the WPS agenda holds particular significance. As the agenda approaches its 25th anniversary, it is crucial to recognize the challenges that have plagued WPS-related initiatives and to work towards solving them. Despite significant progress since the adoption of Resolution 1325, the WPS agenda faces a legitimacy crisis in the region. This is partly due to its failure to adapt concepts and terminology to local cultures, leading to perceptions of it as a foreign construct.

In the Arab world, the shortcomings of the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda are particularly evident, with only eight countries having established National Action Plans (NAPs). The formation of the WPS Working Group for Arab States in June 2024—a joint platform between the UN Women Regional Office for Arab States, the WPS Regional Hub in Beirut and other entities based in the region—is the latest initiative bringing together women from different sectors and Arab countries. The aim of the working group is to shape—through advocacy work, research and regular meetings—how the WPS agenda is implemented in the region, advocating for international attention to the realities and experiences of women living in Arab states.

Methodology

The methodology employed for this assessment of Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) and National Action Plans (NAPs) across Lebanon, Iraq, Tunisia, and Libya was designed to ensure a comprehensive, multi-faceted approach that captures diverse perspectives and data sources. The assessment relied on three primary methods: desk review, focus group discussions (FGDs), and key informant interviews (KIIs). This mixed-methods approach allowed for triangulation of data and ensured robust findings.

The desk review provided the foundational framework for the assessment by gathering and analyzing secondary data. This included reviewing existing WPS-related policies, including NAPs, to understand their scope, objectives, and implementation progress. Reports from international organizations, NGOs, and academic research focusing on gender equality, peacebuilding, and conflict resolution in the four countries were examined. Additionally, national legal frameworks were analyzed for their alignment with international commitments, including UN Security Council Resolution 1325. Socio-political, economic, and conflict-related data were also gathered to contextualize the findings. This review offered a comprehensive understanding of the policy landscape, challenges, and opportunities related to WPS and NAP implementation in each country.

Focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted to capture community-level insights, particularly from women and marginalized groups directly affected by the WPS agenda. Participants included women leaders, civil society activists, youth, and representatives from vulnerable communities, including displaced persons and conflict-affected individuals. These discussions were semi-structured, allowing participants to share their experiences, challenges, and perspectives regarding WPS and NAP implementation. FGDs were held in diverse geographic areas to ensure representation of urban, rural, and conflict-affected populations. The qualitative insights gathered from these discussions highlighted the lived experiences of women and their engagement with WPS initiatives.

Key informant interviews (KIIs) were conducted with stakeholders who have direct roles or expertise in the development and implementation of WPS and NAPs. These stakeholders included government officials from ministries responsible for gender equality, security, and peacebuilding, as well as leaders of civil society organizations (CSOs) involved in advocating for WPS and implementing related projects. Representatives of international organizations, including UN agencies supporting WPS and NAP initiatives, were also interviewed alongside experts and academics specializing in gender, conflict resolution, and regional political dynamics. The KIIs followed a structured format, with questions tailored to the roles and expertise of each informant, providing in-depth information on policy development, implementation challenges, and opportunities for strengthening WPS efforts.

The data collected through the desk review, FGDs, and KIIs were analyzed using a thematic approach. Key themes that emerged included policy gaps, the role of stakeholders, challenges in implementation, and opportunities for enhancing the WPS agenda. Triangulation of data ensured that findings were validated across multiple sources, strengthening the reliability of the results.

The assessment adhered to strict ethical guidelines to protect the rights and confidentiality of participants. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and data were anonymized to ensure privacy. Special care was taken to create safe spaces for participants in FGDs and KIIs to

share their perspectives openly. By combining these methods, the assessment achieved a holistic understanding of the status of WPS and NAPs in Lebanon, Iraq, Tunisia, and Libya, providing actionable recommendations to advance the WPS agenda in these contexts.

For each country, the assessment includes an introduction and contextual analysis that explores the current conflicts and their impact on women, as well as the role of women in addressing these conflicts. It examines key achievements and challenges related to the WPS agenda, providing detailed conclusions and actionable recommendations for the way forward. This structure ensures a country-specific approach that highlights unique dynamics while drawing overarching lessons and strategies.

General overview and analysis

In October 2000, United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 laid the foundation for Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda. Over the past two decades, the agenda has made substantial strides at both international and national levels. Resolution 1325 and subsequent resolutions have significantly influenced global discourse, reshaping how gender roles are understood before, during, and after conflicts. Initially framed around the notion of women as victims of war, the agenda has evolved to recognize women as active agents of peace and security. This shift represents a critical transformation, underscoring the role of women in conflict prevention, resolution, and recovery. The resolution marked a turning point in reframing security concepts and situating women's rights at the core of conflict and post-conflict discourse. It has since become a cornerstone for integrating gender equality into peacebuilding processes, serving as a vital tool for advancing women's participation in decision-making at all levels.

However, the continuing wars and crises necessitate a critical re-evaluation of the WPS agenda. Women's rights organizations and advocates increasingly recognize the necessity of adjusting its approach to the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda to better reflect the complex local realities while remaining firmly rooted in international women's rights standards.

The future of the WPS agenda hinges on a dual strategy: reaffirming its foundational principles of gender equality and human rights while reassuring its application in local contexts. This approach bridges the gap between global norms and localized needs, transforming an aspiration into an urgent necessity.

Women's Rights Organizations: Driving the WPS Agenda

Women's rights and women led organizations emerged as central actors in advancing the WPS agenda. Their efforts are crucial not only in amplifying the voices of marginalized women, but also in challenging systemic inequalities, and addressing the structural and institutional barriers that perpetuate injustice, all while advocating for justice and accountability. Participants highlighted the need for these organizations to bridge local initiatives with global human rights principles, leveraging their unique experiences to push for meaningful change in peace and security efforts. Their role is not only instrumental in addressing immediate needs but also in shaping a long-term, transformative vision for equality and inclusion.

Challenging Militarism

While Resolution 1325 recognizes women's roles in peacebuilding and conflict resolution, it falls short of addressing deeper critiques of militarism and its impact on gender equality. The resolution focuses on certain aspects of conflict without challenging the systems that sustain war, allowing the agenda to shift toward integrating women into existing security structures rather than addressing the root causes of conflict. The WPS agenda should prioritize preventing war, not merely making it safer for women. By emphasizing women's inclusion in militarized spaces, the agenda risks reinforcing traditional gender roles that frame women as natural peacemakers, instead of dismantling the systems that perpetuate violence.

Structural Inequality

Resolution 1325 does not address the deeper causes of inequality that make women especially vulnerable in conflicts. While it includes women in peace and security efforts, it overlooks the systemic issues, like poverty and cultural barriers, that escalate during war and block women from accessing their rights. By focusing on inclusion without tackling these root problems, the resolution risks reinforcing the same unequal systems it aims to change, instead of being a tool for real transformation.

Lack of Enforcement Mechanisms in Resolution 1325

Resolution 1325 lacks effective enforcement mechanisms to ensure its effectiveness. Without explicit accountability measures, implementation standards, or benchmarks for progress, the resolution operates more as a set of guidelines than as an actionable mandate. These gaps raise important questions about the broader challenge of translating international resolutions into tangible outcomes. How can Resolution 1325 be effectively aligned with other women's rights frameworks at both substantive and procedural levels?

Addressing Local Realities and Power Structures

The reliance on external funding and the lack of sufficient local funding have weakened anti-hegemonic, anti-patriarchal, and anti-capitalist feminist efforts. Over time, many local organizations, though not all, have adopted and mirrored externally driven frameworks, creating a gap between these organizations and their local communities. This disconnect is further intensified by local resistance, which arises from either a lack of awareness about these frameworks, direct critiques of their relevance, or adherence to traditional values that emphasize distinct gender roles. These dynamics highlight the urgent need for a context-driven reevaluation of the agenda's frameworks to ensure they address local realities while actively dismantling colonial and patriarchal power structures.

Conclusion

The Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda remains both a critical tool in advancing gender equality and a framework that often reflects the dominant global political and economic order. For the feminist movement, women's rights organizations, women-led initiatives, and advocates in the MENA, particularly in Lebanon, Iraq and Tunisia, the challenge is to adapt this agenda into a transformative project that addresses local realities while dismantling systemic injustices.

Key questions emerge as the agenda evolves. How can feminist movements and women-led organizations engage with international women's rights frameworks when global policies often fail to address the root causes of conflict in these countries? How can trust be restored in approaches to peace and security when donor narratives impose external priorities that overlook local needs? In many cases, these narratives frame women's struggles solely through the lens of patriarchal oppression ignoring the broader structural causes of inequality, such as poverty, political instability, and systemic violence.

In Lebanon, Iraq, Libya, and Tunisia, women's challenges are often reduced to cultural or societal factors, while the deeper systems of inequality, conflict, and marginalization remain unaddressed. This approach risks silencing women's voices and perspectives on their own realities, framing them as victims rather than active agents of change. Such narratives fail to acknowledge the

multifaceted struggles of women and women’s rights advocates in these countries to shape their societies and assert their rights amid ongoing instability.

The feminist movement, women’s rights organizations, and women advocate in the region must work together to reclaim the WPS agenda, embedding it in a justice-oriented framework that reflects local contexts and realities. By addressing not only gender inequality but also the systemic and structural factors perpetuating violence and marginalization, these actors have the potential to transform the agenda into a powerful tool for sustainable peace and inclusive security.

WPS Lebanon

Introduction

Lebanon has faced a multitude of challenges over the past decades, marked by ongoing political instability, economic crises, and the enduring impacts of conflict. In this volatile context, the role of women in peacebuilding, crisis management, and community resilience has been both critical and underrecognized. The Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda, as articulated in United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325, offers a transformative framework to address these challenges by ensuring that women are included as equal participants in conflict prevention, resolution, and recovery efforts.

This report assesses the progress and challenges in implementing the WPS agenda in Lebanon, with a particular focus on the National Action Plan (NAP) adopted in 2019. The NAP serves as a cornerstone for integrating gender-sensitive approaches into Lebanon’s policies and practices, encompassing key areas such as participation, prevention, protection, relief, and recovery. It reflects Lebanon’s commitment to aligning with international standards while addressing the unique needs and experiences of women in its socio-political landscape.

Despite significant strides, the implementation of the WPS agenda in Lebanon remains fraught with systemic obstacles, including resource constraints, cultural barriers, and coordination gaps between national strategies and local realities. This report aims to provide a comprehensive overview of Lebanon’s achievements under the WPS framework, highlight persistent challenges, and propose actionable recommendations for advancing gender equality and inclusive governance.

The findings presented in this report are drawn from an extensive review of national documents, focus group discussions, and stakeholder consultations. By amplifying the voices of women and marginalized groups, this report seeks to offer a nuanced understanding of Lebanon’s journey toward fulfilling the WPS agenda and ensuring that women’s contributions to peace and security are recognized, valued, and institutionalized.

This introduction sets the stage for a deeper exploration of Lebanon’s progress and challenges, emphasizing the critical need for continued efforts to strengthen women’s roles in peacebuilding and governance in the face of persistent instability and inequality.

Context

Lebanon’s socio-political landscape has been shaped by decades of conflict, economic crises, and social disruption. From the Civil War (1975–1990) to ongoing tensions with Israel, including the 2006 war, and the effects of the Syrian refugee crisis, Lebanon has faced cascading challenges. The situation has been compounded by the economic collapse, which has debilitated state institutions; the COVID-19 pandemic, which intensified pre-existing gender inequalities; the catastrophic Beirut Port explosion in August 2020, which underscored the fragility of Lebanon’s infrastructure and governance; and the latest Israeli war, which reignited widespread tensions. Together, these emergencies have intensified the vulnerabilities of women and marginalized communities, hindered policy implementation, and exposed significant gaps in the localization and sustainability of the WPS agenda.

While some progress has been achieved, including the adoption of the National Action Plan (NAP) in alignment with UNSCR 1325, Lebanon's multifaceted crises have underscored a number of critical shortcomings. The WPS agenda has often struggled to address structural inequalities, with the absence of an intersectional and crisis-gender-sensitive approach leaving women and marginalized groups disproportionately affected. Furthermore, its localization efforts remain insufficient, as symbolic achievements have frequently overshadowed transformative outcomes, preventing the agenda from fostering long-term, meaningful change.

The Impact of Conflicts on Women in Lebanon Amid the Latest War

Women in Lebanon have faced heightened vulnerabilities because of the recent escalation of conflict with Israel. This crisis builds upon a longstanding history of instability, economic collapse, and systemic barriers that disproportionately affect women. The convergence of displacement, gender-based violence (GBV), economic hardships, and health challenges has created a multifaceted crisis for women in Lebanon, with the latest conflict magnifying these challenges to an unprecedented level.

The recent conflict led to significant displacement in Lebanon's southern regions, forcing thousands of families to flee their homes, many of whom were already vulnerable due to previous crises. Women among the displaced population face heightened risks, including limited access to shelter, healthcare, and basic resources. The conflict has exposed gaps in Lebanon's preparedness for crises, with displaced women left to navigate inadequate safety nets and insufficient support systems. Gender-based violence has surged in both public and private spheres during the conflict. Women in shelters, host family arrangements, and border regions reported incidents of domestic violence, harassment, and exploitation, which often go unaddressed due to inadequate monitoring and systemic failings.

The economic impact of the recent conflict has further strained women's resilience. The destruction of infrastructure, including agricultural land, coupled with Lebanon's ongoing economic collapse, has left women-headed households particularly vulnerable. The healthcare system, already fragile, has been overwhelmed during the conflict. Displaced women face difficulties accessing essential reproductive health services and sanitation facilities, increasing risks of menstrual hygiene issues and infections. Meanwhile, the psychological toll of violence, displacement, and uncertainty remains largely untreated. Women bear the compounded burden of managing the emotional and physical well-being of their families while navigating unsafe and unstable environments.

Lebanon's adoption of the National Action Plan (NAP) under UNSCR 1325 was a milestone, but its implementation during the latest conflict has exposed critical gaps. The localization of the WPS agenda remains inadequate, with symbolic achievements overshadowing the need for transformative, systemic changes. Structural inequalities and the lack of a crisis-sensitive and intersectional approach have left women and marginalized groups disproportionately affected by the ongoing war and its fallout.

Women's Roles in Addressing Conflicts

Despite these challenges, women in Lebanon have consistently demonstrated resilience and leadership in addressing the impacts of conflict. Women have played pivotal roles at both grassroots and institutional levels, contributing to peacebuilding, humanitarian efforts, and community cohesion.

- **Humanitarian Leadership:** Women-led organizations have been instrumental in providing essential services, such as shelter, food, and psychosocial support, particularly during crises. For instance, in areas like Akkar and Hasbaya, women coordinated with local municipalities to manage shelters and distribute resources. These efforts filled critical gaps left by formal institutions and highlighted the capacity of women to lead in crisis management.
- **Peacebuilding and Advocacy:** Female leaders and activists have actively participated in advocating for gender-sensitive policies and conflict resolution strategies. Women's networks have mobilized to amplify the voices of marginalized communities and demand inclusive recovery efforts. For example, women's advocacy has been pivotal in pushing for the inclusion of gender perspectives in Lebanon's emergency response frameworks and peacebuilding initiatives.
- **Grassroots Resilience:** At the community level, women have taken on expanded caregiving roles, fostering social cohesion and mitigating the impact of displacement on vulnerable groups. Women's initiatives often provide psychological reassurance to displaced families, creating a sense of unity and support. In areas heavily affected by conflict, women's grassroots movements have also played a key role in mediating local disputes and ensuring that aid reaches those most in need.
- **Engagement in National Policy Frameworks:** Female leaders and activists have actively participated in advocating for gender-sensitive policies and conflict resolution strategies. Women's networks have mobilized to highlight the disproportionate impact of the conflict on women and the need for inclusive recovery efforts.

Structural Barriers to Women's Roles

While women's contributions have been invaluable, their roles are often constrained by systemic barriers. Cultural norms and patriarchal structures continue to limit women's access to decision-making spaces, particularly at higher levels of governance. Focus group participants noted that women's efforts are frequently undervalued or overshadowed by traditional authorities and political parties. Additionally, the lack of sustainable funding for women-led initiatives and the disconnect between national policies and local needs undermine their potential impact. Women's participation in decision-making processes often remains symbolic rather than substantive, with quotas sometimes serving as a ceiling rather than a steppingstone for broader inclusion.

Lebanon's conflicts have deeply impacted women, exposing them to heightened vulnerabilities while also highlighting their resilience and leadership. Women have proven to be indispensable in humanitarian response, peacebuilding, and community resilience. By addressing systemic barriers and investing in women's capacities, Lebanon can leverage their contributions to build a more inclusive and sustainable peace.

Overview of the Context in Which Lebanon’s NAP Was Developed

The United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325, adopted in 2000, provided the foundation for Lebanon’s commitment to advancing women’s roles in conflict prevention, peacebuilding, and post-conflict recovery. The adoption of the NAP followed international recommendations, including those from the CEDAW Committee in 2015, which urged Lebanon to create a gender-responsive plan to address women’s rights and participation in peace processes.

The National Commission for Lebanese Women (NCLW) played a central role in the NAP’s development, tasked by the Presidency of the Council of Ministers to spearhead the process. Recognizing the complexity of Lebanon’s governance structure, the NCLW adopted a participatory and inclusive approach. This included establishing a Steering Committee that brought together six key government ministries including: the former Office of the Minister of State for Women’s Affairs, Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants, Ministry of Interior and Municipalities, Ministry of Justice, and the Ministry of Social Affairs and three civil society organizations involved in this field including the organization ABAAD, Women In Front and the Institute for Arab Women at the Lebanese American University. The Committee also included six United Nations agencies serving as a technical advisory board and they are UN Women serving as General Secretariat, ESCWA, OHCHR, UNDP, UNFPA, and UNIFIL. Affairs, Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants, Ministry of Interior and Municipalities, Ministry of Justice, and the Ministry of Social Affairs and three civil society organizations involved in this field including the organization ABAAD, Women In Front and the Institute for Arab Women at the Lebanese American University.

The NAP’s development was informed by comprehensive consultations and a situational analysis of the gendered impacts of Lebanon’s ongoing challenges. These challenges included widespread gender-based violence, underrepresentation of women in political and security sectors, and limited access to resources and opportunities for women and girls. Additionally, Lebanon’s refugee crisis further amplified the vulnerabilities of women, especially among displaced and marginalized populations.

Adopted during a period of political and economic strain, Lebanon’s NAP aimed to address systemic inequalities and promote women’s participation across five strategic priorities aligned with the four pillars of the WPS agenda: participation in decision-making, prevention of conflict, protection of women and girls, relief and recovery, and reforming normative frameworks.

Lebanon’s NAP represents a significant step towards institutionalizing the WPS agenda within a complex and fragile national context. It reflects the country’s acknowledgment of the vital role women play in peace and security, and its commitment to fostering a more equitable and inclusive society despite persistent challenges.

