



# Regional Report Implementing the Women, Peace and Security Agenda in the Arab Region

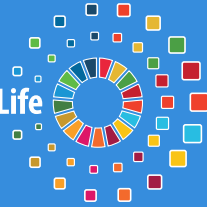


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Regional Report  
**Implementing the Women, Peace  
and Security agenda in the Arab region**



**UNITED NATIONS**  
Beirut

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## Key messages



National Action Plans serve as **concrete actions** for states to advance the Women, Peace and Security agenda



There is a **disconnect** between the positive efforts made by States in the Arab region on women, peace and security, and the continuing negative indicators surrounding women's safety, and civic and political participation.



The Women, Peace and Security agenda is central to addressing the **unprecedented peace and security challenges** in the Arab region, and the persistently grave political, social and economic status of women and girls.





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**Proper budgeting** of National Action Plans and the development of **accountability frameworks** serve to better ensure the realization of women, peace and security goals.



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National Action Plans alone are not sufficient to enhance women's safety and their political participation. **Political will** to implement National Action Plans, including dedicated budgets, cross-sectoral collaboration and concrete timelines, is core to their success.



## Executive summary

The 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 was a significant milestone in which to revisit the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda. The agenda is of central focus in the Arab region, not only due to its unprecedented peace and security challenges, but also due to the grave status of women, with half of the Arab countries ranking in the bottom third of the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index, particularly with regard to economic participation and opportunity, and political empowerment.<sup>1</sup> While there are varying levels of political commitment to the WPS agenda in the Arab region, States have increasingly been advancing their respective agendas, as demonstrated particularly over the past five years.

The adoption of dedicated National Action Plans (NAPs) remains the most concrete action member States can undertake to advance the WPS agenda in the region. The increasing number of Arab States opting to develop NAPs dedicated WPS is a positive sign and a step in the right direction. There is evidence to indicate that the scope and sophistication of NAPs have progressed in terms of the range of activities and aspirations of outcomes. The participatory processes for developing NAPs illustrate recognition of the contributions that a wide array of partners, and particularly women, can offer to advancing the WPS agenda. Despite this progress, implementation of NAPs is a central challenge in the Arab region.

It is important to acknowledge the steps that countries have taken towards gender equality that serve to strengthen the WPS agenda. While some Arab States have been hesitant to directly address the agenda, their progress in gender equality policies, legislation and programmes has inadvertently furthered it. Whether intentional or not, these developments, while not immediately connected to the implementation of UNSCR 1325, ultimately bolster the broader WPS agenda.

This report does not aim to examine the impact of the WPS agenda on the situation of women and

girls at large. This is because, first, it is a report on the efforts of countries towards implementing the agenda, and second, the WPS agenda alone cannot address all aspects of gender equality and protection in isolation from other broader and specialized frameworks. While such an agenda aims at protecting women from violence and discrimination in the context of conflict and enhances their participation in advancing a peace agenda, the broader socioeconomic and political contexts, post-COVID-19 consequences and other global challenges have impeded the advancement of a gender equality agenda in the region – an issue beyond the scope of this report.

Concerning the four pillars of the WPS agenda, participation remains a dominant theme in its implementation with States varying in their approaches to promoting women's participation. The key area of reported progress was in addressing the discrimination against women in legislative and policy frameworks towards strengthening women's agency. All member States identified that addressing existing barriers for women's participation in public life and society is a pressing priority for action, and efforts have been intensified in this area including through policies to counter discrimination against women, for women's empowerment and gender equality, and for improving women's political representation and voice. Women's leadership in conflict mitigation and prevention is a common theme throughout the region with member States enacting a wide range of measures to enable and facilitate women's participation in reinforcing the foundations of peace, and addressing peace and security concerns. However, women have been excluded from most of the peace negotiations in the region since then.

The issue of protection has been particularly pronounced in Arab States experiencing armed conflict or protracted crises. Despite an emphasis on protection, little attention has been given to the institutional set-up to provide protective services



for women; governmental services protecting women survivors tend to be dispersed among various public-sector institutions and rarely achieve nationwide coverage.

Emphasis on prevention in the Arab region has been rather sporadic except for States that have adopted WPS NAPs. In their Beijing +25 reporting, many references made by Arab States with regard to prevention were in the context of preventing domestic violence. Although implementation varies, progressive laws have been put in place in certain States. Prevention of conflict was more advanced in countries that have NAPs in place.

Discussions pertaining to humanitarian relief, recovery and reconstruction in the Arab region are rather limited, and dominated by humanitarian response operations at two levels. The first is the level of countries – predominantly those in conflict or affected by conflict – implementing humanitarian response plans. The second refers to donor countries in the region that provide funding and material support for these operations. Several countries play a dual role such as hosting refugees while providing humanitarian support. It is worth noting that States with NAPs dedicated to WPS include significant elaboration on humanitarian relief and recovery operations such as Iraq, where involving women in designing, identifying and managing humanitarian activities during armed conflict and post-conflict recovery is outlined.

The examination concludes that, while the political climate across the region demands action on the WPS agenda, there are varying degrees of political will to take concrete measures based on clearly defined national goals and targets. The current piecemeal approach applied by many States focuses on areas of overlap with existing policies, frameworks and institutional set-up, with modest gradual expansion of these overlapped areas to address emerging priorities and opportunities, particularly in relation to strengthening women's participation and protection measures. This approach remains a far cry from the spirit of the WPS agenda following the endorsement of UNSCR 1325 over 20 years ago. Member States must note that engagement with the WPS agenda is not

The **issue of protection** has been particularly pronounced in Arab States experiencing **armed conflict** or **protracted crises**



an alternative to other international obligations that aim to ensure gender equality and empower women and girls, for example, the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women and the Beijing Platform for Action and Agenda 2030, among others. The WPS agenda and the timely adoption of NAPs serve to enhance and complement – not replace – these treaties, frameworks and reporting mechanisms. As such, there is still much for the Arab region to achieve in fulfilling the vision established within the agenda.

The recommendations by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) for the advancement of the WPS agenda in the Arab States outlines the increased participation of a broad spectrum of stakeholders, including civil society and women's movements, in the WPS agenda; strengthening institutional capacities on WPS, including dedicated budgeting and the establishment of clear and measurable targets for action on implementing the agenda; developing a comprehensive response to conflict and post-conflict engagement that enables women's participation; mainstreaming the WPS agenda into humanitarian action; and ensuring that any legal reform or policy development in line with the WPS agenda is implemented holistically and complementarily, and avoids a piecemeal or ad-hoc approach.

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## Acronyms

<b>CEDAW</b>	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
<b>CRF</b>	Continental Results Framework
<b>CSO</b>	civil society organization
<b>ESCWA</b>	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia
<b>IEG</b>	informal expert group
<b>IDP</b>	internally displaced person
<b>ISIL</b>	Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant
<b>JONAP</b>	Jordanian National Action Plan
<b>MENA</b>	Middle East and North Africa
<b>NAP</b>	National Action Plan
<b>NCLW</b>	National Commission for Lebanese Women
<b>NGO</b>	non-governmental organization
<b>NWM</b>	National Women's Machinery
<b>OHCHR</b>	United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
<b>OECD</b>	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
<b>PCVE</b>	preventing and countering violent extremism
<b>SDG</b>	Sustainable Development Goal
<b>SGBV</b>	sexual and gender-based violence
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children's Fund
<b>UNFPA</b>	United Nations Population Fund
<b>UN Women</b>	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
<b>UNSCR</b>	United Nations Security Council Resolution
<b>VAW</b>	violence against women
<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organization
<b>WEF</b>	World Economic Forum
<b>WPS</b>	women, peace and security

# Introduction

Upon its adoption in 2000, United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) became a historical landmark through which the international community explicitly recognized the gendered impact of conflict and crises on women, and identified the necessity of a gender-sensitive response to all matters of peace and security. UNSCR 1325 has since been complemented by an additional nine resolutions, each building on and expanding the WPS agenda.<sup>2</sup>

The 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of UNSCR 1325 was a significant milestone in which to revisit its implementation, not only by the Security Council and its members, but by the entire United Nations system and the international community at large. For the United Nations, its *raison d'être* largely focuses on peace and security to “save succeeding generations from the scourge of war”.<sup>3</sup> Article 99 of the United Nations Charter asks the Secretary-General to “bring to the attention of the Security Council any matter which in his opinion may threaten the maintenance of international peace and security”. This clear mandate is particularly relevant for the Arab region which is home to four out of twelve United Nations peacekeeping operations.<sup>4</sup>

The WPS agenda is of particular importance for Arab States, not only due to the unprecedented peace and security challenges, but also due to the grave status of women, with half of the Arab nations ranking at the bottom third of the World Economic Forum’s Global Gender Gap Index, particularly with regard to economic participation and opportunity, and political empowerment.<sup>5</sup> In addition, Palestinians continue to suffer under the Israeli military occupation of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem and Gaza. The situation is further exacerbated in Iraq, the Syrian Arab Republic, the Sudan, and Yemen, which are locked in protracted crises and among the top six countries with the most internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the world in 2019.<sup>6</sup>

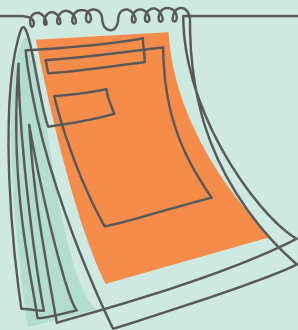
The States in the region are keen to respond to these challenges in peace and security, both at national and regional levels. States have shown an interest in understanding more about the WPS agenda and how it can be particularly useful in responding to both gender equality and peace and security challenges. In 2009, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) received a mandate to work on WPS during the Fourth Committee on Women held in Kuwait on the 10th anniversary of UNSCR 1325.<sup>7</sup> With this background, the report reflects on the region’s responses to the WPS agenda since then, identifying key issues and priorities as well as actions taken in response to them.

This report does not aim to examine the impact of the WPS agenda on the situation of women and girls at large. This is because, firstly, it is a report on the efforts of countries towards implementing the agenda and, secondly, the WPS agenda alone cannot address all aspects of gender equality and protection in isolation from other broader and specialized frameworks. While such an agenda aims at protecting women from violence and discrimination in the context of conflict and enhancing their participation in advancing a peace agenda, the broader socioeconomic and political contexts, post-COVID-19 consequences as well as global challenges have impeded the advancement of a gender equality agenda in the region, an issue that is beyond the scope of this report.

While there are varying levels of political commitment to WPS in the Arab region, States have increasingly been advancing their respective WPS agendas, particularly over the past five years. As more States develop National Action Plans (NAPs), the region will shift towards the establishment of a normative framework on WPS. It is also important to acknowledge the unintentional steps that countries have taken towards gender equality that serve to strengthen the WPS agenda. Overall, however, the approach has been piecemeal, focusing on areas

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The **WPS** agenda is **broad** and **open to interpretation** and priority setting by States.



of WPS overlap with existing policies, frameworks and institutional set-up with a modest gradual expansion of these overlapped areas to address emerging priorities and opportunities, particularly in relation to enhancing women's participation and strengthening protection measures. Whatever progress has occurred at the structural level has not necessarily translated into significantly noticeable or substantive gains for women and girls within the region.

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## Methodology

This report is based on a mixed-method process entailing a desk review of literature relevant to the WPS agenda, qualitative surveys administered to States in the Arab region and a content analysis of WPS NAPs. The report largely analyses relevant plans and policies; however, it does not evaluate the full extent of or challenges in implementation.

The WPS agenda is broad and open to interpretation and priority setting by States. It can be thought of as a toolbox of actions that States can draw on to ensure women's equality in peace and conflict. To focus the analysis within this paper, several existing WPS frameworks were utilized to structure the discussion. The framing of the four pillars of the agenda presented in chapter 2, and the key tools under each pillar, were developed based on the United Nations Women Sourcebook on Women, Peace and Security (2012),<sup>9</sup> with further elaboration based on an analysis of the WPS resolutions and known actions taken by countries in implementing the agenda.

In addition to being guided by the framing of the WPS agenda, the analysis in chapter 2 is based on information gathered from three questionnaires administered by ESCWA in 2018 and 2019. The first was a survey that covered a range of thematic priorities, including several questions on the WPS agenda with a particular focus on the role of institutions in implementing the agenda. The survey included questions on the legislative backing for action on WPS including NAPs; institutional mandates directly referring to the WPS agenda; policy frameworks that include explicit reference to WPS priorities; and actions undertaken in advancing the WPS agenda since 2011. The questionnaire also requested information related to financing, accountability and inter-agency coordination.

The second survey sought information on the implementation of the recommendations and member States' commitments made during ESCWA's Eighth Ministerial Committee on Women in 2017. It asked about commitments toward developing NAPs on WPS; whether countries reviewed national policies and strategies to reflect the WPS agenda; and whether countries had developed WPS frameworks with civil society's participation.<sup>9</sup> The questionnaire also asked member States to provide specific examples of measures undertaken since 2017 on these issues.



The third survey was anchored in national and regional reporting on the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action on its 25th anniversary (Beijing +25). The questionnaire included the areas of the Beijing Platform and sought information on associated elements of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development including Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 5, 10, 16, and 17, which are of relevance to the WPS agenda.

This report also draws upon the participation of member States in a high-level conference on Women, Peace and Security in 2019 (box 1).

The content analysis of NAPs in the Arab region, presented in chapter 3, is guided by the African

Union Continental Results Framework (CRF) for Monitoring and Reporting on the Implementation of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda in Africa (2018–2028).<sup>10</sup> The CRF, launched in partnership with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), provides a useful basis to guide discussions on the responsiveness of NAPs to the various elements of the broader WPS agenda. The African Union’s framework has the advantage of broad regional and global recognition as well as being directly relevant to 10 Arab States.

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**Box 1. High-level Conference on Women, Peace and Security, Amman, November 2019: measuring progress and addressing gaps**

In launching the regional review process for the implementation of the WPS agenda across the Arab region, the high-level conference brought together 61 officials, civil society participants and subject-matter experts to discuss WPS issues and general trends in implementation across the Arab States. Specifically, the conference discussed member States’ responses to the WPS agenda and the utility of instruments for measurement of progress, particularly the Women, Peace and Security Index developed by the Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security and the Peace Research Institute of Oslo. The second iteration of the index was launched in the region during this event and included score readings for 16 Arab States.

The conference also provided a forum for member States to indicate what specific commitments they intend to make to advance the WPS agenda both in their respective States and at the regional level. The commitments showed a renewed level of engagement with the agenda, while flagging specific priority areas for future action. Five member States (Egypt, Kuwait, Morocco, the Sudan, and Yemen) indicated that they are at different stages in developing their respective NAPs on WPS, joining the five countries that already have NAPs in the region (Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, State of Palestine, and Tunisia). The event concluded with a discussion on the factors critical for success in advancing the WPS agenda such as mobilizing various State agencies, engagement with security institutions, the role of civil society organizations, and anchoring the WPS agenda in humanitarian response.

This event was co-organized by ESCWA in partnership with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women Regional Office for Arab States, the League of Arab State’s Social Affairs Division and the Arab Institute for Women at the Lebanese American University, with a valuable contribution from the Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security. The conference was implemented under a regional project entitled SCR1325@20: Towards a renewed engagement with the WPS agenda in the Arab region, funded by the Governments of Germany and Switzerland.

## Women, Peace and Security agenda overview

UNSCR 1325 and its accompanying nine Security Council resolutions form the basis of the WPS agenda, the purpose of which is to recognize the disproportionate and differential impact of conflict and crises on women and girls, and ensure gender-sensitive responses and women's participation in all matters relevant to peace and security (box 2). The resolutions that comprise the WPS agenda are grounded in international human rights law, particularly the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), including General recommendation No. 30 on women in conflict prevention, conflict and post-conflict situation, and General recommendation No. 35 on gender-based violence.<sup>11</sup> The various resolutions refer to international humanitarian, refugee and criminal law, as well as other relevant internationally-agreed upon frameworks such as the SDG Agenda and the recommendations of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations, among others.<sup>12</sup>

A working definition of the WPS agenda is a series of actions intended to advance gender equality, and peace and security in tandem. The WPS agenda can be thought of as a toolbox to leverage a more equitable peace. It is centred around four basic pillars, namely, participation, protection, prevention, and relief and recovery. These pillars first emerged in 2004 from the work of the Inter-agency Network on Women and Gender Equality and the agreed conclusions of the Committee on the Status of Women at its 48th session.<sup>13</sup> The pillars remain the cornerstone of WPS programming around the world. The Security Council strongly recommends the adoption of dedicated NAPs on WPS to guide national action and to measure progress based on national priorities. The development of NAPs has proven to be best practice in responding to the WPS agenda, and 100 countries have voted to develop NAPs as the tool of choice.<sup>14</sup>

### Box 2. The Women, Peace and Security agenda at a glance

- ▶ Established through Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) and has since been supplemented with an additional nine resolutions expanding and elaborating on the agenda.
- ▶ Calls for dedicated measures to advance both gender equality, and peace and security by ensuring women's representation in conflict prevention and resolution, and ending impunity for gender-based violence and sexual abuse in conflict and post-conflict situations.
- ▶ Centred on four inter-connected pillars (prevention, protection, participation, and relief and recovery) to be implemented by States, non-State actors and the United Nations system.
- ▶ As of August 2022, 100 countries have developed WPS National Action Plans (NAPs) including 7<sup>a</sup> in the Arab region: Iraq (2015), State of Palestine (2015), Jordan (2017), Tunisia (2018), Lebanon (2019), Yemen (2019), and the Sudan (2020). The League of Arab States has also adopted a 'regional strategy' on WPS.<sup>b</sup>
- ▶ The United Nations issues an annual report by the Secretary-General on progress in the implementation of the WPS agenda. Other instruments to measure progress include the African Union's Continental Results Framework and the Women, Peace and Security Index from the Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security and the Peace Research Institute in Oslo.