The **Strategic Priorities** outlined in Lebanon’s National Action Plan (NAP) on UNSCR 1325 are:

- 1. Participation**
- 2. Prevention**
- 3. Protection**
- 4. Relief and Recovery**
- 5. Promotion of Normative Frameworks and Policy Reform**

Strategic Priorities of Lebanon’s National Action Plan (NAP) on UNSCR 1325

1. Participation

The NAP emphasizes enhancing women’s participation in decision-making processes at all levels, particularly in peacebuilding, conflict prevention, and governance. It seeks to empower women as active agents in national dialogues, reconciliation efforts, and the formulation of security and political policies. This priority highlights the importance of integrating women’s perspectives and voices in shaping Lebanon’s peace and security agenda.

2. Prevention

The prevention pillar focuses on addressing the root causes of conflict with a gender-sensitive approach. It includes strengthening mechanisms to prevent violence, particularly against women and girls, through early warning systems and targeted interventions. The NAP also emphasizes combating structural inequalities and challenging societal norms that perpetuate violence and discrimination.

3. Protection

Under the protection pillar, the NAP outlines measures to safeguard women and girls from violence, exploitation, and abuse, particularly in conflict and displacement contexts. It includes enhancing legal frameworks and institutional capacities to protect the rights of women and girls, as well as providing access to safe spaces, legal aid, and psychosocial support for survivors of violence.

4. Relief and Recovery

The relief and recovery priority addresses the immediate and long-term needs of women and girls affected by conflict. The NAP emphasizes integrating gender-responsive approaches into humanitarian assistance, rebuilding efforts, and economic empowerment programs. It also seeks to ensure that recovery processes are inclusive and account for the specific challenges faced by women in conflict-affected areas.

5. Promotion of Normative Frameworks and Policy Reform

This priority focuses on aligning Lebanon’s national laws and policies with international standards, such as UNSCR 1325 and CEDAW. It aims to mainstream gender perspectives across security, defense, and governance sectors. The NAP also seeks to enhance institutional accountability and ensure the sustainability of gender-sensitive policies and reforms.

These strategic priorities provide a comprehensive framework for advancing the Women, Peace, and Security agenda in Lebanon, addressing both immediate challenges and systemic inequalities faced by women and girls in the context of conflict and recovery.

Achievements

Lebanon has made significant progress in advancing the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda, reflecting a growing commitment to gender equality, institutional reforms, and women’s empowerment. This section highlights the key achievements, as identified in national reports, focus group discussions, and stakeholder contributions.

1. Adoption of the National Action Plan (NAP) on Women, Peace, and Security

In 2019, Lebanon launched its first National Action Plan (NAP) on Women, Peace, and Security, aligning with United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325. The NAP represents a strategic framework to enhance women's participation in decision-making, prevent conflict, protect women and girls, and promote gender-sensitive relief and recovery initiatives. The National Commission for Lebanese Women (NCLW) spearheaded its development with support from government ministries, civil society organizations, and international partners.

Through this plan, Lebanon institutionalized gender perspectives in peace and security frameworks. Focus group participants emphasized the participatory process behind the NAP's creation, involving women-led organizations and marginalized communities. The NAP's strategic priorities—participation, prevention, protection, relief and recovery, and normative frameworks and policy reform—have laid a solid foundation for promoting women's rights. However, the adoption process also highlighted systemic gaps, including financial constraints and sociopolitical barriers that were addressed through collaborative workshops and consultations.

2. Legal Reforms to Address Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

Lebanon has implemented pivotal legal reforms to combat GBV and protect women's rights. Notable milestones include:

- **Law 205/2020:** Criminalized sexual harassment and established mechanisms for the rehabilitation of survivors. This law introduced clear definitions of harassment across various platforms, including digital spaces, and ensured protection for whistleblowers.
- **Amendments to Domestic Violence Laws 293/2014:** Amendments to **Law 293/2014 in 2020** expanded the definition of domestic violence to include economic and psychological abuse, offering survivors enhanced legal protections that extend beyond physical harm. Furthermore, the amendments addressed a critical gap by allowing children of survivors to be included in protective orders, ensuring their safety and acknowledging the broader impact of domestic violence on families.
- **Specialized Hotlines and Mechanisms:** The establishment of hotlines, such as the Internal Security Forces (ISF) hotline for domestic violence complaints and electronic blackmail, has created accessible avenues for survivors to seek help.

Focus group discussions highlighted that while these reforms represent substantial progress, their implementation requires more effective monitoring systems and greater public awareness to ensure survivors can access their rights. Stakeholders emphasized the need for continued advocacy to address cultural stigmas surrounding GBV reporting.

Other Legal and Policy Reforms

- Amendments were made to the Social Security Law, enhancing women's and their children's rights.
- The Parliamentary Human Rights Committee approved a draft law to protect children from early marriage.
- The Supreme Islamic Council passed Resolution 62, unifying the minimum marriage age for men and women at 18 years.
- The Ministry of Education and Higher Education adopted a decree regulating and setting conditions for free education.
- The Ministry of Public Health launched the National Clinical Care Strategy for Survivors of Rape.
- The Council of Ministers approved the First National Social Protection Strategy.

- Gender equality concepts were integrated into the Ministry of Agriculture's 2020–2025 Strategies.
- The Ministry of Social Affairs and the Higher Council for Childhood launched a national action plan to prevent and respond to child marriage (2021–2026).

Institutional Mechanisms and Tools

- A **hotline (1745)** was activated by the Internal Security Forces (ISF) to address domestic violence complaints.
- The ISF launched a **hotline (01293293)** to address electronic blackmail.
- The Ministry of Education and Higher Education introduced a **hotline (01772000)** for general complaints.
- The Ministry of Labor developed policies to prevent, respond to, and punish sexual harassment in the workplace.
- The Ministry of Social Affairs launched **Standard Operating Procedures** to address gender-based violence (GBV) and ensure coordination among stakeholders.
- A digital database was created to monitor and evaluate the NAP implementation.
- Quality standards for temporary safe shelters for women and girls were developed by the Ministry of Social Affairs.
- A **glossary on GBV terminology** was published to standardize language and improve communication on the topic.
- The Ministry of Social Affairs collaborated with partners to create a group of lawyers providing legal support to survivors of violence

3. Increased Representation of Women in Leadership Roles

Lebanon has seen a notable rise in women's participation in leadership positions across sectors. Highlights include:

- A 30% quota for women ministers in Prime Minister Hassan Diab's cabinet, which included the historic appointment of the first female Defense Minister in the Arab world.
- Equal representation in the Lebanese Military Academy, with male and female officers graduating in equal numbers for the first time. Additionally, the Lebanese Army established a **Gender Affairs Unit** to institutionalize gender equality within its ranks.
- Women's participation in municipal councils and other decision-making spaces has increased, though stakeholders noted that qualitative representation, ensuring meaningful roles rather than token appointments, remains a work in progress.
- Dr. Houaida Turk made history as the first woman to be appointed Acting Governor of Nabatieh, setting a precedent for female leadership in Lebanon's governance.

These achievements were celebrated in focus group discussions as milestones that pave the way for broader societal acceptance of women in leadership. However, participants also pointed to the need for policies that go beyond quotas to address structural barriers limiting women's influence.

4. Empowerment of Women-Led Organizations

Women-led organizations have played a crucial role in humanitarian and peacebuilding efforts, particularly during crises. These organizations have provided essential services, such as shelter, food, and psychosocial support, often filling gaps left by formal institutions.

Focus group discussions highlighted that women's networks have mobilized to advocate for gender-sensitive policies and amplify the voices of marginalized communities. For instance, women-led initiatives in Akkar and Chouf successfully coordinated shelter operations and provided psychological support to displaced families. One participant remarked, "Women's organizations are at the forefront of every crisis, demonstrating resilience and leadership." These efforts underscore the vital role of grassroots initiatives in building social cohesion during times of displacement and conflict.

5. Integration of Gender Equality in Policies and Strategies

Several national strategies and action plans have incorporated gender perspectives, reinforcing Lebanon's commitment to WPS principles. Key initiatives include:

- **The National Strategy for Women in Lebanon (2022–2030):** A roadmap for advancing gender equality across all sectors. This strategy integrates women's perspectives into national development goals and prioritizes their participation in decision-making processes.
- **The National Social Protection Strategy:** Recognized women's unique vulnerabilities and promoted their access to social services and economic opportunities. Specific measures, such as tailored livelihood programs and maternity benefits, were introduced to address these challenges.
- **The National Action Plan to Prevent Child Marriage (2023–2030):** Aimed at eradicating harmful practices and empowering girls through education and advocacy campaigns. This plan emphasized community-driven approaches to shift societal norms and protect vulnerable populations.

These frameworks demonstrate a shift toward institutionalizing gender equality in national policies and ensuring accountability in their implementation. Focus group participants praised these efforts but stressed the importance of sustained funding and public awareness campaigns to maximize their impact.

6. Community-Based Initiatives and Local Leadership

Grassroots movements and community-driven initiatives have significantly contributed to the WPS agenda. Women's leadership at the local level has been instrumental in addressing immediate needs during crises, such as managing shelters and providing psychological support to displaced families. For example, in Hasbaya, women-led efforts filled critical gaps in the local crisis response, ensuring that displaced families received basic supplies and emotional support.

Participants in focus groups emphasized the importance of empowering local women leaders and integrating their insights into national strategies. One stakeholder noted, "Community-based responses often lead the way in crisis management, highlighting the untapped potential of women at the grassroots level." These efforts highlight the intersection of local leadership and national resilience-building.

7. Advancements in Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanisms

To ensure transparency and accountability, Lebanon has introduced monitoring tools to track the progress of WPS initiatives. For instance, a digital database was developed to evaluate the NAP's implementation. This innovation has enhanced data collection and facilitated evidence-based decision-making, addressing previous gaps in disaggregated data.

Moreover, the NCLW established partnerships with academic institutions and civil society to develop comprehensive monitoring frameworks. These collaborations have enabled the identification of key performance indicators, ensuring that progress can be measured effectively. Focus group discussions highlighted the potential of these mechanisms to inform future policy adjustments and strengthen Lebanon's overall WPS agenda.

Challenges

This section highlights the key challenges hindering the implementation of UNSCR 1325 in Lebanon, drawing on insights from focus group discussions, national reports, and stakeholder feedback. These challenges underscore systemic, institutional, and social barriers that have limited the agenda's progress amidst Lebanon's complex socio-political landscape.

1. Overlapping Crises and Limited State Capacity

Lebanon's implementation of UNSCR 1325 was affected by multiple crises, including the COVID-19 pandemic, the Beirut port explosion, the ongoing economic collapse, and recurrent conflicts with Israel. These emergencies have overwhelmed state institutions, diverting attention and resources away from gender-sensitive policy implementation. Consequently, initiatives under the National Action Plan (NAP) have often been deprioritized or inadequately funded. Moreover, these crises disproportionately impact women, further marginalizing their roles in peacebuilding and security and undermining the agenda's transformative potential.

2. Barriers to Addressing Gender-Based Violence (GBV) in Lebanon

While Lebanon has enacted progressive legal frameworks to combat GBV, persistent gaps in implementation continue to undermine their effectiveness. As one participant stated, "Lebanon is rich in legislation, but poor in implementation." For instance, the absence of legal provisions criminalizing marital rape and the lack of a dedicated fund to support survivors have rendered many laws ineffective. Survivors seeking justice face systemic obstacles, including inaccessible forensic medical services and financial barriers to obtaining essential documentation.

Institutional mechanisms such as hotlines and family protection units have been established, yet their effectiveness is hampered by resource shortages, inadequate training, and male-dominated institutional cultures. These limitations prevent mechanisms from fully adopting survivor-centered approaches, leaving many GBV cases unreported or unaddressed. Participants emphasized the urgent need for comprehensive early warning systems to proactively identify and address GBV risks, particularly in marginalized communities, where violence often escalates unchecked.

The enforcement of existing laws remains hindered by systemic inefficiencies, cultural stigmas, and resource shortages. Survivors seeking justice face significant barriers, including inaccessible forensic medical services and the financial burden of obtaining essential documentation. These challenges, compounded by the discretionary power of judges, result in inconsistent application of laws addressing domestic and gender-based violence (GBV). While awareness campaigns have improved public knowledge about GBV, they fall short of addressing risks in marginalized communities. The absence of localized early warning systems leaves vulnerable populations at greater risk of escalating violence, highlighting gaps in proactive and preventive measures.

3. Exclusion of Women from Decision-Making and Leadership Roles

Lebanon's recent crisis has starkly highlighted the exclusion of women from key decision-making processes, revealing systemic gaps in emergency response, disaster management, and post-crisis reconstruction planning. Despite their active roles in grassroots-level efforts during emergencies, they are systematically excluded from strategic and political spaces. For example, women were not included in municipal and national emergency committees during recent crises, nor were their needs considered in reconstruction discussions. "The crisis not only excluded women but also set back our efforts to integrate gender perspectives into national policies and emergency responses." "Women

were not included in the national emergency committee, nor were their needs considered in reconstruction discussions.”.

For example, during the conflict, women were primarily relegated to caregiving roles, managing daily needs while being excluded from strategic discussions. Although women-led organizations actively addressed gender-specific needs during the crisis, their contributions were often overshadowed by traditional authorities and political parties, whose dominance curtailed progress toward equitable crisis management. Participants noted that these exclusions not only undermine women’s roles in peacebuilding but also set back efforts to integrate gender perspectives into national policies and emergency response. The lack of structured frameworks led to chaos during evacuations, with individuals stranded for prolonged periods in unsafe conditions. As noted by one participant, *“People were stuck for 18 to 24 hours on dangerous roads with missiles falling around them. There wasn’t even a basic evacuation plan in place.”* Civil society and individuals were left to fill the void, opening schools as ad-hoc shelters without proper planning to meet the basic needs of displaced families.

4. Underrepresentation in Security and Peacebuilding Institutions

Women remain significantly underrepresented in Lebanon’s military, police, and broader peacebuilding initiatives. While the inclusion of women in traditionally male-dominated sectors marks progress, their roles often remain symbolic, with limited decision-making power. This underrepresentation hampers the integration of gender-sensitive strategies into security and peacebuilding processes, leaving structural inequalities unaddressed. Without meaningful representation, women’s perspectives on conflict prevention and resolution remain sidelined, diminishing the effectiveness of peacebuilding efforts.

5. Increased Gender-Based Violence (GBV) During Crises

The intersection of multiple crises including economic collapse, political instability, and war has intensified gender-based violence in Lebanon. The focus group discussions indicated an increase in domestic violence, sexual harassment, and exploitation, particularly in shelters and overcrowded accommodations.

One of the Key challenges was the absence of pre-existing local mechanisms to address women’s specific needs during crises, such as protection from gender-based violence and access to mental health support.

The focus group findings highlighted that women often prioritize family survival over their safety, leaving GBV incidents underreported and unaddressed. Moreover, the lack of systematic monitoring and comprehensive protection mechanisms in displacement settings has left women vulnerable. As one participant observed, *“In times of crisis, women don’t report violence because they prioritize survival, but the reality is, violence increased significantly in shelters and host families.”*

6. Disconnect Between National Plans and Local Needs

Lebanon’s national emergency plans often fail to reflect the realities on the ground, particularly the needs of women. Emergency response frameworks are typically designed at the governmental level but lack the flexibility to adapt to local contexts. This disconnect has marginalized women’s roles in crisis response and limited the effectiveness of the National Action Plan (NAP). Focus group participants highlighted that local women-led initiatives, while impactful, operate without coordination or support from national strategies. This gap has left many communities, particularly in rural and underserved areas, without adequate resources or representation in crisis response

mechanisms. According to focus group participants, emergency response frameworks are designed at the governmental level but are rarely localized to reflect community-specific needs. One participant explained, *“The national policies are disconnected from real needs on the ground.”*

7. Financial Constraints and Reliance on External Funding

The financial crisis in Lebanon has severely constrained state budgets for social services, including programs aimed at advancing women’s empowerment and combating GBV. As a result, the implementation of the NAP relies heavily on international funding, which often comes with donor-imposed priorities that may not align with Lebanon’s specific gender and peacebuilding needs. This reliance has created inconsistencies in program implementation and limited the sustainability of WPS initiatives. Stakeholders highlighted that the lack of financial and human resources disproportionately affects marginalized regions, leaving critical gender-sensitive programs underfunded and unsustainable. A stakeholder noted, *“We’re expected to implement comprehensive gender-sensitive frameworks without the basic resources needed to sustain our operations.”* This financial strain affects the continuity and scalability of WPS-related programs.

8. Inadequate Integration of Intersectionality

Women from marginalized groups, including refugees, women with disabilities, and rural women face numerous challenges in accessing resources and support. Intersectionality is often overlooked in policy planning, leading to the exclusion of these groups from gender-sensitive interventions.

The intersection of gender inequality with the refugee crisis remains a significant challenge. Refugee women, particularly Syrian and Palestinian women, are among the most marginalized, facing heightened risks of GBV, economic exploitation, and lack of access to healthcare and education. Despite the NAP’s mandate to address the needs of all women in Lebanon, the inclusion of refugee women in policy frameworks and service delivery remains limited. Focus group discussions revealed that women with disabilities are particularly vulnerable during crises. One participant noted, *“Their needs are not just ignored, they’re invisible.”*

9. Data Deficiencies and Monitoring Gaps

The lack of disaggregated data and comprehensive monitoring systems poses a significant challenge to evaluating the effectiveness of WPS initiatives. Without accurate and detailed data, it becomes nearly impossible to track progress, address gaps, or tailor responses to the unique needs of women and marginalized groups. Stakeholders expressed concern that the absence of accountability mechanisms further weakens the enforcement of gender-sensitive policies and programs, leaving critical issues unaddressed and perpetuating systemic inequalities. As one participant highlighted, *“Data gaps prevent us from addressing the real issues faced by women and girls during crises.”*

10. Fragmentation Between Civil Society and State Actors

Although civil society organizations play a critical role in advancing the WPS agenda, there is a lack of effective coordination between these organizations and government agencies. This fragmentation leads to duplication of efforts, inefficient use of resources, and gaps in service delivery. For example, while civil society often steps in to provide immediate support during crises, the lack of a unified strategy weakens long-term outcomes.

11. Weak Community Engagement in Peacebuilding

While the WPS agenda emphasizes women's roles in peacebuilding, there is limited engagement with grassroots communities, particularly in rural areas. Women at the community level are often excluded from formal peace processes, and their informal contributions to conflict resolution are undervalued. This disconnect undermines the potential for a bottom-up approach to sustainable peacebuilding.

Key Findings

Lebanon's progress in implementing the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda reflects both commendable achievements and persistent challenges. This section synthesizes key findings from the context, National Action Plan (NAP), and related sections, while drawing on evidence from focus group discussions and national reports. The findings offer a critical analysis of Lebanon's efforts to institutionalize gender equality and women's empowerment within its peace and security framework.

1. Progress in Policy Development and Legal Reforms

Lebanon has made significant strides in advancing gender equality through policy development and legal reforms. The adoption of the National Action Plan (NAP) in 2019 marked a critical milestone in aligning national priorities with UNSCR 1325. Key legislative reforms, such as the criminalization of sexual harassment (Law 205/2020) and the amendments to domestic violence laws (Law 293/2014), have strengthened the legal framework for addressing gender-based violence (GBV).

Despite these advancements, the implementation and enforcement of these reforms remain inconsistent. Focus group discussions revealed that many women are unaware of their rights, and cultural and institutional barriers often prevent survivors from accessing justice. Additionally, the lack of comprehensive monitoring mechanisms undermines the accountability of these reforms, limiting their transformative potential.

2. Limited Inclusion of Women in Decision-Making

Women's participation in political and security decision-making processes continues to be constrained, despite their significant contributions to grassroots peacebuilding and crisis response efforts. While the NAP prioritizes the inclusion of women in leadership roles, their representation often lacks depth and influence. For instance, quotas have increased the visibility of women in political and security sectors but have not necessarily translated into substantive decision-making power.

Focus group participants emphasized that women are frequently relegated to symbolic positions, while patriarchal norms dominate decision-making spaces. Their exclusion from high-level emergency committees during recent crises has limited the integration of gender-sensitive perspectives into national strategies. This systemic marginalization highlights the need for structural reforms to empower women as active stakeholders in peace and security frameworks.

3. Resilience and Leadership of Women in Crisis Response

Despite systemic barriers, women in Lebanon have demonstrated exceptional resilience and leadership during crises. Women-led organizations have played a pivotal role in addressing immediate needs, such as providing shelter, food, and psychosocial support, particularly in underserved areas like Akkar and Hasbaya. However, these contributions remain undervalued in

national narratives and policies. Focus group findings highlighted that women's informal roles in crisis response are often overlooked, reinforcing traditional gender norms that limit their recognition and opportunities for advancement. This oversight undermines efforts to integrate gender-sensitive approaches into broader peacebuilding and recovery initiatives.

4. Challenges in Addressing Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

Conflict and displacement have exacerbated GBV in Lebanon, with reports of increased domestic violence, sexual harassment, and exploitation. While legal reforms have provided stronger protections for women, gaps in implementation persist. Survivors face systemic barriers, including inaccessible forensic medical services and financial obstacles in obtaining essential documentation.

Focus group participants stressed the need for systematic GBV monitoring and survivor-centric services, particularly in displacement settings. The absence of localized early warning systems has left marginalized communities vulnerable to escalating violence, highlighting the urgency of integrated GBV prevention and response strategies.

5. Disconnect Between National Plans and Local Needs

Lebanon's NAP and other national strategies often fail to reflect the realities of local communities. Focus group discussions highlighted a lack of localization in emergency response plans, with resources and training rarely reaching the ground level where they are most needed. Women's initiatives at the grassroots level, while impactful, often operate without coordination or support from national frameworks.

This disconnect undermines the effectiveness of the NAP and limits its potential to address gender-specific challenges in a meaningful way. Bridging this gap requires greater collaboration between national institutions and local stakeholders, as well as investment in localized training and capacity-building programs.

6. Inadequate Funding and Resource Allocation

The implementation of the WPS agenda in Lebanon has been constrained by limited funding and resources. Women-led organizations and gender-sensitive programs often rely on external funding, which is insufficient to sustain long-term initiatives. Focus group participants stressed that the lack of dedicated financial support for the NAP hampers its scalability and impact.

This financial strain is compounded by Lebanon's broader economic crisis, which has diverted resources away from gender-sensitive interventions. Addressing these funding challenges is critical to ensuring the sustainability of WPS-related efforts.

7. The Role of Cultural Norms and Patriarchal Structures

Cultural norms and patriarchal structures remain significant barriers to women's empowerment in Lebanon. Societal expectations often confine women to caregiving roles, limiting their participation in public and political life. These norms also perpetuate stigma around reporting GBV, creating additional obstacles for survivors seeking justice.

Focus group participants stressed the importance of public awareness campaigns and education initiatives aimed at challenging these norms. Engaging men and boys as allies in promoting gender equality is also critical to dismantling patriarchal structures and fostering inclusive governance.

Conclusions

The implementation of the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda in Lebanon reveals a dual narrative of progress and persistent challenges. While significant achievements have been made, particularly in policy development, legal reforms, and the demonstrated resilience of women in addressing conflicts, systemic barriers and sociocultural constraints continue to hinder full realization of the agenda. This section provides an analytical synthesis of Lebanon's journey toward advancing gender equality within the peace and security framework, drawing from the key findings and contextual analysis.

1. Acknowledging Progress: Milestones in the WPS Agenda

Lebanon's adoption of its first National Action Plan (NAP) on Women, Peace, and Security in 2019 was a pivotal step in institutionalizing gender-sensitive approaches to peacebuilding and governance. This milestone reflects a growing national commitment to aligning with international standards, such as United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Legislative reforms, including laws addressing sexual harassment and domestic violence, underscore Lebanon's efforts to strengthen legal protections for women.

Women's grassroots initiatives and leadership in crisis response further highlight the critical role they play in fostering resilience and social cohesion. From managing shelters to providing psychosocial support during displacement, women have filled essential gaps left by formal institutions. These achievements not only validate the importance of women's contributions but also set a precedent for integrating gender-sensitive strategies into Lebanon's broader development agenda.

2. Persistent Challenges: Barriers to Implementation

Despite these advancements, Lebanon's WPS agenda remains constrained by systemic and structural barriers:

- **Resource Limitations:** The lack of sustained funding and inadequate resource allocation for NAP implementation have undermined its scalability and impact. Many women-led initiatives operate on shoestring budgets, relying heavily on external support, which is neither sustainable nor sufficient to address long-term challenges.
- **Cultural and Patriarchal Norms:** Deep-rooted societal norms continue to marginalize women from decision-making processes. Women's participation in political and security arenas is often tokenistic, with limited opportunities to influence substantive policy outcomes. These norms also perpetuate stigmas around gender-based violence (GBV), discouraging survivors from seeking justice.
- **Disconnect Between National Policies and Local Realities:** The centralized nature of Lebanon's WPS framework has resulted in a disconnect between national strategies and the needs of local communities. Women's grassroots efforts, while impactful, often operate in isolation from national frameworks, limiting their reach and effectiveness.
- **Limited Accountability Mechanisms:** The absence of comprehensive monitoring and evaluation systems weakens the enforcement of legal and policy reforms. Without robust data collection and performance indicators, progress remains difficult to measure, and gaps persist unaddressed.

3. Women's Resilience as a Driving Force

The resilience and leadership of Lebanese women in addressing the impacts of conflict stand as a testament to their indispensable role in peacebuilding and crisis management. Women's ability to mobilize resources, coordinate relief efforts, and advocate for marginalized groups underscores their potential as agents of change. However, their contributions often go unrecognized, reinforcing the need for structural reforms that institutionalize women's roles in formal governance and crisis response mechanisms.

4. Opportunities for Advancing the WPS Agenda

The challenges identified also present opportunities to strengthen Lebanon's WPS agenda:

- **Localized Implementation of the NAP:** Bridging the gap between national policies and local realities requires a decentralized approach that empowers community-level stakeholders. Providing targeted training and resources to local women-led organizations can amplify their impact and align grassroots efforts with national priorities.
- **Enhanced Funding Mechanisms:** Establishing dedicated funding streams for gender-sensitive programs is essential for sustaining progress. This includes fostering partnerships with international donors and private sector entities to ensure consistent support for WPS initiatives.
- **Public Awareness and Education Campaigns:** Shifting cultural norms requires comprehensive awareness campaigns that challenge patriarchal structures and promote gender equality. Engaging men and boys as allies in these efforts can create a more inclusive and supportive environment for women.
- **Strengthening Accountability Systems:** Developing robust monitoring and evaluation frameworks can ensure transparency and track progress in implementing the WPS agenda. Data-driven decision-making will enable policymakers to identify gaps and adapt strategies accordingly.

The Way Forward

The Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda in Lebanon has achieved significant milestones, yet its full potential remains unrealized due to systemic barriers and sociocultural constraints. To build on the progress made and address persistent challenges, Lebanon must adopt a forward-looking and transformative approach that prioritizes inclusivity, resilience, and sustainability. This section outlines actionable recommendations for advancing the WPS agenda.

1. Localizing the National Action Plan (NAP)

To enhance the effectiveness of the NAP, Lebanon must adopt a decentralized approach that bridges the gap between national policies and local realities:

- **Empower Local Stakeholders:** Provide resources and training to women-led organizations, community leaders, and local authorities to implement gender-sensitive initiatives at the grassroots level.
- **Community-Based Monitoring:** Establish localized monitoring mechanisms to track progress and ensure that community needs are reflected in NAP activities.
- **Integration of Marginalized Voices:** Actively involve refugees, rural women, and other marginalized groups in the design and implementation of local WPS initiatives to ensure inclusivity.

2. Strengthening Funding and Resource Allocation

The sustainability of Lebanon's WPS agenda depends on securing consistent and adequate funding:

- **Dedicated Funding Streams:** Establish a national fund specifically for WPS-related activities, with contributions from government budgets, international donors, and private sector partnerships.
- **Support for Women-Led Initiatives:** Prioritize funding for grassroots women's organizations, ensuring that they have the financial stability to continue their critical work.
- **Capacity Building:** Allocate resources for training programs that enhance the skills of women in leadership, peacebuilding, and crisis management.

3. Shifting Cultural Norms and Patriarchal Structures

Transforming societal attitudes is crucial for achieving gender equality:

- **Public Awareness Campaigns:** Launch nationwide campaigns to challenge gender stereotypes, promote the role of women in peacebuilding, and raise awareness about gender-based violence (GBV).
- **Engaging Men and Boys:** Develop programs that involve men and boys as allies in advancing gender equality, emphasizing their role in challenging patriarchal norms.
- **Education Reforms:** Integrate gender equality into school curricula to foster a culture of inclusivity and respect from an early age.

4. Institutionalizing Women's Roles in Decision-Making

To ensure meaningful participation, women's inclusion in decision-making processes must go beyond symbolic representation:

- **Expand Quotas:** Implement and enforce gender quotas in political, security, and governance roles, ensuring that women hold substantive positions.
- **Leadership Training:** Provide mentorship and capacity-building programs for women in leadership roles to enhance their influence and effectiveness.
- **Inclusive Policy Design:** Involve women's networks and organizations in the drafting and review of national policies to ensure gender-sensitive approaches.

5. Addressing Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

Strengthening protection mechanisms and support systems for GBV survivors is essential:

- **Survivor-Centric Services:** Expand access to shelters, legal aid, and psychosocial support for GBV survivors, particularly in underserved areas.
- **Robust Reporting Mechanisms:** Develop accessible and confidential reporting channels to encourage survivors to seek help without fear of stigma or reprisal.
- **Enhanced Law Enforcement Training:** Train police and judicial personnel to handle GBV cases with sensitivity and ensure accountability for perpetrators.

6. Advancing Data Collection and Accountability

Data-driven decision-making is critical for evaluating progress and identifying gaps:

- **Comprehensive Data Systems:** Establish a centralized database to collect disaggregated data on women's participation, GBV incidents, and NAP implementation.

- **Regular Reporting:** Publish annual progress reports on the WPS agenda, highlighting achievements, challenges, and areas for improvement.
- **Independent Oversight:** Create an independent body to monitor and evaluate the implementation of the NAP and related initiatives.

7. Enhancing Regional and International Collaboration

Leveraging regional and international partnerships can amplify Lebanon's efforts:

- **Cross-Border Learning:** Collaborate with countries that have successfully implemented the WPS agenda to share best practices and lessons learned.
- **International Advocacy:** Strengthen partnerships with United Nations agencies and international NGOs to secure technical and financial support.
- **Regional Networks:** Establish networks of women peacebuilders across the Middle East to address shared challenges and promote regional stability.

8. Promoting Intersectionality in WPS Efforts

Recognizing the diverse experiences of women is vital for inclusive policy-making:

- **Tailored Interventions:** Develop targeted programs that address the unique needs of refugees, women with disabilities, and other marginalized groups.
- **Intersectional Analysis:** Incorporate intersectional frameworks into policy design and evaluation to ensure that no group is left behind.
- **Collaborative Approaches:** Work with specialized organizations to address the specific challenges faced by vulnerable populations.

Tunis WPS and NAP Assessment

Introduction

Tunisia stands as a leading example in the Arab world for its progressive strides toward women’s rights and gender equality. The country has been a regional forerunner in enacting groundbreaking policies, such as the 1956 Personal Status Code, which abolished polygamy and granted women equal rights in marriage and divorce, and the 2014 Constitution, which institutionalized gender parity in elected assemblies. These measures reflect Tunisia’s historical commitment to gender equality.

However, the progress achieved has faced significant challenges in recent years, particularly amidst political, social, and economic upheavals. The political consolidation under President Kais Saied since 2021, marked by the dissolution of parliament and the centralization of executive power, has raised concerns about democratic backsliding and its adverse impacts on women’s rights. The erosion of previously established safeguards has contributed to a notable decline in women’s representation and participation in public life.

The socio-economic realities have further compounded these challenges. Economic instability, marked by inflation and resource shortages, has disproportionately impacted women, particularly those in rural and marginalized communities. Despite these adversities, Tunisia’s efforts to implement the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda remain critical.

The adoption of Tunisia’s first National Action Plan (NAP) for the implementation of UNSCR 1325 (2018–2022) was a milestone aimed at enhancing women’s roles in peacebuilding, preventing violence, and integrating gender perspectives into security strategies. However, the absence of a subsequent NAP highlights the need for sustained commitment to advancing this agenda.

This assessment examines the trajectory of the WPS agenda and the 2018–2022 NAP in Tunisia. It evaluates achievements, identifies challenges, and outlines recommendations for strengthening the role of women in peace and security. By situating the WPS agenda within Tunisia’s broader socio-political and economic context, the report aims to offer insights for future strategies that reinforce gender equality and women’s empowerment in Tunisia.

Context

The context of Tunisia’s current situation reflects a complex interplay of political, economic, social, and security conflicts that deeply affect the population. Women, in particular, face disproportionate impacts, both as victims of these challenges and as critical agents in addressing them.

Tunisia’s political landscape has been deeply affected by instability and a shift toward authoritarian governance. Since 2021, the political system has undergone significant upheaval following President Kais Saied’s decision to dissolve parliament, implement a highly centralized constitution, and limit civil liberties. These actions have weakened democratic institutions, curtailed civic freedoms, and created a polarized political climate. The political tension is further exacerbated by a loss of trust in governmental institutions, as citizens witness reduced

opportunities for participation, particularly for women and marginalized groups. The removal of gender parity provisions from electoral laws is a stark example of how recent political reforms have undermined inclusive representation.

Economically, Tunisia faces one of its most severe crises in decades. Inflation rates have soared above 10%, essential goods like food and medicine are increasingly scarce, and unemployment continues to rise. This economic stagnation has created a significant disparity between urban and rural regions. In rural areas, opportunities for formal employment are scarce, and reliance on informal labor—often unregulated and exploitative—is widespread. The agricultural sector, dominated by informal arrangements, exemplifies these issues, with women laborers frequently earning minimal wages while enduring unsafe working conditions.

Socially, these political and economic challenges have intensified existing tensions, leading to a rise in gender-based violence (GBV) and heightened inequality. Despite Tunisia’s progressive legal framework, such as the 2017 law addressing violence against women, societal norms and institutional weaknesses often render these protections ineffective. In rural and underserved communities, access to healthcare, education, and social services remains limited, perpetuating cycles of poverty and marginalization.

On the security front, Tunisia continues to grapple with terrorism, political unrest, and border instability. While the country has avoided full-scale conflict, these security concerns disproportionately affect women, particularly in marginalized regions. Policies aimed at addressing security threats often lack a gender-sensitive approach, overlooking the unique vulnerabilities and needs of women, including their safety, access to services, and protection from exploitation.

Impact of Conflicts on Women

Women have borne the brunt of Tunisia’s multifaceted crises. Politically, they have been systematically excluded from decision-making processes, as evidenced by the steep decline in female representation in parliament following the removal of gender parity laws. Female activists and journalists have been targets of harassment and persecution under restrictive measures, further limiting women’s visibility and influence in public life. This marginalization stifles not only women’s voices but also the advancement of gender-sensitive policies that could address systemic inequities.

Economically, the situation is equally dire. Women disproportionately occupy the lowest-paying and least secure jobs in Tunisia’s informal economy, particularly in agriculture and domestic work. Rural female laborers are often paid significantly less than their male counterparts and face unsafe working environments, with fatal accidents during transportation to job sites being a recurring issue. Inflation and resource scarcity have further strained women’s ability to meet household needs, leading to increased financial dependency and instances of economic violence.

Socially, women experience heightened levels of GBV, exacerbated by economic stress and political instability. Domestic violence, harassment, and other forms of abuse are pervasive, and survivors often face stigma and a lack of adequate support services. In rural areas, cultural norms restrict women’s mobility, access to education, and ability to seek justice, further entrenching gender inequality. These barriers not only harm women directly but also limit their potential to contribute fully to their communities.

Security concerns have compounded these issues, with women in conflict-prone or unstable regions facing exploitation, trafficking, and violence. As primary caregivers, women are often forced to navigate unsafe environments to secure resources for their families. Their unique vulnerabilities are rarely addressed in national security strategies, leaving them disproportionately affected by both direct threats and the collateral damage of instability.

Women's Role in Addressing the Conflicts

Despite the significant challenges they face, women in Tunisia have proven to be pivotal in addressing the country's conflicts, demonstrating resilience and agency in political, economic, social, and security spheres. Politically, women-led civil society organizations have been at the forefront of advocacy efforts, pushing for reforms to protect gender equality and human rights. Women were instrumental in the 2014 National Dialogue Quartet, which played a key role in stabilizing Tunisia's post-revolution transition and was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for its contributions.

Economically, women have emerged as key drivers of community resilience. Many have established small businesses and cooperatives, particularly in rural areas, to create employment opportunities and foster economic independence. These initiatives not only address immediate economic needs but also empower women to break free from cycles of poverty and dependency.

On a social level, women have led grassroots campaigns to combat GBV and challenge harmful societal norms. Their efforts have raised awareness about issues such as economic injustice and gender discrimination, mobilizing communities to demand systemic change. Female educators and healthcare providers have played vital roles in supporting underserved populations, particularly in rural areas where access to essential services is limited.

In the realm of peacebuilding, women have actively participated in mediation and conflict resolution efforts. Their involvement in dialogue initiatives has helped bridge divides, foster reconciliation, and promote sustainable peace. Women's organizations have also advocated for the integration of gender perspectives in national security policies, emphasizing the importance of addressing the specific needs of women in conflict-affected areas.

Overview of Tunisia's National Action Plan (NAP) for UNSCR 1325

Tunisia's National Action Plan (NAP) for the implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) was a landmark policy framework adopted for the period 2018–2022. It marked Tunisia's commitment to advancing gender equality and integrating gender perspectives into peace, security, and governance policies. The NAP reflects Tunisia's recognition of women as essential contributors to national peacebuilding and security. Below is a detailed breakdown of the framework, objectives, and implementation mechanisms of Tunisia's NAP.