<sup>a</sup> Djibouti adopted its NAP, Plan d'action national pour la mise en œuvre de la résolution 1325 (2000) et des résolutions connexes du Conseil de sécurité des Nations Unies sur la femme et la paix in 2017; however, despite identifying as an Arab State, it is not a member of ESCWA and therefore its NAP is not reviewed in this report.

<sup>b</sup> General Secretariat of the League of Arab States, Arab Women Organization and UN Women, 2016.

Indeed, in the absence of NAPs, measurement of progress along the four pillars remains a challenge due to the broad nature of the agenda.

The WPS agenda is best operationalized through an intersectional lens. Intersectionality is a means of analysis that addresses the ways in which gender interacts with other social factors to exacerbate existing inequalities.<sup>15</sup> To understand and respond to the implications of conflict on different groups of people, it is important to analyse how various positionalities affect a person's relationship to conflict. Intersectionality can facilitate the mainstreaming of needs whether based on gender, age, ability, ethnicity, nationality, race, or religion, among others, within policies and programmes related to the WPS agenda. As such, to ensure that the needs of all affected and marginalized communities are recognized, the WPS agenda (and NAPs) cannot only focus on the inclusion of women; instead, it must be intersectional and consider the voices and experiences of persons from diverse backgrounds and identities.

Over the past 20 years, the WPS agenda has continued to evolve in content and global follow-up mechanisms. In 2015, UNSCR 2242 was passed to address the United Nations Security Council's working methods on WPS, among other issues. It led to the establishment of an informal expert group (IEG) on WPS, as well as a commitment from the United Nations Security Council to include civil society representatives in country-specific and thematic meetings.<sup>16</sup> As a result, several women's civil society organizations (CSOs) and women's human-rights defenders from the Arab region have directly addressed the council through the non-governmental organization (NGO) Working Group on Women, Peace and Security.<sup>17</sup> UN Women acts as the Secretariat of the group, and two Member States rotate as elected co-chairs. The work of the IEG gains more importance as it seeks to shift the WPS agenda from a siloed thematic issue to an integrated and integral aspect of all the work of the United Nations Security Council. In recent years, the IEG has held meetings to address the role of WPS in ongoing conflicts as well as the COVID-19 pandemic. However, due to the IEG's status as an expert group, these meetings are not reflected in the programme of work of the Security Council's subsidiary bodies. Furthermore, as council members are not required to attend the meetings, some permanent members of the Security Council may not participate as frequently as they should.

The common thread linking the WPS resolutions, mandates and recommendations is their explicit dual focus on gender equality, and peace and security. However, the broad nature of the resolutions, along with references to a wide range of internationally agreed upon frameworks, have continually expanded the parameters of the agenda. This has left it open to interpretation, with different nuances and expectations, as well as being subject to potential misconceptions (box 3) and uneven implementation. Even within the Security Council, for example, there has been a greater emphasis on the protection of women and girls from sexual violence in conflict, and less consistent inclusion of the pillars of prevention and participation.<sup>18</sup>

Intersectionality  
is a **means of analysis** that  
addresses the  
ways in which  
**gender** interacts  
with **other social factors**  
to exacerbate  
existing  
inequalities



To understand the current state of the WPS agenda in the Arab region, chapter 1 provides an overview of its evolution. Chapter 2 provides an assessment of engagement with the WPS agenda in the Arab region, examining Arab States' implementation of the four WPS pillars as well as analysis on the factors that have enabled the advancement of the agenda to some extent while also acknowledging that the situation and status of women and girls

in the region has made limited progress due to a variety of factors, for instance, chronic conflict and the COVID-19 pandemic. Chapter 3 undertakes a grounded analysis of existing NAPs across the Arab region using the AU's CRF as a lens to identify common priorities as well as gaps in response. The paper ends with a conclusion and set of recommendations for further action to improve implementation of the WPS agenda in the region.

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### Box 3. Misconceptions about the Women, Peace and Security agenda

- ▷ **Member States are not required to implement the Women, Peace and Security agenda:** Article 25 of the United Nations Charter states that members of the United Nations agree to accept and carry out the decisions of the Security Council. United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 specifically calls for action by Member States.
- ▷ **The WPS agenda is purely concerned with women/gender issues:** The creation of the WPS agenda by the United Nations Security Council affirms that the agenda is a global peace and security issue that affects all societies and demographics, and requires comprehensive inter-agency engagement involving a wide spectrum of actors ranging from civil society to the intelligence and security apparatus.
- ▷ **The WPS agenda only concerns UNSCR 1325:** The WPS agenda is an evolving body that was established by UNSCR 1325 in the year 2000 but has since been expanded through an additional nine resolutions, as well as a significant body of internationally agreed upon frameworks and obligations relating to both gender equality, and peace and security.
- ▷ **The WPS agenda is only relevant for conflict-affected States:** The WPS agenda is relevant to all Member States and includes important elements regarding reinforcing the foundations of peace and equality, and strengthening preparedness. Around half of the States that have developed NAPs are not conflict-affected States. The WPS agenda also highlights the need for prevention of conflict and therefore holds relevance for all Member States.
- ▷ **Implementing the WPS agenda is solely a Government responsibility:** While Governments play a central role in implementing the agenda, the responsibility is also shared with non-State actors, civil society, United Nations agencies, and the donor community. For instance, in countries which have not yet adopted a NAP, civil society organizations have continued to work on the WPS agenda.
- ▷ **The WPS agenda can be implemented without a NAP:** A NAP is intended to outline key issues and priorities to identify clear and measurable actions. UNSCR 2242 (2015) specifically refers to NAPs and calls for Member States to develop NAPs in a consultative manner and provide resources for implementation.

- ▷ **The WPS agenda lacks international monitoring and measurement tools:** There are a variety of instruments to monitor and report on progress, including reports of the United Nations Secretary-General; Security Council deliberations and special sessions; States' reporting to United Nations human rights mechanisms such as CEDAW, and reporting by United Nations agencies and partner civil society; regional frameworks; and global indices such as the Women, Peace and Security Index.



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**The evolution, state  
and status of the  
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Security agenda in  
the Arab region**





One of the earliest regional engagements on the WPS agenda in the Arab region was in 2008 when ESCWA organized an expert group meeting to discuss the relevance of UNSCR 1325 (2000) and UNSCR 1820 (2008). This consultation informed an ESCWA publication on the means of strengthening the role of women in conflict resolution and peacebuilding, which included case studies from Iraq, Lebanon and the State of Palestine.<sup>19</sup> In 2009, the fourth session of ESCWA's Ministerial Committee on Women included, for the first time, a mandate for ESCWA to work on advancing the WPS agenda across the region.<sup>20</sup>

While engagement on the WPS agenda accelerated following the ministerial session, the events of the 2010/2011 Arab uprisings obliged several policymakers to reconsider the timing of engaging on the agenda. Only Iraq and the State of Palestine moved forward with their WPS agendas, and were the first countries in the region to take concrete steps towards developing and adopting dedicated NAPs on WPS. In the State of Palestine, the National Coalition for Implementing UNSCR 1325 was formed in 2010 and then continued to work with a variety of stakeholders and Government partners to coordinate action towards a NAP. The State of Palestine's experience resonates with experiences in Iraq, Jordan, the Sudan, Tunisia, and Yemen, where efforts to advance the WPS agenda benefited from civil society participation.

At the same time, policymakers have adopted a variety of positions on this issue ranging from refusing to engage with the agenda as a stand-alone policy framework, to a utilitarian view that uses the agenda to advance specific issues such as preventing and countering violent extremism (PCVE), or improving recognition of the State's contribution to peacekeeping efforts. A related view is using the WPS agenda as a mechanism to mobilize donor resources, as States bring in international funding for their NAP processes. States also use it as a vehicle to implement overlapping policies; for example, NAPs on UNSCR 1325 are currently serving as important advocacy tools, guiding frameworks and means of accountability for countries to implement gender-informed responses to COVID-19. Analysis from the Arab region highlights areas of overlap with specific global responses to COVID-19, thus demonstrating the value of implementing NAPs in the current crisis.<sup>21</sup>

The WPS agenda has also served as a mechanism for dialogue among a variety of governmental and non-governmental partners. In the State of Palestine, for example, the WPS agenda has been used as a unifying force among women's organizations, between different Palestinian factions, and civil society and the Government.<sup>22</sup>

## A. Advancement of women, peace and security in the Arab region: 2015 until present

Since the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of UNSCR 1325, there has been an evident uptick in engagement with the WPS agenda including with legislators, policymakers working for the advancement of the status of women, actors working on human rights, security sector institutions, and civil society.

At the time of writing this publication, the positions of Arab States on the WPS agenda continue to

vary, influenced by political considerations and realities on the ground as well as utilitarian views towards the WPS agenda to advance both gender equality, and peace and security. There is an increasing commitment towards the WPS agenda across the Arab region, manifested in the degree of engagement by member States with the agenda at the national, regional and global levels. For instance, seven member States have adopted dedicated

NAPs with clear action areas and targets across the various pillars of the WPS agenda.