Framework and Pillars of the NAP

The NAP is built on the foundational principles of UNSCR 1325, which identifies women as critical actors in promoting peace and security. It is structured around four interconnected pillars that aim to address gender-specific issues in conflict and post-conflict scenarios:

1. Participation:

- This pillar focuses on increasing women's involvement in decision-making processes, particularly in areas related to peacebuilding, conflict prevention, and governance. The NAP emphasizes the need for women's inclusion in political leadership, security forces, and negotiation tables to ensure their voices shape the country's trajectory toward peace and development.
- Efforts under this pillar include promoting women's representation in local, regional, and national political bodies, as well as in peacekeeping and conflict resolution roles.

2. Protection:

- The protection pillar is centered on safeguarding women and girls from violence, exploitation, and abuse, particularly in conflict or fragile contexts. It includes enhancing legal and institutional frameworks to address gender-based violence (GBV) and ensure survivors have access to justice and support services.
- Measures under this pillar aim to prevent violence, support survivors with rehabilitation and reintegration programs, and build institutional capacity to respond effectively to GBV.

3. Prevention:

- This pillar aims to tackle the root causes of conflict and violence through gender-sensitive approaches. The focus is on promoting social cohesion, addressing inequalities, and preventing extremism and radicalization.
- Preventative measures include community-based initiatives, education campaigns, and programs designed to mitigate risks and foster resilience against violence and instability.

4. Relief and Recovery:

- This pillar ensures that women's needs are considered in humanitarian aid, post-conflict recovery, and reconstruction efforts. It recognizes the unique challenges women face in conflict and disaster-affected areas and emphasizes their active participation in designing and implementing recovery programs.
- Relief and recovery efforts include rebuilding infrastructure, providing psychosocial support, and creating economic opportunities for women in conflict-affected areas.

The NAP's framework integrates these pillars into a comprehensive strategy to empower women and enhance their roles in peace and security processes.

Objectives of the NAP

The NAP outlines a series of specific objectives aimed at institutionalizing gender equality in Tunisia's peace and security agenda. These objectives are designed to align national policies with international commitments while addressing the unique challenges faced by Tunisian women.

1. Promoting Women's Leadership and Participation:

- Strengthen women's roles in political, social, and economic decision-making processes at all levels.
- Increase the representation of women in security institutions, including the military, police, and peacekeeping forces.
- Facilitate women's participation in conflict resolution, mediation, and peace negotiations.

2. Addressing Gender-Based Violence:

- Develop and enforce legal frameworks to combat GBV, ensuring that perpetrators are held accountable and survivors receive justice and support.
- Provide training for law enforcement and judicial personnel to handle GBV cases with sensitivity and effectiveness.
- Establish and expand support services, including shelters, counseling, and legal aid, for survivors of violence.

3. Integrating Gender Perspectives into National Policies:

- Mainstream gender considerations into all policies related to peace, security, and governance.
- Develop gender-responsive budgeting to allocate resources effectively toward initiatives benefiting women and girls.
- Enhance gender analysis in policymaking to address systemic inequalities and root causes of conflict.

4. Enhancing Capacity for Gender Sensitivity:

- Train government officials, security personnel, and civil society organizations on gender issues and their intersection with peace and security.
- Promote awareness among communities about the importance of women's roles in achieving sustainable peace.

5. Supporting Vulnerable Groups:

- Prioritize support for marginalized groups, including rural women, refugees, and survivors of violence.
- Ensure equitable access to resources, services, and opportunities for these populations.

Implementation Mechanisms

The NAP's implementation relied on a collaborative, multi-stakeholder approach involving government ministries, civil society organizations (CSOs), and international partners. This approach aimed to ensure broad ownership, accountability, and sustainability.

1. Steering Committee:

- A central Steering Committee was established to oversee the implementation of the NAP. This committee included representatives from key government ministries, such as the Ministry of Women, Family, and Children, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Defense, and the Ministry of Interior.
- The Steering Committee also worked closely with CSOs, academic institutions, and international organizations to coordinate activities and align efforts with international best practices.

2. Collaborative Governance:

- Each government ministry developed sector-specific action plans to integrate the NAP's objectives into their policies and programs. For instance, the Ministry of Defense focused on increasing women's participation in security forces, while the Ministry of Justice addressed GBV through legal reforms.

- Civil society organizations played a critical role in advocacy, capacity building, and service delivery, particularly in areas such as GBV prevention and survivor support.

3. Capacity Building:

- Comprehensive training programs were conducted for law enforcement, judicial personnel, and security forces to enhance their understanding of gender-sensitive practices. These programs aimed to improve institutional responses to GBV and promote the inclusion of women in peace and security roles.
- Awareness campaigns targeted community leaders, educators, and the general public to foster a broader understanding of gender equality and the WPS agenda.

4. Funding and Partnerships:

- The NAP relied heavily on financial support from international partners, including UN Women and the Finnish Embassy. This funding was essential for implementing key programs and initiatives.
- Collaborative partnerships with international organizations provided technical expertise and resources to support the NAP's goals.

5. Monitoring and Evaluation:

- While the NAP included provisions for monitoring progress, the lack of a robust monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework limited its effectiveness. A more comprehensive M&E system could have provided actionable insights and enhanced accountability among stakeholders.

Tunisia's NAP for UNSCR 1325 established a strong framework for integrating gender perspectives into peace and security policies. Through its focus on participation, protection, prevention, and recovery, the NAP laid the groundwork for advancing gender equality in the country. Its objectives were ambitious and aligned with both national priorities and international standards, addressing the structural barriers that hinder women's empowerment. The collaborative implementation mechanisms emphasized the importance of partnerships, capacity building, and inclusivity. However, the plan also highlighted areas for improvement, particularly in monitoring, funding sustainability, and extending its reach to marginalized populations. Moving forward, these lessons can inform future efforts to strengthen the Women, Peace, and Security agenda in Tunisia.

Achievements

Tunisia's implementation of the WPS agenda and the National Action Plan (NAP) for UNSCR 1325 (2018–2022) represents a critical advancement in gender equality and the inclusion of women in peace and security processes. The achievements span legislative, policy, institutional, and socio-economic domains, reflecting Tunisia's commitment to addressing gender-specific challenges while empowering women as agents of change. Below is a comprehensive review of these accomplishments.

1. Legislative and Policy Advancements

Tunisia has successfully integrated international WPS standards into its domestic legal and policy frameworks, paving the way for gender equality and protection against violence.

- **2017 Law on Violence Against Women:** This landmark legislation criminalized various forms of violence, including physical, sexual, psychological, and economic abuse, and provided mechanisms such as protective orders and specialized law enforcement units.
- **Incorporation of UNSCR 1325 Provisions:** Tunisia embedded the principles of UNSCR 1325 into its legal frameworks, ensuring alignment with global gender norms and national strategies for peace and security.
- **Gender-Responsive Budgeting:** Tunisia institutionalized gender-sensitive financial planning, exemplified by the establishment of the Council of Peers for Equality and Equal Opportunities, which aligned budgeting practices with gender equity goals.

2. Institutional Strengthening

Tunisia built a robust institutional framework to support the implementation of the WPS agenda and the NAP.

- **Creation of the Multi-Stakeholder Steering Committee:** This committee included representatives from government ministries, civil society organizations (CSOs), and international partners to ensure effective coordination and accountability in implementing the NAP.
- **Capacity-Building Initiatives:** Training programs targeted law enforcement officers, judicial personnel, and policymakers to enhance their understanding of gender-sensitive approaches, especially in handling GBV cases and integrating women into peacebuilding processes.
- **Expansion of Support Services:** Additional centers offering counseling, legal aid, and psychosocial support were established to serve survivors of GBV, particularly in underserved areas.

3. Advancing Women's Participation

One of the NAP's central objectives was to increase women's representation and participation in governance and peace processes.

- **Progress in Political Representation:** Gender parity laws introduced earlier led to a record 31% female representation in Tunisia's parliament during the 2014–2018 term, a regional milestone. This achievement set a benchmark for women's inclusion in decision-making roles.
- **Involvement in Peacebuilding Efforts:** Women played significant roles in the 2014 National Dialogue Quartet, which was instrumental in stabilizing Tunisia post-revolution and received the Nobel Peace Prize for its contributions.
- **Integration into Security Forces:** Efforts to promote women in the military, police, and peacekeeping missions demonstrated a commitment to gender-balanced security strategies.

4. Socio-Economic Empowerment

The WPS agenda prioritized initiatives that strengthened women's economic resilience and empowerment, particularly in marginalized regions.

- **Microfinance and Entrepreneurship:** Programs such as "Rai'dat" supported over 4,700 women-led businesses through access to financial services and training. These initiatives were particularly impactful in rural areas.
- **Job Creation and Protection:** Policies and programs aimed at enhancing women's access to formal employment and ensuring fair wages were implemented, addressing economic disparities.
- **Social Support Initiatives:** Investments were made to expand access to education, healthcare, and social services, improving the overall quality of life for women and girls, especially those in vulnerable communities.

5. Raising Public Awareness

Tunisia's NAP emphasized the importance of challenging societal norms and promoting a gender-sensitive culture.

- **Public Campaigns:** National campaigns raised awareness about women's roles in governance, peacebuilding, and economic development, reaching diverse audiences, including rural populations.
- **Education and Advocacy:** Civil society organizations played a pivotal role in advocating for women's rights and raising awareness about the WPS agenda through workshops, media campaigns, and grassroots efforts.

6. Regional and Global Recognition

Tunisia's commitment to the WPS agenda has garnered international recognition for its progressive approach and tangible outcomes.

- **Regional Leadership:** Tunisia was acknowledged as a leader in the Arab world for implementing gender-sensitive policies and integrating women into peace and security processes.
- **Partnerships with International Organizations:** Collaborations with entities such as UN Women and the European Union provided the technical and financial resources necessary to implement the WPS agenda effectively.

Challenges

Despite significant achievements under Tunisia's Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda and the implementation of the 2018–2022 National Action Plan (NAP), several challenges have hindered the realization of its full potential. These challenges encompass political, socio-economic, cultural, and institutional barriers, reflecting structural and systemic obstacles.

1. Political Challenges

Tunisia's political landscape has undergone significant changes since 2021, marked by a shift toward authoritarian governance. This has posed serious challenges to the implementation of gender-sensitive policies.

- **Erosion of Gender Parity:** The 2022 electoral reforms eliminated gender parity provisions, leading to a drastic reduction in women's political representation. Female representation in parliament dropped from 31% (2014–2018) to 16% after the 2022 elections. This rollback has curtailed women's influence in policymaking and highlighted the fragility of earlier gains.
- **Limited Representation in Leadership:** Women's presence in decision-making roles remains largely symbolic. For instance, while Najla Bouden became Tunisia's first female Prime Minister in 2021, her role was largely limited in substantive decision-making power.
- **Suppression of Activism:** Female activists, journalists, and political opponents face increasing risks of harassment, imprisonment, and censorship. The crackdown on dissent has created a climate of fear, discouraging women from participating in public life.

2. Socio-Economic Challenges

Tunisia's ongoing economic crisis has disproportionately affected women, exacerbating their vulnerabilities and limiting their participation in peacebuilding and governance.

- **Economic Marginalization:** Women dominate the informal labor sector, particularly in agriculture and domestic work, where they face low wages, job insecurity, and poor working conditions. Rural women, in particular, lack access to credit, markets, and social protections.
- **Gender-Based Poverty:** Women, especially those in rural and marginalized communities, are overrepresented among the poor. They face additional barriers such as limited access to education and healthcare.
- **Underfunded Support Services:** Shelters, counseling centers, and other critical services for survivors of gender-based violence (GBV) are insufficient and concentrated in urban areas, leaving rural women without access to support.

3. Cultural and Social Challenges

Deeply rooted societal norms and patriarchal attitudes continue to hinder the progress of the WPS agenda.

- **Patriarchal Norms:** In rural areas, traditional gender roles and societal expectations restrict women's mobility, education, and participation in decision-making processes. This limits their ability to contribute to peacebuilding and governance.
- **Stigma Surrounding GBV:** Survivors of GBV often face societal stigma and victim-blaming, discouraging them from seeking justice or support. This is compounded by a lack of awareness about available resources and legal rights.

4. Institutional and Implementation Barriers

The implementation of the NAP faced several institutional and operational challenges.

- **Funding Shortfalls:** The NAP relied heavily on external funding, which created vulnerabilities when resources were delayed or reduced. The lack of sustainable domestic funding mechanisms limited the scope and continuity of initiatives.
- **Monitoring and Evaluation Gaps:** The absence of monitoring and evaluation framework hindered the ability to track progress, identify gaps, and adapt strategies. This reduced the accountability and effectiveness of the NAP's implementation in Tunisia.
- **Limited Reach in Marginalized Areas:** While the NAP achieved some success in urban centers, its impact in rural and underserved regions was limited. These areas often lacked access to resources and programs, creating disparities in implementation.

5. Narrow Focus on Security

The NAP's emphasis on countering terrorism and violent extremism sometimes overshadowed broader gender equality objectives. This narrow focus risked sidelining critical issues such as economic empowerment, social justice, and the protection of marginalized groups in Tunisia.

Conclusions

The assessment of Tunisia's Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda and the implementation of the 2018–2022 National Action Plan (NAP) reveals both substantial achievements and significant challenges, underscoring critical insights for future interventions. These conclusions highlight the underlying dynamics, gaps, and opportunities that can inform a stronger and more sustainable framework for advancing gender equality and women's empowerment.

1. The Fragility of Gains in Women's Political Participation

While Tunisia has achieved notable milestones in women's political representation, including gender parity laws and historic levels of female participation in parliament, the rollback of these provisions in recent electoral reforms illustrates the fragility of progress in the absence of institutional safeguards. This indicates that legal advancements alone are insufficient to secure lasting gender equality. Sustained political will and the institutionalization of women's leadership in decision-making structures are crucial to preventing regression.

2. Socio-Economic Empowerment as a Foundation for Peacebuilding

The economic marginalization of women, particularly in rural and informal sectors, is both a symptom and a driver of broader inequalities. Without addressing the root causes of gender-based poverty—such as limited access to education, healthcare, and financial resources—women's contributions to peacebuilding and governance will remain constrained. Economic empowerment programs, while impactful, need to be scaled and integrated into national strategies to provide a foundation for women's active participation in all aspects of society.

3. The Centrality of Grassroots and Localized Approaches

The limited reach of the NAP in rural and underserved communities highlights a critical gap in addressing regional disparities. Women in these areas often face compounded vulnerabilities due to cultural norms, inadequate infrastructure, and lack of access to resources. Effective implementation of the WPS agenda requires localized approaches that are responsive to the unique needs and realities of marginalized groups. Engaging community leaders and grassroots organizations is essential to bridging these gaps and ensuring inclusivity.

4. Insufficient Institutional Mechanisms and Sustainability

The dependency on external funding for the implementation of the NAP underscores the vulnerability of Tunisia's gender equality efforts to financial uncertainties. This reliance highlights the need for sustainable domestic financing mechanisms to ensure the continuity and scalability of programs. Additionally, the absence of a robust monitoring and evaluation framework has limited the ability to measure impact, identify gaps, and adapt strategies effectively. Strengthening institutional capacity and accountability is imperative for achieving long-term goals.

5. The Need for a Holistic Approach to Security

The emphasis on countering terrorism and violent extremism within the NAP, while important, has overshadowed broader gender equality objectives. A narrow focus on security risks sidelining critical issues such as socio-economic empowerment, education, and access to justice. A more comprehensive approach to security—one that integrates gender-sensitive strategies across all sectors—is necessary to address the multifaceted challenges facing women and society as a whole.

6. Resilience and Agency of Tunisian Women

Despite systemic barriers, Tunisian women have demonstrated remarkable resilience and agency in navigating political, economic, and social challenges. Their leadership in peacebuilding, advocacy, and grassroots mobilization highlights the transformative potential of women's participation. However, this potential remains underutilized in formal structures, reflecting the need for greater institutional support and opportunities for women to lead at all levels.

7. The Urgency of a Second NAP

The absence of a follow-up NAP post-2022 represents a critical gap that risks losing momentum in advancing the WPS agenda. The next iteration of the NAP must address the lessons learned from the previous plan, prioritize inclusivity, and adopt a more robust monitoring and evaluation system. This will require renewed political commitment, stronger partnerships, and sustained advocacy from civil society and international actors.

Tunisia's experience with the WPS agenda and NAP underscores the interconnectedness of political, economic, social, and security dimensions in achieving gender equality. While the country has made significant progress, sustaining and expanding these gains requires a systemic and intersectional approach that addresses structural inequalities and prioritizes women's agency. The path forward demands collaboration, innovation, and an unwavering commitment to ensuring that women are at the center of peace and security efforts, not as beneficiaries but as leaders and equal stakeholders in shaping Tunisia's future.

The Way Forward

To ensure sustained progress and address the gaps identified in Tunisia's implementation of the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda and the National Action Plan (NAP), several targeted recommendations emerge from the analysis and discussions across the documents. These recommendations span political, economic, social, and institutional domains, emphasizing inclusivity, sustainability, and the centrality of women in peace and security.

1. Develop a Second National Action Plan (NAP)

The absence of a follow-up NAP post-2022 has created a policy vacuum that risks stalling progress. A new NAP should build on lessons learned and address emerging challenges:

- **Expand the Scope:** Incorporate cross-cutting issues such as climate change, digital security, and migration into the new plan, ensuring it reflects contemporary challenges.
- **Inclusivity:** Engage a broader range of stakeholders, including grassroots organizations, private sector actors, and marginalized groups, to ensure the plan is representative and addresses diverse needs.
- **Intersectionality:** Tailor programs to address the unique challenges faced by marginalized women, such as refugees, rural women, and those with disabilities.

2. Reinvigorate Political Commitment to Gender Parity

Tunisia must address the regression in women's political representation by reinstating and reinforcing gender parity provisions:

- **Reintroduce Gender Parity Laws:** Amend the electoral framework to restore gender-balanced candidate lists for all elections.
- **Empower Women Leaders:** Provide training and mentorship programs to prepare women for leadership roles in governance, security, and peacebuilding.

3. Enhance Economic Empowerment Programs

Economic empowerment is essential to reducing gender-based inequalities and supporting women's participation in peace and security efforts:

- **Formalize the Informal Economy:** Integrate informal workers, particularly women, into the formal economy by introducing social protections such as pensions, health insurance, and maternity leave.
- **Support Women Entrepreneurs:** Expand access to microfinance, business incubators, and mentorship programs to enable women to start and grow businesses.
- **Target Rural Areas:** Prioritize investments in vocational training and infrastructure in rural and marginalized communities to address geographic disparities in economic opportunities.

4. Strengthen Institutional Mechanisms

Effective institutional frameworks are critical to implementing the WPS agenda:

- **Establish Sustainable Funding:** Create domestic funding mechanisms to reduce reliance on external donors, ensuring the continuity of programs.
- **Improve Monitoring and Evaluation:** Develop robust frameworks with clear indicators to track progress, assess impact, and ensure accountability.
- **Decentralize Implementation:** Allocate resources and authority to local governments and organizations to address regional disparities in access to programs and services.