External encouragement and support from the United Nations and other international actors seem to have played a significant role in the advancement of the WPS agenda over the past five years. The 2030 SDGs published in 2015 share numerous overlapping priorities with the WPS agenda including SDG 5 on achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, and SDG 16 on promoting just, peaceful and inclusive societies. Jordan, for example, began the process of developing a WPS NAP as it endorsed the SDGs.<sup>23</sup> The adoption of UNSCR 2212 in 2013 built meaningfully on the landmark UNSCR 1325 and the WPS agenda by reaffirming women's full and equal participation at all stages of peacebuilding, holding countries accountable for engaging civil society and women. As the world commemorated the 20th anniversary of UNSCR 1325, more Arab States were moved to action whether through meetings, reports or even through renewed commitments to developing a NAP. For example, UN Women and the General Union of Palestinian Women held a high-level dialogue to discuss the state of the WPS agenda in the State of Palestine in the run-up to the 20th anniversary,<sup>24</sup> and in 2020, the Ministry of Women's Affairs launched the State of Palestine's second NAP on WPS.<sup>25</sup>

It is particularly important that **States that have adopted NAPs are diverse geographically and across the spectrum of peace and conflict**



In addition to the influence of the strengthening global normative frameworks on WPS, perhaps the more persuasive factors have been internally driven, based on the unique political, social and economic contexts of each Arab State. States may be incentivized based on their respective needs and strategic interests, while civil society and National Women's Machineries (NWMs) capitalize on strategic points of opportunity within each country. Many NAPs have taken advantage of the momentum generated by significant political events such as public presidential endorsements and political campaign periods.<sup>26</sup> NAPs have also followed transitional justice efforts such as Tunisia's Truth and Dignity Commission.

Of course, periods of transition and conflict can inspire a need for greater investment in the WPS agenda. The State of Palestine leveraged the agenda to push back against military occupation. In conflict-affected countries such as Iraq, Libya, the Syrian Arab Republic, and Yemen, civil society has turned to the WPS agenda in constitutional drafting processes.<sup>27</sup> For example, Yemen passed its NAP for WPS in 2019 in the midst of conflict and the devastating humanitarian crisis occurring throughout the country.<sup>28</sup> In 2015, Iraq issued an Emergency NAP to respond to the invasion of the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). Additionally, in 2015, UNSCR 2242 merged the PCVE and the WPS agendas, strategically responding to the widespread concern of violent extremism which was particularly rampant in the Arab region at the time.

Through regional policies, conferences and increasing NAPs, the Arab region is working towards a new normative framework around the WPS agenda. In 2013, the League of Arab States adopted a Regional Strategy on WPS and sanctioned a Regional Action Plan in 2015. The Regional Strategy and Regional Action Plan were both endorsed by member States and intended to act as guiding frameworks for States to develop NAPs.<sup>29</sup> The 2016 Muscat Declaration, which emerged from ESCWA's seventh session of the Committee on Women, affirmed the region's commitment to the promotion of gender justice.<sup>30</sup> In addition, the Beirut Call to Action adopted at

the 2016 Conference Prioritizing Women, Peace and Security on the Arab Agenda, prioritizes gender justice in times of both peace and conflict, connecting gender justice to the WPS agenda.<sup>31</sup>

As more and more Arab States become a critical mass of countries with NAPs, it sets off a tipping point. It is particularly important that States that have adopted NAPs are diverse geographically and across the spectrum of peace and conflict. A major roadblock in the progress of the WPS agenda in the Arab region is the attitudinal belief that the agenda and NAPs are not applicable to States not experiencing conflict.<sup>32</sup> The wide array of Arab States that have either endorsed or are in the process of developing NAPs demonstrates that every State will benefit from investing in the WPS agenda (box 4). As increasing institutionalized knowledge is established across the region, States can turn to one another for guidance on best practices and assistance in developing their NAPs, and other relevant strategies. This broad commitment helps build a normative framework throughout the region,

both encouraging other States to strengthen their commitment to WPS and teaching them how to take similar steps.

The consensus promoting the development of NAPs as the optimal tool for implementing the WPS agenda reflects the need to advance relevant national strategic interests broadly and to its four pillars specifically. NAPs are most useful when they are timebound, budgeted and inclusive of diverse voices. The extent to which implementation has taken place varies. Several States reported that they integrate relevant elements from the WPS agenda into their respective national frameworks, particularly those associated with women and gender equality.

In the Sudan, NAP was seen as a tool to address any possible gaps or potential issues within peace efforts as a part of the transitional political agreement, as follows:

***Developing a National Action Plan was included within the constitutional document of the political agreement signed in August 2019 [...]***

#### Box 4. Regional reflections on the Women, Peace and Security agenda

*“Tunisia is committed to international conventions to enhance human rights and human value. We are also interested in implementing UNSCR 1325 since it started the democratic transition in 2011 directly given that Tunisia is not protected from surrounding conflict, although not directly in conflict. Tunisia is supporting sustainable peace through mechanisms to enhance women’s roles in all aspects. The added value this NAP [National Action Plan] would bring is to further align and reform legislation to be in line with international standards. It would also allow us to have economic projects for women to contribute to the development of their community, particularly in the areas that are threatened with terrorism and violent extremism and that are challenged by marginalization and poverty.”*

**Fedoua Derouiche, Ministry of Women, Family, Children and the Elderly, Tunisia**

*“The region can no longer afford any delay in reaching the representation [that] women deserve in decision-making circles and in prioritizing women in humanitarian assistance. We stress the commitment of the League of Arab States to achieve the goals of the regional Women, Peace and Security agenda through close work with member States, and by providing technical assistance and dialogue platforms to exchange expertise.”*

**Inas Mekkawy, Former Director of Women, Family and Childhood Department, League of Arab States**

***and therefore it was a priority for the transitional government to adopt the National Action Plan, also reflecting the priority given to peace issues by the transitional government.***<sup>33</sup>

One dominant position is for Arab States to use the WPS agenda as a tool to enhance women's fundamental rights, particularly in contexts such as those in Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and the State of Palestine. A key strategic use for the agenda in this regard is to advocate for specific measures targeting women and girls given the differentiated impact of conflict on them. This includes advocacy by NWMs with their sister agencies and actors to become more sensitive to the needs of women and girls towards a more inclusive and egalitarian society, as this excerpt from Lebanon's NAP indicates:

***This NAP, endorsed by the Government of Lebanon, [...] will enhance all efforts in preventing and containing armed conflicts and will provide girls and women with more effective protection measures against violence, as well as improve their conditions to access, benefit and participate in relief and recovery efforts.***<sup>34</sup>

Furthermore, engaging on the WPS agenda is increasingly serving as a tool to respond to the

institutional interests of governmental and non-governmental agencies. This includes activities associated with advancing the agenda to respond to needs for resources, staff, capacity development, and development of institutional systems relating to gender equality, and peace and security. A key example is using national processes and frameworks on WPS to facilitate continued dialogue among CSOs as well as with governmental agencies and international partners. This responds to practical needs associated with information sharing, coordination and collective action, particularly on emerging concerns and programmatic interventions at grassroots levels.

It is worth noting, however, that several Arab States remain reluctant to develop national frameworks with clear parameters on the WPS agenda, perhaps due to misconceptions (box 3) on what the agenda calls for or due to limited interest in developing a stand-alone framework, with a preference to use existing overlapping frameworks to advance the agenda instead. This approach retains current gaps in response and limits the capacity of States to identify, respond to and overcome current as well as emerging core issues affecting both gender equality, and peace and security.

## **B. The interconnectedness of the Women, Peace and Security agenda, legislation and discriminatory norms and attitudes**

While some States have been hesitant to directly address the WPS agenda, their progress in policies, legislation and programmes working towards gender equality may inadvertently further the WPS agenda in their countries. Women have made advancements around the Arab region over the past two decades, from securing the right to vote and achieving political and civic in Saudi Arabia, to Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, the State of Palestine, and Tunisia repealing so-called 'marry-your-rapist' laws and taking a step towards combating sexual and gender-

based violence (SGBV). Whether intentionally or not, these developments were not immediately connected to the implementation of UNSCR 1325 but ultimately bolstered the broad WPS agenda. However, there is limited advancement in some elements of the WPS agenda, as reflected in specific recommendations of the resolutions. A review of WPS-related legislation<sup>35</sup>, while not encompassing all legislative changes required to implement the WPS agenda, does highlight areas where legal reform could be targeted. Legislation should be guided by international human rights

standards, notably those outlined in CEDAW, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and the WPS agenda, among others. CEDAW General Recommendation No. 30 provides detailed guidance for Governments on legal and policy responses to ensure that women's human rights are protected before, during and after conflict. It calls on Governments to develop and fund NAPs on the WPS agenda, as well as for measures to protect women and girls from SGBV, enhancing women's participation at all levels of decision-making, and for greater access to justice for women and girls impacted by conflict.

Reform of existing laws to remove discriminatory provisions can be more effective when accompanied by the strengthening of institutional capacities to enforce laws that provide for gender equality and protection from SGBV, and to offer expanded access to justice for women and girls.<sup>36</sup> It is crucial that a holistic approach is taken, recognizing the interlinkages between various measures of women's well-being and the flow-on effects of legislation and policy. For example, both legislation restricting women's movement and low rates of mobile phone ownership – while seemingly unrelated – can have a negative effect on women's rates of financial inclusion (amongst other indicators), demonstrating the need for a range of legislative and policy initiatives. The rankings on the WPS Index provide an indication of where effective policy and programme changes can improve the status and conditions of women and girls.

To further ensure the effectiveness of legislation and policy implementation, steps should be taken to address conservative and discriminatory gender norms. Gender roles associated with traditional norms often limit women's decision-making power, their educational and economic opportunities, and access to services. The International Men and Gender Equality Survey conducted in four Arab States in 2016–2017 found that most men interviewed supported a wide range of inequitable attitudes.<sup>37</sup> Several countries among the worst performing on the WPS Index have rates of intimate partner violence approaching 50 per cent, demonstrating how women's security at home is correlated with security in the country at large. As such, legislative and policy changes should be accompanied by measures to counter gender stereotypes, and such steps can be incorporated into NAPs, as has been demonstrated by countries such as Jordan, which has included measures to address negative gender stereotypes.

Finally, achieving the goals set down in the WPS agenda requires the engagement of multiple stakeholders, and it is particularly important that women at all levels participate in and, where possible, lead the development, implementation and monitoring of legislation and policymaking. As such, any steps taken to address deficits should include the participation of women.



Several countries among the **worst performing** on the **WPS** Index have rates of intimate **partner violence** approaching **50%**



# 2

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**The status of women  
and girls in the  
Arab region and  
implementation of  
the Women, Peace  
and Security agenda**





This chapter first examines the status of women and girls in the Arab region. A brief examination is warranted given the disconnect between positive efforts made by States in the region on WPS and the continuing negative indicators surrounding women's safety, and civic and political participation.

The chapter then discusses the four integral pillars of the WPS agenda: participation, protection, prevention, and relief and recovery, and examines how Arab States understand and respond to the WPS agenda in relation to the four pillars based on their responses to the questionnaires circulated by ESCWA, as well as publicly available information. As demonstrated by the framing of the four pillars, there is a range of actions and tools that States can draw on to implement the WPS agenda. Given the broad nature of the agenda, it is natural that States focus on pillars or tools given their specific country context though, overall, Arab States have particularly focused their efforts on the participation and protection pillars. The research has shown that responses to the WPS agenda are still in their infancy despite the experiences of several Arab States in developing dedicated NAPs.

This chapter also explores the factors that have enabled implementation of the pillars and the overall WPS agenda. The strength of the enabling factors for the advancement of the WPS agenda and successful implementation of NAPs varies significantly, stunting the full realization of the WPS agenda.

The analysis in this chapter is based on information gathered from the three questionnaires administered by ESCWA in 2018 and 2019. As described in chapter 1, the first questionnaire covered a range of thematic priorities and included several questions on the WPS agenda with a particular focus on the role of institutions in implementing the agenda. The second questionnaire sought information on the implementation of the recommendations and commitments by member States to the WPS agenda made during ESCWA's Eighth Ministerial Committee on Women. The third questionnaire was anchored in national and regional reporting on the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action on its 25th anniversary. This questionnaire sought information on SDGs 5, 10, 16, and 17, which are of relevance to the WPS agenda (table 1).

**Table 1. Matrix of analysis**

Survey	Algeria	Bahrain	Egypt	Iraq	Jordan	Kuwait	Lebanon	Libya	Mauritania	Morocco	Oman	State of Palestine	Qatar	Saudi Arabia	Somalia	Sudan	Syrian Arab Republic	Tunisia	United Arab Emirates	Yemen
ESCWA Survey 2018	-	✓	-	✓	✓	-	✓	✓	-	✓	✓	✓	✓	-	-	✓	-	✓	-	✓
ESCWA Survey 2019	-	-	-	-	✓	-	✓	-	✓	-	✓	✓	-	✓	-	-	-	-	-	✓
Beijing +25 National Reports	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	-	✓	✓	✓	-

Source: Authors

## A. The status of women and girls in the Arab region

While the region has advanced, to some degree, in its absorption of the WPS agenda in frameworks, legislation and NAPs, the situation and status of women and girls remains precarious. The region continues to stand out for its marked inequalities – especially gender inequality – which have been compounded by chronic conflict, occupation, mass displacement, climate change and disasters, health crises, and increasing poverty. As such, women and girls have been impacted in specifically gendered ways, particularly in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, meaning that the WPS agenda, while essential for the region, has yet to be fully implemented in an impactful manner.

A brief review of the status of women and girls in the Arab region highlights the continued harm and barriers they face.<sup>38</sup> Comprehensive data and documentation on violence against women and girls in the region is limited due to stigma and fear of retaliation; however, the World Health Organization estimates that 33 per cent of women in the Eastern Mediterranean region have experienced some form of violence in their lifetime.<sup>39</sup> Other forms of violence persist. For example, despite improvement over recent decades, 13.3 per cent of girls in the region were married before the age of 18,<sup>40</sup> whereas the current estimate of female genital mutilation cases numbers around 50 million.<sup>41</sup> The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated these forms of violence, compounding WPS concerns.<sup>42</sup>

In terms of civic engagement including peacemaking and peacebuilding processes, women's participation has been consistently curtailed. Women's political representation remains the lowest globally with women holding just 16.9 per cent of parliamentary seats in 2021, down by 0.9 per cent compared to the previous year.<sup>43</sup>

Women's civil society in the region has actively engaged with the WPS agenda, notably contributing to the annual United Nations Security Council Open Debate on Women and Peace and Security, the Open Debate on Sexual Violence in Conflict and country briefings, providing a gendered perspective on conflict, occupation and transition in the region while consistently noting women's exclusion from formal peace processes.<sup>44</sup> The United Nations has worked to ensure that women in the region are

**13.3%**  
of girls in the  
region **were**  
**married** before  
the age of 18



engaged as experts and advisors in contexts such as Libya, the Sudan and Yemen;<sup>45</sup> however, this still places them on the periphery of engagement. At the local or informal levels, women serve as “inside mediators”, working to reconcile conflicts within families, tribes and local communities during and after conflict.<sup>46</sup> Since 2000, only 32 signed peace agreements in the Arab region referenced ‘women’, ‘girls’ and/or ‘gender’, though this does not necessarily mean that the specific needs of women and girls were mainstreamed into those documents.<sup>47</sup>

This situation is not unique to the region as noted in the Secretary-General's recent report on WPS which states the following: “Today, the world is experiencing a reversal of generational gains in women's rights while violent conflicts, military expenditures, military coups, displacements and hunger continue to increase [...] Recent challenges to democratic and inclusive politics show once again that misogyny and authoritarianism are often mutually reinforcing and antithetical to stable and prosperous societies.”<sup>48</sup>

Therefore, it is important to remember that the WPS agenda is a tool – one among many – to guide Arab States in their work to address gender-based inequalities and women's empowerment, while also working toward more sustained peace and security. As such, the following discusses how the WPS pillars have been implemented in the Arab region, fully aware that gaps and challenges persist.

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## B. Implementation of the women, peace and security pillars in the Arab region

### 1. Participation

The participation pillar of the WPS agenda cuts across all the other pillars in necessitating women’s meaningful participation and active engagement in all prevention, protection, and relief and recovery efforts. Furthermore, the WPS agenda highlights the importance of women’s participation and decision-making in political life and peace processes. In situations of conflict and instability, women take on additional roles and have particular experiences which may give them different first-hand understanding of various peace and security issues vis-à-vis men.

Women’s participation is crucial to ensure that women’s voices guide the design and implementation of the WPS agenda, while ensuring that there is an adequate representation of women from various political, socioeconomic and other backgrounds in WPS processes, as well as peace and security deliberations. Women’s meaningful participation is integral to shaping policymaking in ways that better reflect the lived needs of communities in times of both conflict and peace. Evidence suggests that women’s participation increases the probability of a lasting peace agreement. For example, an agreement is 35 per cent more likely to last for 15 years if women participate in its creation.<sup>49</sup> Therefore, women’s participation is not only required to ensure that their experiences of conflict are considered, but can also act as a preventative factor to conflict in the first place. Implementing the WPS agenda without the active engagement and leadership of women goes against the spirit of the agenda.

Participation remains a dominant theme in the implementation of the WPS agenda in the Arab region, with States varying in their approaches. Broadly speaking, progress was reported along the following three key areas relating to participation: (a) women’s participation in public life and the opportunities for a more pronounced role for women in society; (b) women’s participation in crisis mitigation and conflict de-escalation; and (c) women’s participation in the security sector.

The key area of reported progress was in addressing discrimination against women in legislative and policy frameworks towards strengthening women’s agency. All member States identified that addressing existing barriers for women’s participation in public life and society is a pressing priority for action, and efforts have been intensified in this area, including through policies to counter discrimination against women, for women’s empowerment and gender equality, and for improving women’s political representation and voice.