5. Address Cultural and Social Barriers

Shifting societal norms is crucial for creating an enabling environment for gender equality:

- **Expand Awareness Campaigns:** Use multimedia platforms to challenge patriarchal norms and promote women's rights. Tailor campaigns to reach rural communities and underserved populations.
- **Integrate Gender Sensitivity into Education:** Incorporate gender equality into school curriculums to foster a culture of inclusion and respect from an early age.

6. Combat Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

Efforts to address GBV must be intensified and made more accessible:

- **Increase Support Services:** Expand shelters, counseling centers, and legal aid services, particularly in rural and marginalized areas.
- **Enhance Training for Law Enforcement:** Provide continuous gender-sensitive training for police, judges, and social workers to ensure effective handling of GBV cases.
- **Strengthen Legal Protections:** Close implementation gaps in existing laws and create mechanisms to hold perpetrators accountable while protecting survivors.

7. Promote Women's Roles in Peace and Security

Tunisia should strengthen its efforts to include women in peace and security initiatives:

- **Increase Women's Participation in Security Forces:** Ensure gender balance in military and police recruitment, emphasizing women's roles in peacekeeping and conflict resolution.
- **Support Women in Mediation and Negotiation:** Provide training and resources to empower women as mediators and negotiators in local and national conflict resolution processes.

Iraq WPS Assessment

Introduction

The trajectory of women's rights and security in Iraq has been profoundly shaped by decades of conflict, political instability, and sociocultural transformations. Since the 2003 US-led invasion, Iraq has faced a complex interplay of challenges, including weakened state institutions, armed conflict, and systemic corruption, which have disproportionately affected women. The emergence of extremist groups, such as ISIS, brought about targeted violence against women, particularly from minority groups, further exacerbating their vulnerabilities. The proliferation of sexual and gender-based violence became one of the most critical challenges in the post-2003 landscape. Women faced widespread harassment, trafficking, forced prostitution, temporary marriages, and femicide. Minority women, including Yezidis, Christians, and Turkmen, were particularly vulnerable, with sexual violence often used as a weapon of war. Weak legal frameworks, coupled with cultural stigmatization and inadequate enforcement, denied survivors justice and perpetuated systemic inequalities.

Decades of conflict displaced millions, compounding vulnerabilities for internally displaced persons (IDPs) and returnees. Women in displacement settings faced heightened risks of exploitation, trafficking, and violence, with limited access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities. Minority communities grappled with legal barriers, statelessness, and exclusion from political and social integration, further entrenching cycles of marginalization.

Despite these systemic challenges, Iraqi civil society demonstrated resilience and played a crucial role in advocating for women's rights. Women's rights activists, women rights organizations, and women led organizations worked tirelessly to address gender-based violence, promote legal reforms, and raise awareness about women's contributions to peacebuilding. However, they faced restrictions, limiting their capacity to effect broader societal change.

Amid these challenges, the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda, anchored in United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, has provided a framework for advancing women's roles in peacebuilding, governance, and conflict resolution.

Iraq's commitment to the WPS agenda is reflected by the development of National Action Plans (NAPs), with the first NAP (2014–2018) laying the groundwork for national efforts and the second NAP (2020–2024) building on lessons learned. Despite significant strides, including greater awareness of gender issues and the establishment of institutional mechanisms, implementation has been hindered by systemic barriers such as inadequate funding, sociopolitical resistance, and cultural norms that perpetuate gender inequality.

The importance of addressing women's inclusion and protection in Iraq cannot be overstated. The intersection of gender-based violence, displacement, and economic marginalization highlights the urgent need for integrated policies and effective governance. Civil society organizations and grassroots movements have played a crucial role in advocating for women's rights, fostering resilience, and demanding justice for survivors of violence. Yet, as Iraq prepares for its third NAP, critical gaps remain in ensuring sustainable progress.

This assessment seeks to evaluate the current state of the WPS agenda in Iraq, examining key achievements, persistent challenges, and opportunities for advancing women’s participation and protection in peace and security processes. By integrating insights from desk reviews, national reports, and focus group discussions, this report aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of Iraq’s WPS framework and inform actionable recommendations for future interventions.

Context

The recent history of Iraq has been defined by cycles of conflict and instability, each leaving profound scars on the nation’s social, economic, and political fabric. The 2003 US-led invasion and the subsequent collapse of state institutions ushered in a prolonged period of violence, political fragmentation, and governance challenges. These conditions not only disrupted Iraq’s development trajectory but also disproportionately affected women, compounding existing inequalities and exposing them to heightened risks of violence and marginalization.

The rise of extremist groups such as ISIS between 2014 and 2017 marked a particularly devastating chapter for women in Iraq. ISIS weaponized gender-based violence, systematically targeting women—especially those from Yazidi, Christian, and other minority communities—through sexual enslavement, trafficking, and forced marriages. These atrocities were not only acts of individual harm but also tools for eroding community cohesion and perpetuating cycles of trauma and displacement. The aftermath of ISIS’s territorial defeat continues to affect women, with many survivors struggling to access justice, psychological support, and reintegration into their communities.

Beyond the direct violence of armed conflict, the pervasive insecurity has had far-reaching implications for women’s rights and participation. Displacement, often lasting for years, has exacerbated women’s vulnerability to exploitation, trafficking, and poverty. In displacement camps and areas of return, inadequate resources and lack of protection mechanisms have left women disproportionately bearing the brunt of the humanitarian crisis. Legal and bureaucratic barriers, including difficulties in registering children born of sexual violence, further entrench women’s exclusion and marginalization.

Despite these challenges, Women in Iraq have played critical and multifaceted roles in responding to conflict and its aftermath. Women’s rights activists, women rights organizations, and women-led civil society organizations have been at the forefront of advocating for justice, documenting human rights violations, and providing essential support to survivors of violence. In conflict-affected regions such as Sinjar and Ninewa, women have been instrumental in community recovery efforts, organizing grassroots initiatives to address psychosocial, legal, and economic needs. Their contributions to peacebuilding, whether through participation in dialogue sessions, mediation efforts, or local governance, have highlighted the resilience and agency of women in conflict settings.

However, the systemic barriers to women’s full participation remain significant. Patriarchal norms and sociocultural resistance to gender equality have limited women’s involvement in formal decision-making processes, particularly in the security and governance sectors. The Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda, while providing a framework for enhancing women’s roles in peace and security, has struggled to achieve transformative change due to inadequate political will, weak implementation mechanisms, and insufficient resources.

Overview of Iraq’s Second National Action Plan (NAP II)

Iraq’s Second National Action Plan (NAP II) on Women, Peace, and Security (2020–2024) represents a significant step forward in addressing the challenges faced by women in conflict and post-conflict settings. Building on the lessons of the first NAP (2014–2018), NAP II adopts a more comprehensive, participatory, and strategic approach to promoting gender equality and ensuring the protection and empowerment of women. It underscores Iraq’s commitment to implementing United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 and advancing the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda.

NAP II was developed through an inclusive process that involved a broad range of stakeholders. Over 60 women-led organizations, representatives from the Council of Ministers Secretariat (COMSEC), the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), and 33 ministries and governmental institutions participated in consultations, facilitated by UN Women.

NAP II introduced formal coordination mechanisms to strengthen collaboration between the Federal Government and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). The High Council of Women and Development (HCWD) in the KRG played a crucial role in monitoring implementation, establishing a UNSCR 1325 board committee with working groups focused on implementation, monitoring and evaluation, and communications.

Regional action plans were also developed to address local needs, with over 35 CSOs contributing to the process. The HCWD mobilized resources and engaged decision-making bodies to support the plan, ensuring its alignment with regional priorities.

The second NAP was structured around three main pillars: The **Participation** pillar emphasizes increasing women’s representation in leadership roles and decision-making processes, particularly in peacebuilding, governance, and security sectors. This focus reflects an acknowledgment of women’s critical role in fostering sustainable peace and inclusive governance. The **Protection** pillar addresses the safety and security of women and girls, particularly in areas of displacement and return, by enhancing mechanisms to prevent sexual violence, trafficking, and exploitation. The **Prevention** pillar seeks to address the root causes of conflict and violence by integrating gender-sensitive approaches into conflict resolution and societal rebuilding efforts.

One of the hallmarks of NAP II is its emphasis on cross-sector coordination and the establishment of formal mechanisms to monitor and evaluate its implementation. To address challenges faced during the first NAP, the concept of automation was introduced, resulting in the creation of a digital monitoring and evaluation (M&E) portal, supported by UN Women, including baseline data, indicators, strategic outcomes, and reporting requirements, to enhance accountability and data-driven decision-making. While the portal experienced delays in implementation, its development reflects a commitment to improving the transparency and efficiency of WPS initiatives.

Regional action plans were another innovative feature of NAP II. In governorates such as Ninewa and Thi-Qar, localized plans incorporated activities tailored to the specific needs of communities, including workshops on legal, psychosocial, and health issues. The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) played a pivotal role, with the High Council of Women and Development (HCWD) mobilizing resources and engaging stakeholders to align regional priorities with the national agenda.

Despite these advancements, the implementation of NAP II faced persistent challenges. Sociocultural resistance to gender equality, funding constraints, and coordination gaps among stakeholders hindered progress. Misinformation campaigns by conservative groups and delays in operationalizing the M&E portal further complicated efforts to achieve the plan's objectives.

NAP II marks a pivotal moment in Iraq's engagement with the WPS agenda, demonstrating both the potential and the limitations of national action plans in addressing gender-based challenges. By focusing on inclusive participation, enhanced protection, and proactive prevention, the plan lays the groundwork for future progress. However, its success ultimately depends on sustained political will, adequate resource allocation, and stronger advocacy to overcome structural and cultural barriers.

Achievements

Iraq's efforts to advance the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda through its second National Action Plan (UNSCR 1325 NAP II) have resulted some progress, despite the challenges of implementation. Significant progress has been made in advancing the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda in Iraq and the Kurdistan Region. Through survivor-centered approaches, legislative advances, increased women's participation, and economic empowerment programs, various initiatives have created meaningful change for women and communities. These gains reflect the resilience of women in Iraq and the contributions of civil society, even amidst the persistent instability that has marked the country's recent history. Below are the key areas of progress.

1. Survivor-Centered Approaches

Significant progress has been made in adopting survivor-centered approaches to address the needs of Yazidi women and survivors of sexual violence, particularly those in camps. Local organizations, operating under the framework of UNSCR 1325, have worked tirelessly to empower survivors through capacity-building programs and advocacy initiatives. These efforts have helped survivors develop the confidence to demand their rights and participate actively in decision-making processes. As one participant explained, *"Over the years, we've seen survivors transition from silence to speaking out. They now know their rights and understand that they can advocate for themselves, especially the Yazidi survivors."* This shift is evident in the establishment of voluntary survivor-led networks and organizations that serve as platforms for women to collaborate and amplify their voices.

Furthermore, mechanisms for reporting violence have improved, marking a cultural shift. *"In the past, women hesitated to report violence due to fear or stigma, but now, survivors in camps directly report cases to on-site security personnel,"* noted a participant.

2. Legislative and Policy Advances

One of the most significant achievements within Iraq's Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) framework is the passage of the Yazidi Survivors Law (2021). This legislation acknowledges the atrocities committed against Yazidi women during the ISIS conflict and provides reparations for survivors of sexual violence. Participants in the focus group discussions (FGDs) emphasized that the law is a groundbreaking step toward justice, representing both acknowledgment and redress for the severe crimes endured by Yazidi women. The law includes provisions such as monthly wages and land allocations for survivors, marking an essential move toward reparations.

While the law represents a critical milestone, participants emphasized that its implementation must go beyond financial compensation. *"Reparations are important, but justice requires more than*

a monthly stipend or a piece of land. It demands accountability for the perpetrators and a comprehensive framework for addressing the trauma survivors carry,"

Furthermore, the establishment of gender-sensitive policies and codes of conduct within security institutions is another milestone. While FGDs highlighted that implementation remains uneven, these measures indicate a growing institutional recognition of gender-based challenges and the importance of integrating women's rights into governance frameworks.

- **The National Strategy to Combat Violence Against Women and Girls (2018-2030)**
A comprehensive framework addressing gender-based violence and enhancing protective mechanisms for women.
- **The Second National Action Plan (NAP) for UNSCR 1325 (2021-2025)**. Focused on enhancing women's roles in peace and security, including participation in conflict resolution and post-conflict recovery.
- **The National Strategy for the Empowerment of Women (2022-2030)**. Aimed at improving women's political, social, and economic participation while ensuring gender equality across all sectors.
- **Child Protection Policy (2022)**. Strengthened social protection systems and enhanced capacity for safeguarding children, including those affected by displacement and conflict.

In addition, Iraq has made notable progress through the development of codes of conduct across key ministries. The Ministry of Justice prepared a code focused on prison management, while the Ministry of Defense initiated efforts to develop its own guidelines. Additionally, the Ministry of Interior adopted a code of conduct to guide the behavior of its personnel, including those in Family Protection Units tasked with addressing domestic violence cases, and community policing as part of broader efforts to address violence and improve the relationship between citizens and law enforcement. As one participant noted, *"The creation of these codes reflects an important step toward institutionalizing mechanisms to combat violence against women, especially within security and justice institutions."*

Advancements in Kurdistan Region

Some advancements were highlighted in Kurdistan Region

- **Combating Hate Speech Against Women:** The Ministry of Endowment and Religious Affairs has educated religious preachers on tolerance and gender equality.
- **Preventing Weapon Proliferation:** The KRG has implemented strategies to curb unauthorized weapon proliferation.
- **Anti-Harassment Policy at Peshmerga Hospital:** Peshmerga Hospital developed an anti-harassment policy and conducted capacity-building sessions for staff.
- **Establishing Dedicated Prevention Team:** A specialized prevention team has been established to strengthen mechanisms to prevent GBV.
- **UNAMI and HCWD Women Advisory Group:** UNAMI has formed a Women Advisory Group to support and protect women leaders in Kurdistan.
- **UN Women's Conflict Prevention Efforts:** UN Women collaborates with CSOs on conflict prevention strategies.
- **Training for Female Journalists:** Female journalists have received training on ethical and safe reporting of vulnerable groups.
- **MOLSA's Economic and Livelihood Opportunities:** MOLSA has provided training programs and financial support to empower women economically.

- **IOM's Economic Empowerment and Leadership Initiatives:** IOM has provided micro-loans and financial literacy training to women.
- **Reintegration Support for Women in Detention:** MOLSA has provided education and vocational training to women in detention.

3. Women's Political Participation

Political participation was enhanced by establishing a committee that supported women's participation in the 2021 elections. This resulted in 97 women being elected to the Council of Representatives, exceeding the quota. The government also repeated this support in the 2023 elections, with 77 women winning seats on provincial councils.

- Combating violence against women was addressed through multiple strategies including updating the National Strategy to Combat Violence Against Women and Girls in Iraq (2023-2030). This strategy aimed to create a comprehensive framework to address all types of violence against women and girls, with a focus on those with disabilities.
- The National Family Planning Strategy (2021-2025) was launched to improve women's health services. This strategy was developed through consultation with various sectors to ensure it adequately addressed women's rights and needs.
- Social protection was improved, and the Social Protection Department for Women was strengthened. The number of women receiving social protection was expanded, and the process to receive benefits was streamlined through digital platforms.
- Rural women received support through strategic initiatives focused on rural development and providing essential needs to these areas. These initiatives aimed to improve living conditions, ensure decent work, and enhance irrigation for agriculture.
- Women's involvement in the security sector increased. The government took steps to include more women in the security sector, and as a result, the number of women in the Ministry of Interior reached 15,551.
- Displacement camps were considered for a safe return, and procedures were set for displaced women and their families. Through collaboration with relevant authorities, the government facilitated the return of displaced women and provided social protection and financial allocations.

Enhancing Women's Participation in the Kurdistan Region

- **Increased Representation:** Women now hold 30% of the seats in the Kurdistan Parliament.
- **Leadership Roles:** Women have assumed key ministerial roles in the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG).
- **Capacity Building:** Over 300 training sessions have been organized across multiple sectors to promote women's participation in community, economic, and governance spheres.
- **Security Sector Integration:** A 60% increase in the recruitment of female officers in the security sector has been achieved.
- **Women in Counter-Terrorism Units:** Women have been integrated into counter-terrorism units within the Asayish.
- **Peshmerga Female Units:** Female units have been established within the Peshmerga forces.
- **Female Security Forces Expansion:** A 15% increase in female officers in the police force since 2021.
- **Civil Society Engagement with Legislation:** Hawpaimany Zhnani Kurdistan organization presented a policy paper advocating for legislation aligned with the WPS agenda.
- **Gender Units in Ministries:** Eight KRG ministries have established Gender Units to promote gender-sensitive policies.
- **Political Leadership Engagement:** The KRG has increased women's representation in high-level roles by appointing female ministers in key positions.

4. Community and Civil Society Initiatives

Civil society organizations (CSOs) have played a pivotal role in advancing the WPS agenda. Capacity-building initiatives have empowered survivors of sexual violence to advocate for their rights and form grassroots networks. In Sinjar and other conflict-affected areas, CSOs have provided essential legal aid, psychological support, and vocational training, enabling women to rebuild their lives and communities. As one participant noted, *"These programs have given survivors the tools to rebuild their lives and contribute to their communities."*

5. Awareness and Advocacy

Awareness campaigns have significantly increased understanding of women's rights and the principles of the WPS agenda. Workshops organized in regions such as Duhok and Sinjar introduced women to concepts of peacebuilding and advocacy, enhancing their capacity to engage in these areas. Focus group participants noted the effectiveness of local NGOs in disseminating information about legal rights and economic opportunities, particularly among displaced and marginalized populations. Efforts to engage religious leaders and media outlets have also amplified messages of gender equality and peaceful coexistence. Such initiatives have begun to challenge entrenched cultural norms that perpetuate gender inequality, a critical component of long-term societal change. *"Changing societal perceptions is critical and involving religious and media leaders makes these messages more impactful,"* noted a participant.

6. Economic Empowerment and Capacity Building

Economic empowerment programs have sought to address the vulnerabilities of displaced women and returnees. Training initiatives and micro-grant programs have provided women with the skills and resources to achieve greater independence. Localized action plans in Ninewa and Thi-Qar included workshops designed to increase participants' knowledge of legal, psychosocial, and health-related matters. *"These programs have given women the tools to be self-reliant and contribute to their families' resilience,"* said one participant. The role of organizations like SEED Foundation in providing **mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS)** and shelters like Baghi Shar in offering counseling and vocational training were discussed as examples of support for women affected by conflict and displacement.

However, focus group participants stressed that the scale of need remains vast, particularly in displacement camps. *"Economic dependency continues to limit women's ability to advocate for themselves, underscoring the importance of sustained investment in livelihood programs,"* another participant concluded.

7. Sectoral Advancements Under NAP II

Sector-specific progress has been notable under NAP II, particularly in the Ministries of Health, Education, and Migration. For instance:

- The Ministry of Health reported an 85% increase in staff knowledge to respond to violence against women.
- The Ministry of Education trained beneficiaries on violent extremism, resulting in an 88% increase in awareness.
- The Ministry of Migration and Displacement established women empowerment centers, achieving a 90% increase in participant knowledge.