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An agreement is  
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more likely to last  
for **15 years**  
if **women**  
participate in  
its **creation**



Participation		
Ensuring women's meaningful participation and active engagement in all prevention, protection, and relief and recovery efforts		
Action	Purpose	Examples
<b>Participation in prevention, protection, and relief and recovery</b>	Ensuring there is adequate, representative, meaningful, and inclusive participation of women in the identification of priorities, design of activities, implementation, and monitoring of progress on the various pillars of the WPS agenda, including in the design and implementation of WPS NAPs.	Identifying the different experiences and roles that women play in times of peace and conflict vis-à-vis men (for instance, they may be combatants, victims/survivors of violence or SGBV, breadwinners, community organizers, or take on other roles distinct from men) and ensuring that a range of women's voices guide the design, implementation and monitoring of the WPS agenda.
<b>Participation in political life</b>	Participation of women at all levels of governance is critical for their legitimacy and representation. The presence of women across political life has proven to be indicative of the health of a political system and its robustness in addressing a society's needs and advancing its well-being.	Ensuring women's representation, at all levels, in legislative, executive and judicial branches of government; in subnational, local and community governance structures; within high-level political appointments and technical and administrative positions; in non-civilian governmental entities such as military and police; and in political parties, trade unions, special interest groups and other civic structures.
<b>Participation in peace processes</b>	Active engagement and participation of women in processes that contribute to peace and prevent/mitigate conflict is more likely to help peace processes reach an agreement, and in ensuring that those agreements are relevant, of quality, last longer, and are more successful in mitigating relapse. It also increases the legitimacy of outcomes and helps consolidate women's movements, enabling them to play a more visible role in advocating for peace, mitigating conflict and mediating among conflict parties.	Ensuring women's representation and engagement of women's organizations in peace and associated processes, including participation in peacekeeping operations, negotiating and mediation groups, civilian and military administration, monitoring missions, and the security sector.

Saudi Arabia, for example, included a range of measures to reflect the roles and contributions of Saudi women in public life within the national identity pillar of its Vision 2030,<sup>50</sup> as enacted in Decree 33322/2017, which effectively removed the obligation of male guardianship over women.<sup>51</sup> This follows Saudi Arabia's legislation in 2011, which introduced women's suffrage and allowed them to vote and run

in municipal elections. By 2013, women constituted 20 per cent of the Saudi-appointed legislative body. Another example is from Algeria, where women occupy leading positions including those of direct relevance to stability and prosperity such as head of the judicial branch, head of the national commission for human rights, inspector-general, as well as leaders of four political parties, among many other roles.<sup>52</sup>

In the State of Palestine, the Central Committee of the Palestinian Liberation Organization recommended a goal of 30 per cent of leadership positions for women to be achieved through capacity-building, skills development and encouraging participation.<sup>53</sup> This resonates with the intentions of the WPS NAP. Quota systems have also emerged as mechanisms to achieve greater participation of women in politics. For example, Iraq reserved 25 per cent of the seats in its Council of Representatives for women, and women currently comprise 26 per cent of those seats.<sup>54</sup>

In terms of crisis mitigation and conflict de-escalation, a noteworthy observation is the repeated emphasis on the roles of women in addressing the root causes of conflict such as conflict over access to common resources, addressing socioeconomic grievances and counter-radicalization efforts. Mauritania is a rare example where women played important roles in negotiations between landowners and landless agricultural labourers in the Maghama region. Their roles were central to ensure that disadvantaged communities, including women, are assured equitable access to land.<sup>55</sup> The success of these roles has prompted encouraging similar engagement elsewhere

in the region, such as through the Coastal Women Association to de-escalate tensions among fisher communities over marine resources.

Women's leadership in conflict mitigation and prevention is a common theme throughout the Arab region, with member States enacting a wide range of measures to enable and facilitate women's participation in reinforcing the foundations of peace, and addressing peace and security concerns (box 5). For example, Egypt appointed its first woman presidential advisor on national security in 2014,<sup>56</sup> while Oman enacted a range of measures to empower women from vulnerable communities to improve their socioeconomic standing and resilience in the face of shocks, including economic and financial shocks. Women comprised 27 per cent of the 565 delegates at the 2013–2014 National Dialogue Conference of Yemen. Around 30 per cent of the civil society participants in the United Nations-facilitated Syrian Constitutional Committee were women,<sup>57</sup> and 16 (of 75) women participated in the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum.<sup>58</sup> However, women have been excluded from most of the peace negotiations in the region since then.

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**Box 5. Iraq: measures enacted to reinforce women's leadership in reinforcing peace and managing crisis<sup>a</sup>**

The National Reconciliation Committee affiliated with the Prime Minister's Office has established a Women's Bureau with a range of functions to support national reconciliation. This is as part of implementing NAP with an objective to "increase the effective and proportional participation of women in decision-making positions at local and national level, in all reconciliation committees and peace-building negotiations".<sup>b</sup> The bureau's key functions include the following:

- ▶ Advocacy on the centrality of women's participation in building national unity and social cohesion through a range of seminars and conferences across all governorates.
- ▶ Undertaking a series of workshops on developing their security senses.
- ▶ Participating in all efforts and activities for public education on the importance of peace and facilitating the success of national reconciliation.
- ▶ Connecting with non-governmental organizations to realize national reconciliation enjoining the broadest spectrum of Iraqi women possible.
- ▶ Establishing representational offices across governorates and following their work, including Women Support Councils, to provide educational and social seminars to reinforce peace and national unity.

<sup>a</sup> Republic of Iraq, 2019, p. 43.

<sup>b</sup> Federal Government of Iraq and Kurdistan Regional Government, 2014

Concerning women's participation in the security sector, several important measures were reported by member States in relation to the breadth and depth of women's engagement at different levels. Algeria reports that women now represent 23.17 per cent of all personnel affiliated with the National Security apparatus, while the military has promoted four women to the rank of general including one to major-general,<sup>59</sup> the highest rank in the army. Another example is from the United Arab Emirates, which initiated a regional training programme to promote the enrolment of women cadets in armed forces and prepare them to

take on more challenging roles in security and peacekeeping operations.<sup>60</sup>

While emphasis is on mainstreaming gender considerations in broader security sector operations, there are rare references on engaging women across all roles within the defense sector or the intelligence community. One of these references is Jordan's effort in partnership with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization<sup>61</sup> to increase the percentage of women in active combat operations to 3 per cent.

## 2. Protection

Within the context of the WPS agenda, protection refers to active measures to protect the physical integrity, safety and well-being of women and girls in times of peace and conflict. It accompanies preventative actions to ensure that deterrent laws are enforced and that there is an effective mechanism for protection within national frameworks. According to UNSCR 1325 provisions, ensuring protection requires the adoption of "[...] special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence, particularly rape and other forms of sexual abuse, and all other forms of violence in situations of armed conflict".<sup>62</sup> This involves, among other measures, the adoption of protective and preventive mechanisms to ensure the effective implementation of laws in times of conflict and instability. Providing these

protections is critical to enable women and girls to engage in their regular activities and contribute to society in times of peace and conflict; safeguard their rights and gains in gender equality; and protect their dignity.

UNSCR 1325, as well as other resolutions within the WPS agenda, calls for a series of actions to strengthen protection. These actions fall under three categories. The first relates to the institutional set-up for protection and associated services, particularly working through the security sector and the police. The second focuses on facilitating access to justice, while the third focuses on the role of women in peacemaking and peacekeeping to promote women's agency and ensure the protection of women. The protection elements within the WPS agenda are multifaceted, encompassing a wide range of interventions that include improvements in the physical protection of women, particularly in times of active conflict; the institutional set-up for social protection and welfare; and facilitating women's access to justice. Particular attention is given to the protection of women from sexual exploitation and abuse.

The issue of protection has been particularly pronounced in Arab States experiencing armed conflict or protracted crises. The Syrian Arab Republic has identified a range of concerns affecting women and girls, their lives, physical integrity, and overall well-being.





Protection A set of measures to protect the physical integrity, safety and well-being of women and girls in times of peace and conflict		
Action	Purpose	Examples
<b>Institutional set-up for protection</b>	Refers to the capacity of the security sector and other instruments to respond to protection issues with specific emphasis on vulnerable populations such as refugees, irregular migrants, internally displaced persons, children, persons with disabilities, minorities, and others.	Training police officers to be aware of and sensitive to gender-based violence; providing facilities for the physical protection of women such as shelters for survivors of abuse; and providing medical care and psychosocial services as needed.  In situations of political instability, conflict and post-conflict, the need for a robust institutional setup is critical due to the associated sharp increase in violence.
<b>Access to justice</b>	Facilitating access to the judiciary and adjudicatory mechanisms to realize the right to legal protection, equality before the law, and obtaining a just and timely remedy for violations of rights without discrimination of any kind. <sup>a</sup>	The WPS agenda emphasizes facilitating access to justice, transitional justice and reparations. This includes removing financial, procedural and any other barriers that may hamper victims' access to justice. UNSCR 1820 (2008) affirms that SGBV in conflict can constitute a war crime and a crime against humanity. Emphasis is placed on ensuring accountability for SGBV in conflict and ending impunity for human rights violations.
<b>Women in peacemaking and peacekeeping</b>	Strengthening women's contributions and leadership in peacemaking and peacekeeping to both reinforce peace and security, in tandem with gender equality and the protection of women.	Peacemaking refers to various efforts to address emerging and ongoing conflicts, and peacekeeping refers to efforts intended to support the implementation and durability of negotiated settlements.  Efforts should include ensuring that peacemaking and peacekeeping efforts are gender-sensitive, include women peacekeepers and decision makers, promote women's agency and actively work towards the protection of women.

<sup>a</sup> ESCWA, 2015b.

There are concerns associated with cross-border trafficking in persons, including the sexual exploitation of IDP and refugee women and girls, organ harvesting and trade, forced recruitment of combatants, and combat-support roles such as forced and so-called 'jihad-marriage' as well as organized practices in the exploitation and abuse of women.<sup>63</sup> Additionally, a range of policies to address

these protection concerns, particularly for IDP women, have been outlined as highlighted in box 6.

In Iraq, the Government reported a range of interventions for protecting the rights of women and girls in humanitarian settings, with particular emphasis on securing camps and humanitarian corridors for the safe passage of IDPs.

### Box 6. Selected policy measures declared to strengthen protection of displaced women in the Syrian Arab Republic\*

- ▶ Deliver humanitarian relief to all those in need without discrimination and guarantee protection of humanitarian workers in line with international obligations.
- ▶ Continue counter-terrorism efforts to guarantee safety and stability.
- ▶ Rehabilitate infrastructure in liberated areas and provide basic services such as water, electricity, communication, and sanitation to facilitate return of displaced peoples.
- ▶ Continue reconciliation efforts in targeted areas.
- ▶ Mainstream development interventions within humanitarian relief plans.

\* Syrian Commission for Family and Population Affairs, Syrian Arab Republic, 2019, p. 18.

Iraq also put in place a series of measures to facilitate identification documentation and family reunification, locate forcibly disappeared women and girls, and promote the engagement of CSOs and women's groups in providing protection and support services for these populations. Elsewhere, the Yemen NAP has explicitly cited protection from SGBV as a key focus area, along with protection of vulnerable and displaced women from harassment as well as psychological, physical and verbal abuse.

Despite an emphasis on protection, little attention has been given to the institutional set-up to provide protective services for women; governmental services protecting women survivors tend to be dispersed among various public-sector institutions and rarely achieve nationwide coverage.<sup>64</sup> For instance, Egypt has a total of nine shelters for women survivors of sexual violence,<sup>65</sup> serving a population of 29 million working age women at a ratio of one shelter for every 3.2 million women. Morocco has 40 active shelters with plans for an additional 25 by the year 2021,<sup>66</sup> reaching a ratio of 1 shelter for every 177,000 working-age women.<sup>67</sup> With the assistance of international funding, the Public Security Directorate in Jordan has undertaken a number of training sessions to establish a Community Policing Department covering topics such as gender sensibility and conflict de-escalation.<sup>68</sup> In terms of access to justice for survivors of SGBV, Tunisia's Truth and Dignity Commission had a Women's Committee

subcommission that was responsible for addressing gender-specific issues of gross human rights violations to provide compensation and rehabilitation to victims, as well as gender-mainstreaming the work conducted by the other committees.<sup>69</sup>

Women continue to be underrepresented in peacekeeping forces in the Arab region. As of June 2020, Tunisia had the most women in peacekeeping troops with 4 per cent representation, followed by Morocco at 2 per cent.<sup>70</sup> The United Arab Emirates partnered with UN Women to deliver a programme that aims to prepare female military officers for United Nations peacekeeping operations and increase the pool of women on staff.<sup>71</sup> Jordan's NAP also specifically focuses on women as active agents in peacekeeping.<sup>72</sup>

There have been several noteworthy legislative developments for the protection of women particularly from domestic violence, spanning across the protection cycle, from detection to remediation and reparations. Thus far, only nine Arab States have such legislation in place with the intention of forming a comprehensive framework for protection of women (box 7). Several other States have incorporated specific measures into their respective legal frameworks and penal codes in a piecemeal approach, which carries important limitations in terms of availability of services and support, access to justice and legal aid and punishment of perpetrators, among others.<sup>73</sup>

### Box 7. Arab States adopting legislation for the protection of women

- ▷ 2013 Saudi Arabia: Law for the Protection from Abuse M/52.
- ▷ 2014 Lebanon: Domestic Violence Law 293/2014.
- ▷ 2015 Algeria: Law no. 15–19.
- ▷ 2015 Bahrain: Protection against Domestic Violence 19/2015.
- ▷ 2016 Morocco: Combating Violence against Women 103.13.
- ▷ 2017 Tunisia: On Violence against Women, Law 58/2017.
- ▷ 2018 Jordan: Law on Protection from Domestic Violence 15/2017.
- ▷ 2019 United Arab Emirates: Federal Decree no. 10 of 2019 Regarding Domestic Violence.
- ▷ 2020 Kuwait: Law on Protection from Domestic Violence no. 16.

## 3. Prevention

Researchers have noted that higher levels of gender equality may equate with less belligerency, both domestically and internationally. Therefore, any regressions in equality may serve as indicators of risk associated with peace and security, stability and social cohesion.<sup>74</sup> Attacks on women’s rights defenders are seen as an early warning sign of violence.<sup>75</sup> Structural factors such as exclusion, discrimination and societal inequalities are known contributing factors to VAW and violence in general. Addressing the root causes of VAW, and creating an enabling environment of law and practice, is vital not only in the protection of women’s human rights but in overall conflict prevention.

The WPS agenda calls for a range of measures to prevent SGBV during times of peace and conflict. These measures include the enactment and enforcement of legislation and policies designed to prevent VAW through deterrence; addressing the root causes of both violence in general and VAW in particular; and mainstreaming gender in early warning systems and associated preventative measures.

Emphasis on prevention in the Arab region has been rather sporadic except for States that have adopted NAPs. Through this review, the emphasis can be broadly categorized into two areas. The first relates

to prevention through preparedness, particularly to perceived risks to health that can be prevented such as domestic violence, radicalization and organized crime. The second revolves around prevention through detection focusing on early warning, human rights protection and the mitigation of natural disasters.

In their Beijing +25 reporting, most references made by Arab States to prevention were in the context of preventing domestic violence.

Attacks on **women’s rights** defenders are seen as an early warning sign of **violence**



Prevention		
A set of measures to protect the physical integrity, safety and well-being of women and girls in times of peace and conflict		
Action	Purpose	Examples
<b>Deterrent legislation and policies</b>	To enact legislation, policies, institutional mechanisms, and programmes designed to prevent VAW through deterrence.	Training criminal investigators; facilitating access of victims/survivors to justice; improving institutional linkages between medical staff, prosecutors and judicial offices; reducing financial costs and waiting times for VAW cases.
<b>Addressing root causes of inequality, violence and VAW</b>	To address the root causes of violence and VAW such as exclusion, discrimination and structural inequalities.	Creating gender-responsive policies to directly address grievances such as easing livelihood hardships, facilitating equitable access to services and providing adequate social protection. Other measures include institutionalizing empowerment-centric processes that address misconceptions and negative stereotypes, and facilitating conflict resolution, mediation and dialogue platforms.
<b>Early warning systems</b>	<p>Designed to foresee, detect, pre-empt, and allow for preparedness of threats and risks within a specific timeframe. Usually have five key components:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▷ Data collection for understanding risks.</li> <li>▷ Assessment and prioritization of risks.</li> <li>▷ Transmission of alerts to relevant stakeholders.</li> <li>▷ Recommendations for early response.</li> <li>▷ Continuous monitoring of response adequacy and emerging risks.</li> </ul>	<p>Examples of early-warning indicators relevant to the WPS agenda include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▷ Demographic and Context-related Indicators: for instance, increases in the number, shape and size of female-headed households.</li> <li>▷ Human Rights Indicators: for instance, increases in sexual harassment, sexual violence and abuse, and killings, abductions and disappearances of women.</li> <li>▷ Rule of Law and Geopolitical Indicators: for instance, civil unrest, rise of militant and xenophobic rhetoric in the media, new restrictions on freedoms.</li> <li>▷ Security Indicators: for instance, rise of organized crime, trafficking in persons, abuse of irregular migrants and refugees.</li> <li>▷ Socioeconomic Indicators: for instance, increases in school/college dropouts among girls and women, increases in prostitution, trafficking and child marriage.</li> </ul>

Although implementation varies, progressive laws have been put in place in certain States. Morocco was a leader in developing a national personal status code – the 2004 Moudawana – to

secure important rights for women such as rights to divorce and child custody, restrictions on polygamy, ending male guardianship over adult women, and raising the legal age of marriage

to 18 years. Bahrain included prevention as the first strategic objective of its National Strategy to Protect Women from Domestic Violence with dual emphasis on education and social development, as well as specific measures to undermine factors that contribute to domestic violence.<sup>76</sup> Arab States are increasingly strengthening laws and their penal codes to directly address domestic violence such as Lebanon's Law no. 293, passed in 2014, which provides for restraining orders, a victims' fund, a specialized police unit, and amendments to the penal code.<sup>77</sup> Beyond preventing domestic violence, a number of States identified particular priorities for prevention such as preventing the spread of sexually transmitted infections in Egypt through investment in health systems, or the prevention of radicalization in Bahrain through promoting a culture of tolerance.