8. Partnerships with Youth and Focus on Marginalized Groups

CSOs expressed strong interest in partnering with youth-led organizations, highlighting the need to integrate youth perspectives into the WPS and YPS agendas. Additionally, there has been increased emphasis on addressing the needs of minorities, such as Yazidis and displaced women, through tailored justice mechanisms, reparations, and psychosocial support programs.

The achievements under NAP II reflect a growing recognition of the critical role women play in peace and security processes. Legislative advancements increased political participation, and grassroots initiatives underscore the progress made in Iraq's journey toward gender equality. However, as highlighted in the FGDs, these gains must be consolidated through sustained political will, resource allocation, and stronger coordination among stakeholders. Building on these achievements will be essential for the success of Iraq's forthcoming third National Action Plan.

Challenges

While Iraq's Second National Action Plan (NAP II) on Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) has facilitated some progress, numerous challenges continue to undermine the realization of its goals. These challenges are deeply interconnected, stemming from sociopolitical, cultural, economic, and security-related factors. They reveal systemic barriers that hinder women's full participation, protection, and empowerment in peacebuilding processes.

1. Comparative Challenges Between NAP I and NAP II

Participants highlighted significant differences in the implementation of NAP I and NAP II, emphasizing a noticeable decline in focus and effectiveness during the second plan. While NAP I faced considerable challenges due to the conflict with ISIS and the need for emergency planning, it still featured more tangible efforts, such as the establishment of women's units and initial awareness campaigns. As one participant noted, *"Despite its limitations, NAP I at least introduced structures like women's units, which gave a sense of progress, even if their impact was limited."*

In contrast, NAP II was described as disorganized and lacking clear direction. Participants pointed to inconsistencies, such as changing terminology from "gender" to "women's affairs" and renaming committees and units, which created confusion and disrupted continuity. One participant remarked, *"This constant shift in terminology and structure only added to the confusion, and it felt like the efforts lacked seriousness or a genuine commitment to progress."* Other participants highlighted, *"While NAP I had its flaws, it at least made efforts to establish foundational frameworks. In contrast, NAP II clearly lacked commitment and seriousness."*

2. Political Will and Governance Challenges

The lack of sustained political will has been repeatedly identified as a primary barrier to the successful implementation of Iraq's UNSCR 1325 National Action Plans (NAPs). While the adoption of the first NAP in 2014, and the second NAP, reflected some level of political intent, many participants in Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) described these efforts as largely "symbolic" and "cosmetic." As one participant noted, *"The government is more focused on how Iraq looks internationally rather than addressing the deep structural issues women face in peace and security."*

The government's approach to the NAPs was frequently described as reactive and externally motivated. Participants noted that the lack of dedicated financial resources and actionable goals in the first NAP underscored the absence of genuine political commitment. As one civil society

member observed, *"Developing the NAP was a step forward, but it was not backed by the structural changes needed to make it effective."*

Participants also highlighted how women's rights are often deprioritized, treated as secondary concerns rather than integral to Iraq's peace and security agenda. As one participant remarked, *"Women's issues are not seen as a priority, which leads to weak engagement with these policies and plans."*

Despite Iraq's recognition as a leader in developing women's rights strategies since 2012, none of these strategies were fully implemented, including the National Strategy for Combating Violence Against Women and the Strategy for the Advancement of Iraqi Women. As a participant explained, *"These plans exist only on paper—there's no enforcement mechanism to ensure their implementation, which reflects weak political commitment."*

3. Coordination Challenges Among Institutions

Another significant challenge raised in the FGDs was weak intergovernmental coordination. Newly established women's units often worked at cross-purposes with pre-existing gender committees, leading to inefficiencies and overlap. As one participant explained, *"There's no clear division of roles or responsibilities, which results in duplicated efforts and wasted resources."* This lack of collaboration hindered the collective ability of institutions to address key issues affecting women. Another participant highlighted, *"One department would start a project only to find another department doing something similar, wasting resources and time."*

4. Financial, Technical, and Administrative Challenges

4.1 Insufficient Financial Resources

The lack of dedicated and timely funding was a persistent issue during the implementation of Iraq's National Action Plans (NAPs) under UNSCR 1325. Many participants in the Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) emphasized that financial constraints often delayed critical initiatives and limited their scope. As one participant remarked, *"Many activities were planned, but without secure funding, they remained on paper. This left gaps in implementation that directly affected women in conflict areas."*

The reliance on external donors created significant challenges for the NAP, as differing visions between international donors and local stakeholders often hindered alignment with Iraq's specific needs. Participants noted that donor priorities often took precedence over local needs, making it difficult for the plan to address Iraq's specific challenges. As one participant explained, *"Donor funding often focused on their expectations rather than the actual issues affecting women in our communities."*

4.2 Weak Technical and Administrative Capacity

Implementation efforts were also constrained by a lack of trained personnel and institutional capacity. Many government entities tasked with carrying out the NAP lacked specialized knowledge in gender-sensitive approaches. As one participant explained, *"The staff handling the plan had no training in gender-based analysis or implementation, which meant that critical details were often overlooked."*

5. Monitoring and Evaluation Challenges

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) frameworks under NAP II were a significant area of weakness. These systems were primarily quantitative, focusing on activities rather than outcomes. Indicators often measured inputs (e.g., number of workshops conducted) instead of assessing the long-term

impact on women's safety or participation. As one participant stated, *"We collected numbers—how many meetings, how many attendees—but we never asked whether these meetings made any real difference."* Institutional weaknesses further exacerbated these challenges.

The digital M&E portal, intended to enhance accountability under NAP II, faced delays and technical issues that undermined its effectiveness. Moreover, the absence of a comprehensive data collection mechanism further weakened efforts to track progress. As another participant noted, *"Without proper data, it's impossible to understand whether the plan is addressing the challenges women face or simply ticking boxes."*

6. Limited Role of Civil Society

Civil society initially played a significant role in advocating for women, peace, and security policies, especially during the development of the first NAP. However, this role diminished under NAP II, largely due to government restrictions. One participant explained, *"During NAP II, the government downplayed civil society's role, arguing that these plans were a governmental effort and leaving minimal space for external collaboration."*

This reduction in civil society engagement was identified as a major setback. *"The limited involvement of civil society in implementing NAP II was not by choice but because of the government's approach. This exclusion weakened the plan and undermined its ability to address women's issues comprehensively,"* noted another speaker.

Looking ahead to NAP III, participants expressed concerns that civil society remains marginalized and that the lack of collaboration could further hinder progress. As one participant concluded, *"Without the active inclusion of civil society, it will be difficult to achieve meaningful change in women's security and participation in Iraq."*

7. Women's Participation in Politics

Women's political participation has seen notable progress, particularly in the legislative branch, supported by the 25% constitutional quota. The recent elections resulted in 97 women securing seats in Parliament, supported by smaller electoral districts and local tribal and social backing. As one participant noted, *"Women gained trust within their communities, with some receiving higher votes than male candidates."*

Although this situation marks a positive societal shift, breaking stereotypes that politics is a male domain, however, participants highlighted the need for stronger efforts to build women's political capacities. While a committee was formed to support women in elections, the trainings provided were limited in scope, lacking focus on leadership skills, negotiation, and security measures. As one participant remarked, *"Women must be equipped to defend their rights and address societal issues effectively."*

Male-dominated political parties also continue to restrict women's influence. Participants emphasized that real progress requires empowering women to take on decision-making roles. *"Women in political parties often lack decision-making power or a strategic vision for addressing societal and women's issues,"* one participant observed.

Despite progress in women's participation, official reports from the Ministry of Planning on gender equality up to 2020 highlight a widening gap in leadership roles within Iraqi state institutions. These reports acknowledge that men continue to dominate high-level positions, leaving women underrepresented in decision-making roles.

8. Limited Role of Women in Security Policy Development

Iraq's security institutions remain largely symbolic, with most women confined to administrative or inspection roles. Despite their presence, they are excluded from shaping critical security policies, including counter-terrorism strategies and broader security planning. As one participant noted, *"Women are part of the security institutions, but they do not contribute to the design of security policies, even though global trends now emphasize participatory approaches that include women."*

This exclusion extends beyond counter-terrorism efforts to other governmental institutions such as defense, where women's involvement is similarly limited. *"While women are present in these institutions, their roles are restricted to administrative functions, and they are excluded from meaningful decision-making processes,"* noted another participant.

9. Setbacks in Legal Reforms: The Absence of a Domestic Violence Law

While Iraq has introduced several initiatives, such as community policing, hotlines, Family and Child Protection Units, and a national security response unit for blackmail, these mechanisms remain insufficiently effective. As one participant explained, *"The mechanisms are in place, but they lack a legal framework to institutionalize them, leaving them vulnerable to reversal by mere decisions."*

A key challenge is the absence of a Domestic Violence Law to provide legal guarantees and strengthen these mechanisms. *"A law to combat domestic violence is essential to ensure these initiatives are effective and sustainable,"* a participant emphasized. Without such legislation, the existing mechanisms are often undermined by limited understanding

The lack of progress in enacting a Domestic Violence Law remains a critical gap in Iraq's legislative landscape, undermining efforts to address violence against women and fulfill the objectives of the UNSCR 1325. Despite being a long-standing priority for civil society and women's rights advocates, the law has yet to be approved, reflecting broader challenges in advancing women's rights. As one participant noted, *"A few years ago, passing the Domestic Violence Law was at the forefront of our advocacy; today, we find ourselves defending what we already have instead of advocating for progress."*

The absence of this law has direct implications for the NAP's pillars on protection and prevention of violence. Without a legal framework to combat domestic violence, the commitments outlined in the NAP lack enforceability. This legislative gap also hinders the establishment of comprehensive support mechanisms, such as functional shelters or legal protection for survivors. One participant explained, *"The shelters don't have the necessary resources or trained staff to function effectively, making them unable to provide meaningful protection for survivors of violence."* Participants highlighted how this failure reflects broader institutional resistance to addressing gender-based violence. *"The reluctance to pass this law shows a lack of genuine commitment to tackling violence against women, which directly contradicts the goals of the NAP,"* one speaker remarked.

Additionally, Iraq's legal framework remains a barrier to achieving equality and justice. Discriminatory provisions within laws such as the Penal Code, Civil Code, and Criminal Procedure Code continue to disadvantage women. As one participant highlighted, *"These laws need to be revised in line with Iraq's international commitments to ensure equality and eliminate discrimination."*

Social practices that prioritize reconciliation over justice, coupled with weak enforcement mechanisms, perpetuate cycles of violence. As one participant noted, *"The cycle of violence continues because both the legal framework and societal structures fail to prioritize women's protection and accountability for offenders."*

10. Weak Partnership with Civil Society

Civil society plays a critical role in advocating for women's rights and advancing the agenda of peace and security. As one participant emphasized, *"Civil society is the true defender of women's issues and should be the government's primary partner in implementation."* Participants highlighted the unique ability of civil society to mobilize efforts, engage in voluntary work, and reduce costs for the government. However, this potential remains underutilized due to the lack of serious and genuine collaboration from the government.

"The government recognizes civil society as a potential partner but has not taken concrete or meaningful steps to ensure this partnership is effective," one participant noted. This weak collaboration has hindered progress in achieving the goals of UNSCR 1325 and the National Action Plans (NAPs).

During FGD, participants stressed that strong partnerships with civil society are fundamental to success. *"If we aim to make real progress in peace and security, there must be a complete and inclusive partnership with civil society,"* another participant remarked. However, they also noted that civil society continues to be excluded from key decision-making processes, leaving their voices unheard in critical forums.

Participants called for increased pressure on the government to actively involve civil society in all aspects of the NAPs' design, implementation, and monitoring. *"This partnership is essential if we want to achieve tangible results in security and peacebuilding,"* one speaker concluded.

11. Dual Governance and Legal Protection

Several challenges persist, particularly in areas like Sinjar, which is impacted by dual governance between Iraq's federal government and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). This governance structure creates gaps in legal protections and complicates the work of organizations supporting women. *"In Sinjar, we lack a Domestic Violence Law to protect women. Survivors must often turn to KRG courts in Duhok to seek justice, as they are better equipped than those in Mosul,"* one participant explained.

The absence of legal frameworks in Sinjar leaves many cases of violence to be resolved through tribal mediation, often favoring men. *"When a woman in Sinjar faces violence, her case is usually resolved through tribal customs, which almost always work in favor of the man,"* noted another participant.

Additionally, organizations face logistical challenges due to the dual governance structure. Gaining approvals from both federal and regional authorities for projects in Sinjar and Duhok requires significant time and effort. *"Every project we initiate requires separate approvals from both governments, which adds delays and increases the burden on our operations,"* explained one participant.

12. Challenges and Limitation in Implementation

Despite these achievements in the development of codes of conduct for the security institutions, their implementation remains inconsistent and limited, and have not fully influenced the practices of the broader institutional culture. As one participant explained, *"These codes often remain procedural, without translating into daily practices or significantly impacting the response to gender-based violence."*

While Family Protection Units represent a critical effort to address domestic violence, they face significant operational challenges. Reports of violence within the Family Protection Units are frequently handled by male officers, which can discourage survivors from accessing these units. *"Out of 15,000 domestic violence cases reported in 2023, fewer than 100 reached the courts. This demonstrates the systemic failure to hold perpetrators accountable,"* a participant highlighted.

13. Climate Change and Its Disproportionate Impact on Women Under UNSCR 1325

Climate change poses a significant challenge for Iraqi women, especially in regions like Basra, where environmental degradation intensifies daily struggles. Women disproportionately bear the burden of water scarcity, pollution, and related health risks, limiting their resilience and exposing them to further socioeconomic vulnerabilities. As one participant noted, *"Women in Basra face immense difficulties due to the lack of clean water for drinking and daily use, making it a persistent challenge for families."*

These challenges intersect directly with the **Protection** pillar of the UNSCR 1325 NAP, which aims to safeguard women in conflict and post-conflict contexts. Environmental stressors intensifies existing vulnerabilities for displaced women, survivors of violence, and marginalized groups, undermining their safety and security.

The inadequate governmental response to these environmental challenges underscores systemic gaps in implementing the NAP. Weak resource management and a lack of modern environmental policies contribute to the barriers faced by women. As one participant stressed, *"The government must adopt modern strategies for managing resources and improving environmental conditions, as civil society alone cannot resolve these challenges."*

14. Security and Political Instability

The pervasive insecurity in Iraq, exacerbated by ongoing conflicts and the aftermath of ISIS, remains a critical impediment to the WPS agenda. Areas such as Sinjar, which experienced severe violence during the ISIS occupation, continue to face governance fragmentation and unsafe conditions for returnees. Displacement camps are plagued by inadequate security, privacy, and resources, leaving women particularly vulnerable to exploitation and violence.

The fragile political environment also hampers the implementation of NAP II. Weak governance structures, characterized by overlapping roles and insufficient coordination between federal and regional authorities, lead to inefficiencies. For example, focus group discussions (FGDs) revealed conflicts between newly established women's units and existing gender committees, creating duplication and obstructing progress.

15. Implementing Survivor-Centered Mechanism

Challenges persist in ensuring that survivor-centered approaches are consistently applied. In Sinjar, dual governance between Iraq's federal government and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) creates gaps in legal protections and services for survivors. *"In Sinjar, survivors lack access to protective laws like the Domestic Violence Law available in the KRG. This forces them to seek justice in Duhok courts, as the legal framework in Mosul is insufficient,"* explained one participant.

16. Challenges of Children Born to ISIS Members

The fate of children born to ISIS members poses a complex challenge. Participants highlighted the societal and legal difficulties these children face, particularly in the Yazidi community. According to Iraqi law, these children are automatically registered as Muslims, which conflicts with Yazidi religious beliefs. One participant explained, *"This issue requires international intervention and collaboration between the Iraqi government and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) to develop solutions that respect the Yazidi community's cultural and religious sensitivities."*

The cultural and psychological challenges associated with reintegrating these children were also emphasized. Some children raised in ISIS environments have internalized extremist ideologies, making reintegration into Yazidi society more complex. *“These children are innocent victims, but their upbringing under ISIS requires specialized rehabilitation programs and international support,”* remarked a participant.

17. Cultural and Structural Barriers

Deeply entrenched patriarchal norms present one of the most significant challenges to the WPS framework. These norms limit women’s participation in decision-making processes across security, governance, and peacebuilding sectors. FGDs highlighted that women are often excluded from high-level security policy discussions, reinforcing their marginalization .

Resistance to gender-sensitive terminology further complicates efforts to promote women’s rights. For instance, the terms “gender” and “gender-based violence” have faced sociopolitical pushback, resulting in inconsistent language in official documents. For instance, the term “gender” has been replaced by “women’s affairs” in several policy documents to avoid controversy. As one participant noted, *“Changing ‘gender’ to ‘women’s affairs’ is not just semantics—it reflects resistance to acknowledging the structural inequalities women face.”* This resistance reflects broader societal attitudes that continue to devalue women’s contributions and needs, undermining the transformative potential of the WPS agenda .

18. Economic Constraints

Economic dependency is a pervasive issue affecting women’s empowerment and protection. Displaced women, in particular, face limited access to livelihoods, making them more vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. FGDs underscored the acute economic hardships in displacement camps, where women’s lack of financial independence prevents them from achieving stability and resilience .

Furthermore, inadequate funding for NAP II initiatives has stalled critical programs. Delays in funding allocation and a lack of financial resources for gender-sensitive programming have hindered the effective implementation of planned activities. This financial shortfall is compounded by technical and administrative challenges, such as insufficient capacity to monitor and evaluate program outcomes beyond superficial metrics.

19. Sociopolitical Resistance

Efforts to advance gender equality under NAP II have been met with resistance from conservative groups, which have launched misinformation campaigns and organized public protests against WPS initiatives. This sociopolitical pushback has hindered advocacy efforts, limited the public’s understanding of the WPS agenda, and discouraged government institutions from pursuing more transformative reforms. Participants in FGDs described this resistance as a key factor contributing to the slow pace of change, particularly in regions where traditional norms are deeply entrenched .

The challenges outlined above are not isolated but are instead deeply interconnected, forming a web of systemic barriers that mutually reinforce one another. For instance, the exclusion of women from decision-making roles perpetuates patriarchal norms, which in turn contribute to inadequate legal protections and underrepresentation in governance structures. Similarly, economic constraints and displacement exacerbate women’s vulnerability to violence, while the lack of political will to address these issues perpetuates insecurity and weakens institutional capacity.

Findings

The evaluation of Iraq’s Second National Action Plan (NAP II) on Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) highlights significant progress and enduring challenges. Drawing on the desk review, focus group discussions (FGDs), and national reports, this section consolidates key findings to provide a detailed analysis of the achievements, gaps, and context-specific needs.

1. Capacity Building and Institutional Strengthening

The assessment underscores the importance of capacity building for civil society organizations (CSOs) to strengthen their role in implementing the WPS agenda. Many CSOs require further training on gender equality, conflict resolution, and peacebuilding. Enhanced capacity in these areas would enable them to better address the diverse and complex needs of women and youth in conflict-affected settings. Moreover, strengthening the ability of CSOs to engage in advocacy and policy dialogue would amplify their impact, particularly in areas such as legal reform and survivor support.

2. Regional Networking for Collaboration

Strengthening regional networks among CSOs in the MENA region is identified as a critical need. Such networks would facilitate knowledge exchange, the dissemination of good practices, and collaborative advocacy efforts to advance women’s and youth’s roles in peace processes.

3. Advocacy and Awareness-Raising

CSOs have made strides in raising awareness of women’s and youth’s roles in peacebuilding, but additional support is needed to enhance their advocacy efforts. Utilizing innovative tools such as social media, storytelling, and engaging with policymakers can promote positive narratives and foster broader societal acceptance of gender equality.

4. Context-Specific Needs

The findings emphasize the necessity of tailoring interventions to the specific needs of women and youth in different conflict-affected contexts. For instance, in areas like Sinjar, protection mechanisms for women are critical due to heightened vulnerabilities in displacement settings.

5. Protection and Empowerment

The assessment highlights the dual challenges of ensuring protection for women and girls while fostering their empowerment. In Iraq, gender-based violence remains a pervasive issue, particularly in displacement camps where security and resources are limited. CSOs have played an instrumental role in providing psychosocial support, legal aid, and education, but these efforts must be scaled to meet the vast scale of need. Additionally, the assessment underscores the importance of education as a tool for empowerment, with targeted programs designed to build women’s leadership and advocacy capacities .

6. Partnerships with Youth

FGDs and reports reveal a strong willingness among CSOs to partner with youth-led organizations to engage a broader population in WPS and Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS) initiatives. These partnerships are seen as vital for fostering intergenerational collaboration and ensuring the sustainability of peacebuilding efforts. The inclusion of youth not only enriches the WPS agenda but also strengthens its reach and relevance.

7. Focus on Minorities and Marginalized Groups

Marginalized groups, including Yazidi survivors, displaced women, women with disabilities, and other minorities, face significant barriers such as inadequate legal protections, limited economic opportunities, and heightened exposure to violence. Tailored support and targeted strategies are urgently needed to address these vulnerabilities and advance the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda. Reporting mechanisms for violence have seen some improvements but still require stronger safety guarantees and trauma-informed services to ensure survivors' well-being. Programs like the Baghi Shar Shelter provide vital support; however, they remain under-resourced and lack adequately trained staff.

8. Advocacy and Regional Cooperation

Strengthening regional cooperation and advocacy remains a priority. Collaborative efforts across the MENA region, particularly in advocating for the protection of women and promoting inclusive governance, would enhance the effectiveness of WPS initiatives. Advocacy campaigns that focus on breaking cultural barriers and promoting gender-sensitive narratives are necessary to counter entrenched patriarchal norms.

9. Legislative and Policy Advances

Enacted in 2021, Yazidi Survivors Law provides reparations like monthly stipends and land to survivors of ISIS atrocities. However, participants stressed the need for broader implementation, including justice mechanisms and support for trauma recovery. In addition, ministries such as Justice, Interior, and Defense adopted codes of conduct to address violence against women. These are positive steps but lack consistent enforcement. Moreover, Strategies to combat violence against women (2018–2030) and empower women (2022–2030) reflect institutional commitment but face challenges due to limited funding and uneven application.

10. Women's Political Participation

Iraq elected 97 women to Parliament in 2021 and increased representation in provincial councils in 2023. Yet, women are often excluded from high-level decision-making in governance and security sectors. In the Kurdistan region, women hold 30% of parliamentary seats and ministerial roles in the Kurdistan Region, demonstrating regional progress. However, male-dominated party structures limit their broader influence.

11. Cultural and Structural Barriers

Cultural resistance continues to marginalize women, evident in changes like replacing “gender” with “women's affairs” in policies. This limits progress toward structural change. The absence of a Domestic Violence Law and discriminatory laws perpetuate inequality and cycles of violence.

12. Economic Empowerment

Displaced women face financial dependency, increasing vulnerability to exploitation. Sustained investment in livelihood initiatives is needed to foster independence.

13. Implementation and Monitoring

Overlapping roles and poor collaboration between federal and regional authorities reduce efficiency and impact. In addition, current evaluation systems focus on numbers, not meaningful outcomes, limiting insights into long-term progress.

Climate Change and Its Impact on Women change disproportionately affects Iraqi women, particularly in regions like Basra, where water scarcity, pollution, and environmental degradation exacerbate daily struggles, increasing health risks and limiting resilience. Civil society organizations have taken proactive measures through water treatment projects, reforestation, and awareness campaigns, empowering communities and highlighting women's critical role in resource management and climate action. However, weak governmental strategies, including ineffective water negotiations with neighboring countries and a lack of modern environmental policies, hinder progress and underscore the need for stronger institutional efforts. Integrating a gender perspective into climate action is essential to addressing immediate vulnerabilities while fostering long-term resilience and stability for women and their communities.

The findings highlight a mix of progress and ongoing challenges within Iraq's Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda. Legislative advancements, such as the Yazidi Survivors Law, showcase Iraq's commitment to addressing gender-based violence and providing reparations for survivors. However, these achievements often fall short due to weak implementation, lack of follow-through, and deeply rooted cultural norms that continue to restrict women's rights and opportunities.

Local civil society organizations (CSOs) have been instrumental in raising awareness, advocating for change, and supporting survivors on the ground. Despite their critical role, they face challenges like insufficient funding, limited resources, and gaps in technical expertise. There is significant potential to expand their impact through stronger partnerships and targeted capacity-building efforts. Regional collaboration and youth involvement present opportunities to deepen the WPS agenda's reach, but both require more consistent support and investment to make a meaningful difference.

These interconnected issues highlight the need for a more unified and practical approach to addressing structural barriers. Building the capacity of institutions and CSOs, fostering collaboration between local and regional actors, and prioritizing the unique needs of marginalized groups—including displaced women, survivors of violence, and minority communities—are essential steps. Addressing these gaps in a localized and culturally sensitive way will ensure that Iraq can create a more inclusive and sustainable framework for women's participation, protection, and empowerment in peacebuilding and governance.

Conclusion

The implementation of Iraq's Second National Action Plan (NAP II) under the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda provides an instructive lens through which to analyze both progress and persistent challenges in advancing gender equality in conflict and post-conflict settings. While the plan represents a significant step forward, the findings from this assessment reveal a nuanced landscape of successes tempered by systemic barriers that limit transformative change.

1. Reflections on Progress

NAP II has marked a shift toward recognizing the importance of women's roles in peacebuilding and governance. Key legislative advances, such as the Yazidi Survivors Law, demonstrate Iraq's commitment to providing reparations and justice for survivors of violence. The growing representation of women in political spaces, facilitated by the quota system, reflects incremental progress toward inclusive governance.

Civil society organizations (CSOs) have been instrumental in filling critical gaps left by government initiatives. Their localized interventions, from legal aid and psychosocial support to grassroots

advocacy, underscore the value of community-driven approaches to achieving WPS goals. These efforts illustrate how partnerships with CSOs can empower women to rebuild their lives and engage meaningfully in decision-making processes.

2. Persistent Challenges: Addressing Structural and Cultural Barriers

The implementation of NAP II has faced several interconnected challenges that hinder its effectiveness. Deeply rooted patriarchal norms perpetuate systemic inequalities and limit women's access to leadership roles, particularly in security and governance sectors. Cultural resistance, including the rejection of gender-sensitive language, reflects broader societal attitudes that undermine efforts to achieve equality.

Economic dependency among women, particularly those in displacement settings, intensifies their vulnerabilities. Limited livelihood opportunities prevent women from achieving financial independence, restricting their ability to advocate for themselves and participate fully in societal and political life. These economic challenges are further compounded by weak institutional capacity, including delays in operationalizing the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) portal and fragmented coordination between federal and regional authorities.

3. Localizing the WPS Agenda

Localized interventions and regional collaboration remain critical to advancing Iraq's WPS agenda. Tailored solutions, such as vocational training in displacement camps and mediation programs in conflict-affected areas, address the specific needs of marginalized groups. Strengthening regional networks among CSOs in the MENA region can amplify these efforts, fostering knowledge exchange and collaborative advocacy to tackle shared challenges.

The findings also emphasize the importance of addressing the unique needs of vulnerable communities, including Yazidis, displaced women, and those with disabilities. Survivor-centered approaches, including trauma-informed care and enhanced reporting mechanisms, must be prioritized to ensure comprehensive support for survivors of violence.

The Way Forward

The success of Iraq's WPS agenda depends on the ability to translate policies into tangible outcomes that improve the lives of women and girls across the country. This requires sustained political commitment to enforce existing laws, confront cultural resistance, and allocate adequate resources. Robust institutional mechanisms must be developed to enhance coordination and ensure accountability through transparent and data-driven monitoring processes.

Moreover, fostering a society-wide acceptance of gender equality involves targeted advocacy campaigns that challenge patriarchal norms and amplify the voices of women and marginalized communities. By prioritizing an integrated and localized approach, Iraq can build a stronger foundation for inclusive governance and sustainable peace.

Ultimately, the WPS agenda must be a collaborative effort, engaging government entities, CSOs, international partners, and local communities to create an environment where women are not only protected but also empowered to lead and contribute to peacebuilding and development. By addressing these systemic barriers with localized, context-specific solutions, Iraq can ensure that its policies bring about lasting change and a more equitable future for all.

Addressing Critical Issues in the Third National Action Plan (NAP III)

1. Climate Change as a Priority in the NAP III

Integrate climate change into Iraq's national strategies on women's rights and security, addressing it as both an environmental and gender issue. Climate-related challenges, such as water scarcity and pollution, disproportionately impact women and require targeted solutions. Aligning these efforts with strategies for gender equality and protection will ensure women's needs are prioritized and their participation in decision-making strengthened. Climate initiatives should focus on building women's resilience and contributing to sustainable peace and stability NAP's implementation, linking gender equality with broader strategies for resilience and stability.

2. Missing Yazidis and Survivors of Sexual Violence

Prioritize the issue of missing Yazidis, including women and children, within NAP III. This requires concrete actions to locate missing individuals, ensure justice for survivors, and address the trauma of families. While the Yazidi Survivors' Law offers compensation, it should be expanded to include the prosecution of ISIS perpetrators and the preservation and investigation of mass graves in Sinjar. These measures are essential to achieving justice and closure for the Yazidi community and reinforcing commitments to human rights and accountability. *"The law shouldn't stop at compensation; it must also focus on ensuring justice through the prosecution of ISIS members and addressing the mass graves in Sinjar, which remain neglected."*

3. Ensuring a Survivor-Centered Approach

Participants stressed the need for all governmental institutions to adopt a survivor-centered approach when dealing with victims of sexual violence. This includes creating an environment where survivors feel safe to report their experiences without fear of reprisal. *"Survivors are often hesitant to provide details about ISIS members due to threats from their own communities or even relatives,"* noted a participant. Ensuring the confidentiality of survivors' information and providing protection for witnesses is crucial to fostering trust and encouraging reporting.

4. Strengthening Institutional Roles and Partnerships

Participants highlighted the need for stronger government institutions to lead the implementation of NAP III. They recommended that oversight be assigned to influential ministries such as the Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Justice, or the National Security Advisory, which have the authority to allocate resources and influence policy. *"A strong governmental entity must oversee the plan to ensure accountability and effective implementation,"* one participant noted.

In addition, civil society must be granted a broader role in the plan's execution. Participants stressed the importance of including ministries such as the Ministry of Education to promote societal awareness about the importance of women's participation and the goals of the Women, Peace, and Security agenda. *"The Ministry of Education plays a critical role in fostering a culture that values women's contributions to peace and security,"* explained a participant.

5. Social Justice and Women's Empowerment

Social and economic empowerment of women must be a cornerstone of the third National Action Plan (NAP III). Participants emphasized the importance of supporting women's roles and rights across political, economic, and social spheres. One participant stated, *"We need to strengthen women's participation in all areas of life, ensuring their rights and empowering them socially and economically."*

This effort should include prioritizing access to quality higher education, which has seen significant decline recently, as well as ensuring sustainable development and environmental protection. These issues must be integrated into the plan with active partnerships between the government and civil society organizations. *“Sustainable development and environmental protection are critical priorities that must be addressed in collaboration between civil society and government bodies,”* noted another participant.

6. Strengthening Civil Society Partnerships

Participants underscored the essential role of civil society organizations in addressing challenges such as displacement, gender-based violence, and community resilience. Despite their significant contributions, civil society organizations often face marginalization. *“The government sees civil society as an adversary rather than a partner, and this limits progress,”* one speaker remarked.

To achieve the goals of NAP III, the government must recognize civil society as a key partner and expand collaboration with local councils and grassroots initiatives. *“Civil society is deeply embedded in communities, and its role is indispensable. Greater partnership with the government will ensure more impactful and sustainable outcomes,”* emphasized a participant.

7. Addressing Political Will and Supporting Women’s Participation

A recurring challenge is the lack of political will to advance women’s rights and implement plans effectively. Participants noted that the absence of commitment among policymakers has resulted in initiatives that exist only on paper. *“There is no genuine interest in making these plans work, even though Iraq is internationally obligated to have actionable strategies,”* one participant said.

To overcome this, participants recommended enhancing women’s participation in elections as both voters and candidates to ensure greater representation of voices advocating for women’s rights. *“We need more women in parliament who can champion these causes and ensure that women’s gains are protected and expanded,”* explained a speaker.

8. Advancing Social, Economic, and Environmental Equity

Adopt comprehensive policies that prioritize access to quality education for women and youth, integrate women’s health into national development strategies, and expand sustainable practices like reforestation and water management. These initiatives are essential for addressing systemic inequalities, promoting social empowerment, and mitigating environmental challenges that disproportionately affect women.

9. Localizing NAP III

To enhance the effectiveness of NAP III, it is essential to adopt a localized approach that considers the specific needs and priorities of different regions. Collaboration with local stakeholders, including community leaders, civil society organizations, and local authorities, should ensure that interventions are inclusive, context-sensitive, and sustainable. This approach will foster stronger ownership and more meaningful outcomes for advancing women’s roles in peace and security.

Libya WPS Assessment

Introduction

The 2011 revolution marked a pivotal moment in Libya’s history, overthrowing a decades-long authoritarian regime and sparking aspirations for democracy and reform. However, the ensuing years have been marred by political instability, violent conflict, and socio-economic crises. These challenges have had profound implications for Libya’s governance, security, and development, with women bearing a disproportionate share of the burden. Despite their resilience and contributions, women in Libya continue to face systemic barriers to full participation in public life, protection from violence, and representation in peacebuilding processes.

The Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda, established under United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325, offers a critical framework for addressing these challenges. By emphasizing women’s participation in peacebuilding, the prevention of violence, and the protection of rights, the WPS agenda aligns with Libya’s broader goals of stability and inclusion. Yet, the country’s progress in implementing this agenda has been uneven, hindered by entrenched patriarchal norms, fragmented governance, and ongoing conflict.

Libya’s political division between the House of Representatives (HoR) in Tobruk and the Government of National Unity (GNU) in Tripoli underscores the complexity of its current context. The rivalry has deepened the country’s instability, resulting in contested governance, frequent clashes, and stalled reforms. Within this volatile environment, women’s voices are often marginalized, their roles in decision-making processes reduced to token representation. The absence of a unified national framework for advancing gender equality further exacerbates these disparities.

Economic challenges compound the obstacles facing Libyan women. Disputes over oil revenues, lack of labor protections, and reliance on informal employment expose women to heightened vulnerabilities. Meanwhile, the persistence of human rights violations, including widespread gender-based violence (GBV), underscores the urgent need for comprehensive legal and institutional reforms.

Despite these challenges, Libyan women and civil society organizations continue to advocate for change. Grassroots initiatives, awareness campaigns, and international partnerships have created pockets of progress, demonstrating the potential for transformative action. By examining the historical and current context of Libya’s WPS agenda, this document seeks to highlight achievements, identify gaps, and propose actionable strategies to ensure that women play a central role in building a more inclusive and peaceful Libya.

Context

The overthrow of the Gaddafi regime in 2011 opened a window of opportunity for Libyan women to engage in governance and public life. During the post-revolution period, women’s representation in political processes was supported by the introduction of quotas. For instance, the 2012 General National Congress elections included a vertical and horizontal zipper system, resulting in women occupying 16.5% of the seats. This was a significant milestone, symbolizing progress toward gender inclusion in Libya’s political landscape.

Civil society also saw a surge in women's activism during this time. Women-led organizations played key roles in advocating for human rights, promoting peacebuilding, and addressing community-level challenges. Their efforts were instrumental in raising awareness about gender equality and creating platforms for women's voices to be heard.

However, the achievements of the early post-revolution period were undermined by systemic challenges, including entrenched patriarchal norms, societal resistance, and political instability. Cultural stigmas around women's involvement in public life persisted, relegating many to symbolic rather than substantive roles in governance. Additionally, the breakdown of institutional structures and the rise of rival administrations further stalled progress on gender equality.

Since 2021, Libya's political scene has been dominated by the rivalry between the House of Representatives (HoR) based in Tobruk and the Government of National Unity (GNU) in Tripoli. This division has resulted in a governance vacuum, with competing factions vying for control. The political impasse has had significant implications for women's participation in governance and peace processes.

The appointment of parallel governments has led to increased violence, particularly in western Libya, where armed groups frequently clash over territorial control. These conditions have created an environment of insecurity that disproportionately affects women, restricting their mobility, economic opportunities, and participation in public life.

Efforts by the United Nations, including the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum (LPDF), have sought to mediate and establish a constitutional basis for elections. However, unresolved issues, such as electoral sequencing and power-sharing arrangements, have prevented meaningful progress. Within this fractured landscape, women's contributions to peacebuilding remain marginalized, with their roles often limited to advisory or symbolic capacities.

Libya's economic crisis is deeply intertwined with its political instability. The country's vast oil reserves, which should serve as a cornerstone for economic development, have instead become a source of conflict. Rival factions leverage control over oil production and revenues, leading to frequent disruptions in exports and the failure to establish a unified state budget.

These economic challenges have gendered impacts. Women, particularly in rural and marginalized communities, are disproportionately affected by poverty and unemployment. Many women are confined to the informal sector, where they lack social protections such as maternity leave, health insurance, and fair wages. Additionally, disputes over oil revenues have limited the government's ability to invest in public services, further exacerbating gender disparities in access to healthcare, education, and economic opportunities.

Human rights violations, including restrictions on civil society, further complicate efforts to address these challenges. The shrinking civic space has hindered women-led organizations' ability to advocate for economic reforms and gender-sensitive policies. Without significant changes to Libya's governance and economic structures, the country risks entrenching existing inequalities and delaying progress toward sustainable development and peace.

Status of Women's Rights and Political Participation

Legal and Institutional Framework

Libya's legal framework provides nominal protections for women's rights but falls short in terms of enforcement and inclusivity. The 2011 Interim Constitutional Declaration guarantees gender

equality; however, the influence of Sharia law creates ambiguities that often restrict women's rights in practice. Customary law and tribal justice systems frequently override formal legal frameworks, perpetuating discriminatory practices.

The 1953 Penal Code fails to adequately address gender-based violence (GBV), omitting protections against domestic violence, marital rape, and harassment. Efforts to establish inclusive policies, such as quotas for women's representation, are undermined by weak enforcement and political instability. Institutional mechanisms like the Women's Empowerment and Support Unit face significant resource constraints, limiting their capacity to advocate for or implement gender-sensitive reforms.

Women's Political Participation

Quota systems introduced in 2012 initially increased women's representation in governance, with women occupying 16.5% of seats in the General National Congress. However, subsequent electoral frameworks, such as those for the Constitution Drafting Assembly in 2013, reduced quotas to 10%, signaling a retreat from earlier commitments to gender parity.

Women's participation in governance is further constrained by structural and societal barriers. Meetings are often scheduled in unsafe or inaccessible locations, deterring women from attending. Cultural stigmas and verbal harassment also discourage women from engaging in political activities. These challenges limit women's roles to symbolic representation rather than substantive influence in decision-making processes.

Local-level participation presents additional hurdles, as women often exclude themselves from political processes due to fears of societal backlash and gossip, particularly in smaller, close-knit communities. Such barriers underscore the need for systemic reforms to create an enabling environment for women's meaningful participation.

Gender-Based Violence

Gender-based violence is pervasive in Libya, exacerbated by weak institutional responses and cultural stigmas. Survivors face significant barriers to justice, including public shaming, retaliation, and the lack of confidentiality within law enforcement agencies. Many women are deterred from reporting crimes due to these obstacles, and tribal councils often prioritize reconciliation over justice, further marginalizing survivors.

Libya's legal framework inadequately addresses GBV. The Penal Code categorizes rape as a crime against honor and allows perpetrators to avoid prosecution by marrying their victims, perpetuating harmful cultural norms. Limited data on GBV compounds the problem, as the absence of comprehensive statistics hinders the development of targeted interventions and leaves survivors without adequate support.

Efforts to address GBV are fragmented and underfunded. Specialized police units, shelters, and legal aid services are sparse and often inaccessible, especially for women in rural and marginalized areas. Addressing these gaps requires legal reforms, improved institutional responses, and targeted investment in survivor support services.

Overview of Libya's WPS Framework

Libya has not yet developed a National Action Plan (NAP) for UNSCR 1325, largely due to prolonged instability and a fragmented government. Nevertheless, national and international actors have pursued hybrid approaches to implement aspects of the WPS agenda.

Historical Efforts

Despite the absence of a formal National Action Plan (NAP) for UNSCR 1325, Libya has seen several targeted efforts to advance the WPS agenda through hybrid and decentralized modalities.

- 1. Baseline Studies by WILPF (2013–2014):** The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) conducted two comprehensive baseline studies to provide insights into how gender intersects with Libya's security threats and socio-political dynamics. These studies highlighted the differentiated impacts of violence on men and women, emphasizing the urgent need for gender-sensitive interventions. The reports also offered actionable programming recommendations for international development partners, including UNDP and other stakeholders, to strengthen WPS programming in Libya. However, escalating conflict in 2014, particularly the GNC's refusal to disband and Haftar's military campaign in Benghazi, curtailed further investigations and implementation of WILPF's findings.
- 1. Renewed Efforts Post-2016:** Following the establishment of the UN-backed Government of National Accord (GNA) in Tripoli, a period of relative stability allowed for renewed international engagement. UN agencies returned to Libya, and the operational space for WPS-related initiatives expanded. UN Women played a pivotal role in this phase, building partnerships with government bodies, civil society organizations, and media outlets to mainstream gender-sensitive approaches in peace and security.

Achievements

1. Capacity-Building and Advocacy:

- **Civil Society Strengthening:** UN Women supported the formation of the Libyan Women's Network for Peacebuilding, representing diverse political, generational, and geographic backgrounds. This network aimed to enhance the conflict resolution, mediation, and negotiation skills of Libyan women, enabling them to play more active roles in peace processes.
- **Government Collaboration:** Partnerships with governmental institutions focused on improving gender-responsive planning and budgeting. These collaborations sought to institutionalize gender considerations in national policies and enhance women's access to justice systems that are gender-sensitive and equitable.

2. Youth and Media Engagement:

- Training programs for youth organizations empowered young women and men to contribute to peacebuilding initiatives. Grants and fellowships provided opportunities for youth to address community-level challenges and promote inclusive development.
- Media-focused initiatives trained journalists in gender-sensitive reporting, increasing awareness of the WPS agenda and amplifying women's voices in national narratives.

3. Participation in Political Dialogue

Women's active engagement in the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum (LPDF) marked a significant step forward. Their advocacy within this platform led to the inclusion of a declaration calling for a 30% quota for women in the Government of National Unity. This demonstrated the potential of coordinated efforts to influence high-level decision-making.

Challenges

- 1. Resistance to the NAP Proposal (2021):** A proposed National Action Plan, developed with support from UN Women, Finland, Norway, and the UK, faced significant backlash. Conservative religious groups, including Libya's Fatwa House, opposed the NAP, claiming it violated Sharia law. The backlash included a petition signed by 800 women against the initiative, highlighting the co-optation of female voices by conservative forces to block gender equality reforms.
- 2. Political Instability:** Libya's deeply fragmented political landscape has consistently undermined the establishment of cohesive national policies. The failure to hold elections in December 2021 further exacerbated public frustration and disillusionment, eroding confidence in national governance and political participation.
- 3. Lack of Localized Consultation:** The NAP development process suffered from inadequate engagement with local women's rights activists and diverse societal sectors. Insufficient awareness-raising and consultation with conservative elements created misunderstandings about the NAP's objectives, fueling opposition and stalling progress.
- 4. Demonization of Women's Rights Defenders:** Regional trends of vilifying women's rights organizations (WROs) and activists have taken root in Libya, further marginalizing those advocating for the WPS agenda. This demonization has not only weakened grassroots movements but also deterred international and local actors from advancing WPS issues.

Conclusions

The assessment of Libya's Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) framework reveals a complex interplay of progress and persistent challenges. Libya's post-2011 landscape, marked by political instability, conflict, and socio-economic crises, has deeply influenced the trajectory of women's rights and their roles in peacebuilding. Despite initial advancements, such as the introduction of quotas and the emergence of civil society initiatives, the lack of institutional continuity and systemic barriers has hindered sustainable progress.

Key conclusions include:

- 1. Political Instability as a Barrier:** The ongoing rivalry between the House of Representatives and the Government of National Unity has resulted in fragmented governance and policy stasis, directly impacting the implementation of WPS-related initiatives. Women's participation remains limited, often relegated to symbolic roles, undermining their potential contributions to governance and peacebuilding.
- 2. Systemic Gender Disparities:** Entrenched patriarchal norms and societal stigmas continue to marginalize women in both public and private spheres. Structural barriers, such as inadequate legal frameworks and insufficient protections against gender-based violence, exacerbate the vulnerabilities faced by Libyan women.
- 3. Economic and Security Vulnerabilities:** Economic hardships, compounded by disputes over oil revenues and reliance on informal employment, disproportionately affect women. Coupled with pervasive insecurity, these factors restrict women's mobility, access to resources, and ability to engage meaningfully in societal processes.

4. **Achievements and Grassroots Resilience:** Despite challenges, Libyan women and civil society organizations have demonstrated resilience and innovation. Initiatives supported by international partners, such as capacity-building programs and advocacy for gender-sensitive governance, highlight the potential for transformative action.
5. **The Need for a National Action Plan (NAP):** The absence of a formal NAP for UNSCR 1325 remains a significant gap. While hybrid and decentralized efforts have yielded pockets of progress, a unified and inclusive framework is essential for addressing gender inequities and advancing the WPS agenda.
6. **Resistance to Gender Reforms:** Backlash from conservative religious groups and societal resistance to gender equality reforms have stalled critical initiatives. This underscores the need for localized consultation, awareness-raising, and strategic engagement to mitigate opposition and foster inclusivity.

The Way Forward

Addressing the challenges facing the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda in Libya requires a multi-faceted and inclusive approach. The following recommendations outline key actions to ensure sustained progress and meaningful participation of women in peacebuilding, governance, and societal transformation:

1. Developing a Comprehensive National Action Plan (NAP) for UNSCR 1325

- **Inclusive Design Process:** Engage diverse stakeholders, including local women's rights organizations, community leaders, and youth, in the development of the NAP to ensure it reflects Libya's cultural and societal realities.
- **Strategic Awareness Campaigns:** Conduct widespread awareness-raising initiatives to address misconceptions about the WPS agenda and the NAP, targeting both urban and rural areas to foster broader societal support.
- **Government Commitment:** Secure the commitment of key political institutions, such as the House of Representatives and the Government of National Unity, to adopt and implement the NAP despite political divisions.

2. Strengthening Women's Political Participation

- **Institutional Reforms:** Enhance the enforcement of quota systems to ensure women's substantive representation at all levels of governance and decision-making.
- **Capacity-Building Programs:** Develop training and mentorship initiatives to empower women in political roles, equipping them with the skills to navigate Libya's complex political landscape.
- **Safe Participation Mechanisms:** Create secure and accessible venues for women to engage in political activities and decision-making processes, minimizing risks of harassment and societal backlash.

3. Addressing Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

- **Legal Reforms:** Update the Penal Code to comprehensively address GBV, including provisions for domestic violence, marital rape, and workplace harassment.
- **Survivor-Centered Support:** Establish accessible shelters, legal aid services, and psychosocial support centers, particularly in rural and marginalized areas.
- **Institutional Accountability:** Train law enforcement and judicial personnel on gender sensitivity and confidentiality to improve institutional responses to GBV cases.

4. Promoting Economic Empowerment

- **Labor Market Inclusion:** Expand opportunities for women in the formal labor market through targeted employment programs, skills training, and gender-sensitive labor policies.
- **Support for Entrepreneurs:** Provide financial support, such as grants and microloans, to women-led businesses, especially those in rural areas or emerging sectors.
- **Oil Revenue Reinvestment:** Advocate for a gender-sensitive allocation of oil revenues to fund public services, infrastructure, and economic programs that benefit women.

5. Strengthening Civil Society

- **Capacity Development:** Offer technical and financial support to women-led civil society organizations to enhance their advocacy and service delivery capabilities.
- **Protecting Civic Space:** Ensure the protection of activists and organizations against threats and reprisals, fostering an enabling environment for grassroots movements.
- **Partnership Building:** Facilitate partnerships between Libyan civil society and international organizations to exchange best practices and leverage global resources.

6. Engaging with Religious and Community Leaders

- **Dialogue and Sensitization:** Initiate structured dialogues with religious leaders, tribal elders, and other influential community figures to promote an understanding of the WPS agenda and its alignment with Libyan values.
- **Community-Based Advocacy:** Develop grassroots campaigns led by trusted local voices to challenge patriarchal norms and support gender equality.

7. Fostering Regional and International Cooperation

- **Regional Networks:** Collaborate with neighboring countries and regional bodies to share experiences, build solidarity, and implement cross-border initiatives for peace and security.
- **Sustained International Support:** Encourage long-term commitment from international actors to provide financial, technical, and diplomatic support for WPS initiatives in Libya.
- **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Establish transparent monitoring mechanisms to track the progress of WPS-related programs, ensuring accountability and continuous improvement.

8. Incorporating Youth and Media

- **Youth Engagement:** Involve young people in peacebuilding and governance initiatives through leadership training, internships, and participatory platforms.
- **Media Advocacy:** Train journalists on gender-sensitive reporting to amplify women's voices, challenge stereotypes, and raise awareness of WPS issues.

9. Conflict-Sensitive Programming

- **Local Adaptation:** Design WPS programs that account for the unique needs and contexts of different regions, ensuring relevance and effectiveness.
- **Resilience Building:** Focus on long-term resilience by addressing root causes of conflict, such as inequality, poverty, and exclusion.

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The contribution of Un Ponte Per ETS

Between 2019 and 2024, with the financial support of the DGAP - Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (MAECI) and in the framework of the IV Italian National Action Plan (NAP) for UNSCR 1325, *Un Ponte Per ETS* implemented initiatives aimed at strengthening CSOs focused on women and peacebuilding in the MENA region. Projects like *Engendering Peace* and *Kaleidoscope of Peace* fostered regional collaboration, particularly in Lebanon, Iraq, and other MENA countries, building local capacities for leadership and peacebuilding. *Un Ponte Per ETS* also launched the *Woman Waving Peace* project in partnership with the Lina Ben Mhenni Association in Tunisia, further supporting local NGOs in Tunisia, Libya, and Iraq. In 2023, the *Women Peacebuilders in Action* initiative continued these efforts, addressing the challenges of declining freedoms and human rights in the region. The new *Women's Action for Peace* project reflects the ongoing need for training focused on the pillars of Participation, Prevention, and Protection, with an emphasis on women's leadership, political participation, and the protection of minorities and human rights defenders. The aim of the project is also to strengthen intergenerational dialogue and youth involvement in peace processes.

This Impact Assessment is a huge result of the project, a document on women and their involvement in peacebuilding and related policies. It is conceived as a collective work aimed at highlighting, through a detailed analysis of each partner organizations, the involvement of women in peace processes, and the potential they hold at the local and global level in shaping policies, as well as the small daily changes. The whole work is combined with an engendering perspective, which seeks to bring women and men together on shared paths with the intention of fostering a system of social and economic justice.

Un Ponte Per ETS is grateful to play a part in building this system through both significant and smaller contributions, such as this assessment and all the work, relationships and challenges that lie behind it. We keep building bridges, not walls.

Partners' role in the impact assessment

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Lastly, heartfelt appreciation is conveyed to all the **individual activists** who participated in the focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews (KIIs). Their voices, experiences, and reflections form the foundation of this research and underscore the resilience and agency of women and communities in advancing peace and security.

Biographies of partner organizations

- **Centro Studi Difesa Civile APS** works to spread the culture and practical tools of violence prevention and constructive conflict management by enhancing the role of Women and Youth in building Peace. CSDC's mission is to combine theory with practical experimentation by fostering dialogue and confrontation at various levels - political, academic, operational. Its main fields of action are research, training, advocacy, and peacebuilding. It is actively engaged in the Women-Peace-Security sector by contributing to the development of policies and on their implementation at both national and international levels, promoting and participating in several working groups in the Italian, EU and OSCE bodies and carrying out projects for the implementation of the Italian WPS National Action Plans.
- The Lebanese section of the **Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF)** was founded in 1962, by decree 257/AD, and was the first section of the organization in the MENA region. WILPF Lebanon's work is aligned with and guided by the principles and vision of WILPF, the oldest women's peace organization, founded in 1915. The vision and goals of WILPF continue to mobilize one of the most powerful forces for change: women's and feminist activism, rooted in an anti-racist and intersectional approach that challenges and eliminates discrimination in all its forms. Currently, WILPF Lebanon mainly works on the pillars of participation, protection, and prevention, emphasizing the role of women in preventing gender-based violence, amplifying their voices in conflict areas, and promoting their political participation. In particular, the organization is engaged in a campaign to incorporate the Arms Trade Treaty into Lebanese law, with a special focus on the gender perspective and dimension.
- **Fighters for Peace (FFP)** is an association committed to supporting former combatants of the Lebanese Civil War in generating a shared memory of the war and transforming them into peacebuilders within civil society. In addition to promoting a shared vision of the tragic events of the war around the concept of restorative justice, the organization has participated in initiatives funded by the Italian NAP and has hosted UPP's Civil Peace Corps in their offices and activities.
- The **Permanent Peace Movement (PPM)** is an organization founded in 1986 by university students during the Lebanese Civil War. The organization promotes peace in Lebanon and the MENA region through training courses and seminars on peace and dialogue, bringing together groups from different backgrounds through the experience of reconciliation, with a focus on political and religious sensitivities. PPM is a member of the Peace Portal and the Network for Nonviolence for Arab countries, promoting nonviolent conflict transformation methodologies.
- **LOUDER** is a Lebanese NGO, led by women and youth-oriented, fighting for a world where individuals and communities can enjoy, respect, and defend their own rights as well as the rights of others. In this direction, LOUDER educates, empowers, supports individuals and communities, and mobilizes their creativity and motivation to defend their rights. This strategy and agenda are supported by using innovative human rights education, sensitive to gender differences, practical and transformative, with the aim of building knowledge and skills of rights holders while increasing the accountability of duty bearers.
- **DAK Organization for Ezidi Women Development** is a non-political, non-governmental, and independent organization founded by Ezidi women and based in Iraqi Kurdistan. DAK is dedicated to promoting development, empowerment, protection, and peacebuilding processes by strengthening the decision-making processes of women. DAK has been a partner in

implementing Italian PAN projects from 2019 to 2024. In recent years, DAK has significantly specialized in advocacy, establishing itself as a key interlocutor for the governmental bodies of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) regarding gender issues and the development of the National Action Plan on the Women, Peace, and Security agenda.

- **Youth Bridge Development Organization (YBDO)** is based in the Sinjar district, Iraq, and is dedicated to empowerment and the protection of human rights. During the ISIS occupation in August 2014, residents of Sinjar, particularly the Ezidis, suffered genocide and horrific acts of violence, including mass killings, enslavement, and the near-total destruction of regional infrastructure, along with bombardments from the international coalition. YBDO has actively participated in the Italian PAN program since the first project, “Engendering Peace” in 2019. Participation in annual programming has allowed for greater structuring and effectiveness in the organization’s field interventions and serving the local community more professionally, particularly in terms of women’s protection.
- The **Libyan Legal Aid Organization** works in the training and education of lawyers in order to provide legal assistance to victims of torture, psychological support, as well as to develop awareness campaigns on human rights, detention center conditions, and international agreements signed by Libya. In the last three years, the intervention network has been expanded through connections with several organizations, thus starting to provide assistance to abused women and developing related awareness campaigns on their human and legal rights.



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Impact Assessment on Women's Involvement in Peacebuilding Processes: A Critical Analysis of the WPS Agenda and NAPs in Lebanon, Tunisia, Iraq, and Libya

The Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda stands as a transformative framework to address the unique challenges women face in conflict-affected regions while amplifying their critical roles as agents of peace and security. This report delves into the implementation of National Action Plans (NAPs) under the WPS framework across Lebanon, Tunisia, Iraq, and Libya, offering a comprehensive evaluation of progress, barriers, and actionable pathways for strengthening gender equality and sustainable peace.

With a focus on grassroots perspectives and policy-level analysis, this assessment provides a nuanced understanding of the socio-political landscapes in the MENA region and the systemic obstacles that persist. Highlighting best practices, transformative leadership, and the power of women-led initiatives, this report is an essential resource for policymakers, practitioners, and advocates striving to advance the WPS agenda.

Through its findings and recommendations, this work reaffirms the enduring link between gender equality, justice, and lasting peace, emphasizing the necessity of inclusive and localized approaches to conflict resolution and peacebuilding.