Another prevention focus is on decreasing vulnerability to shocks and promoting self-reliance. While this is a recurring theme across most Arab States, only two States – Morocco and the Syrian Arab Republic – refer to such measures as a resilience-based policy approach that focuses on prevention. Morocco refers to strengthening the resilience of rural women through targeted measures to mitigate the impact of climate change on their livelihoods and well-being. The Syrian Arab Republic focuses on strengthening the resilience and coping capacity of IDP women. These measures

were informed by a study of current coping practices to strengthen the sustainability of results in the medium term, impact on overall well-being and linkages with social protection mechanisms.<sup>78</sup>

Prevention has also been highlighted in the context of crisis preparedness and mitigation measures, and the differentiated impact of natural crises on women. For instance, Oman refers to the guidelines set by the Gulf Cooperative Council's Joint Emergency Management Centre, established in 2013. The Centre included mainstreaming women's empowerment among the 11 directives that guide their work. It also included particular attention to engaging women at the community-level in training and community participation.<sup>79</sup>

The prevention of conflict has been a serious focus among States with more developed NAPs. For example, Tunisia has included a comprehensive "alertness system" to serve as a preventative early warning system, which includes a variety of action areas such as women's rights and preventing VAW, terrorist group activity and police services, among others. The governmental agencies responsible for the alertness system include security sector institutions as well as civilian and non-governmental entities. Jordan's NAP also recognizes women's roles in preventing and addressing the increased threat of violent extremism.<sup>80</sup>

#### 4. Relief and recovery

The relief and recovery pillar of the WPS agenda includes a wide range of actions intended to address the consequences of crises and conflict to build peaceful and prosperous societies based on gender equality and the empowerment of women. This pillar includes three areas of focus, namely, assessing the disproportionate risks faced by women during shocks and crises; humanitarian action; and post-conflict recovery and reconstruction. UNSCR 1325 recognized the gender inequality of risk, highlighting how women are exposed to risk and are disproportionately and differently affected by shocks and crises. These can include natural disasters, economic recessions, political violence, armed conflict, climate change, or health emergencies such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Women's different experiences of conflict and crises requires gender-sensitive emergency relief and humanitarian action. However, in 2016, only 1.3 per cent of the projects in the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Action Financial Tracking System that applied the Inter-agency Standing Committee Gender Marker included targeted action for women and girls, reflecting sizeable gaps in humanitarian action tailored to gender needs.

In addition to ensuring gender sensitivity in immediate humanitarian responses, recovery and reconstruction are of paramount importance to economic growth patterns, livelihoods, decent housing, and access to key infrastructure and

social services. The WPS agenda calls for using recovery as an opportunity to bridge the gender-resilience gap; not necessarily returning to the norm pre-conflict or pre-disaster but forging a more gender-equal society. UNSCR 1889 (2009) “urges gender mainstreaming in all recovery processes and sectors”, while specifically emphasizing “gender mainstreaming in all early post-conflict planning, financing and recovery processes”.<sup>81</sup>

Discussions pertaining to humanitarian relief, recovery and reconstruction in the Arab region are rather limited and dominated by humanitarian response operations at two levels. The first is the level of countries – predominantly those in conflict

or affected by conflict – implementing humanitarian response plans. The other refers to donor countries in the region that provide funding and material support for these operations. Several countries in the region play a dual role, such as hosting refugees while providing humanitarian support in neighbouring countries.

It is worth noting that States with NAPs dedicated to WPS include significant elaboration on humanitarian relief and recovery operations, such as Iraq, where involving women in designing, identifying and managing humanitarian activities during the armed conflict and the post-conflict recovery is outlined.<sup>82</sup>

Relief and recovery		
Addressing the consequences of conflict and crises to build peaceful and prosperous societies based on gender equality and empowerment of women		
Action	Purpose	Examples
<b>Analysing gender equality of risk</b>	Highlighting how women are more exposed to risk and are affected disproportionately and differently by shocks and crises.	The extent of gender inequality of risk requires a gender analysis of issues relating to fragility, vulnerability, exposure, and susceptibility to various stressors. Other parameters include age, location, and access and adequacy of support networks, among others.
<b>Relief and humanitarian action</b>	Ensuring that humanitarian efforts include targeted actions for women and girls, recognizing that women are disproportionately and differently affected by crises.	Emergency and humanitarian actions requiring consideration of the needs of women and girls include (but are not limited to) the provision of temporary shelter; access to food, water and sanitation; other protection, medical and urgent needs; psychosocial support; remedial education; and facilitation of repatriation, resettlement and integration support.
<b>Recovery and reconstruction</b>	Applying a gender-sensitive approach to addressing the negative effects of crises and conflict on economic growth, prosperity and the well-being of women and men.	The principle of “building back better” calls for going beyond rectifying a country’s development deficits as a result of crises to ensuring that recovery is equitable, just and sustainable, thereby creating more resilient communities. This entails using a gender-sensitive approach to ensure support for recovery and reconstruction that is gender-responsive and oriented to the needs of women and girls.

Iraq's 2015 Emergency NAP calls for IDP camps to offer psychological support, accessible planning methods and legal services to women and survivors of violence. Similar references are present in NAPs of Jordan and Lebanon with reference to the impact of the crisis in the Syrian Arab Republic and refugee displacement.

Beyond humanitarian action, only one State has made direct mention of gender-responsive recovery planning. The Sudan's recently approved NAP refers to undertaking a mapping of institutions engaged in economic recovery and reconstruction, reasoning that sectors with intensive male employment, such as construction, tend to recover faster and stronger than women-intensive sectors such as hospitality services.<sup>83</sup> This requires specific actions towards more equitable recovery for the country.

The COVID-19 pandemic has posed new challenges on the Arab region's relief and recovery response, exposing vulnerabilities and resulting in broad socioeconomic implications. With the largest gap in human development in the world, it is expected that women in the Arab region will disproportionately bear the consequences of COVID-19. Other extremely vulnerable groups include migrant workers and IDPs. A number of Arab States have worked closely with NWMs to take measures to integrate gender into their response plans, for example, Algeria, Egypt and Tunisia.<sup>84</sup> Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, and Tunisia have taken steps to integrate gender into their COVID-19 responses, working closely with women's CSOs and international organizations.<sup>85</sup> This may be an opportunity to further the WPS agenda through NAPs in States' responses to COVID-19

through ensuring health systems, social protection, economic response and recovery, macroeconomic response and multilateral collaboration, and social cohesion and community resilience.<sup>86</sup>

Only a handful of Arab States have economic response policies specifically targeted to the needs of women. Egypt's COVID-19 stimulus package, however, provides more incentives for sectors that have high female labour force participation including tourism and agriculture; increased payments to women community leaders in rural areas; and delayed loan instalments for the microfinance sector (women comprise over 70 per cent of microfinance clients). Iraq and the State of Palestine have also offered exceptional paid leave for women employees.<sup>87</sup> Most women work in small and micro-enterprises that are less resilient during crises.<sup>88</sup> While the Gulf States set up stimulus packages for their small and micro-enterprises, many of the States where such enterprises are particularly important have fewer resources to provide these businesses with what they need to survive beyond the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>89</sup> The Arab region should align its COVID-19 response with the WPS agenda and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to not just recover, but to recover as a more gender-equitable region. COVID-19 recovery can be an opportunity to invest in women, provide emergency support to the most vulnerable, support small and micro-enterprises to reduce job layoffs, provide education and employment opportunities, and ensure that women can be equal contributors in society through bridging the gender divide and addressing gender inequalities.<sup>90</sup>

## C. Enabling factors for implementation of the Women, Peace and Security agenda in the Arab region

### 1. Legislative base that endorses gender equality

The WPS agenda's dual focus on gender equality and peace and security requires the existence of a strong legislative basis for executive-level action to advance the WPS agenda. Arab constitutions

include clauses that reinforce a State's responsibility to provide an environment of peace and security for its citizens, as well as non-discrimination among citizens in the eyes of the law. However, no Arab





Arab constitutions include clauses that **reinforce a State's responsibility** to provide an **environment of peace and security** for its citizens



State has a particular law or legal framework that is dedicated to the WPS agenda, instead relying on a variety of laws that provide some bases for the various WPS pillars and associated measures.

In 2015, an ESCWA examination of the legal bases for the implementation of UNSCR 1325 in seven Arab States concluded that patriarchal culture and ingrained customs and traditions are barriers to accepting women's roles as equal participants and decision makers on all matters that affect society,<sup>91</sup> including matters relating to peace and security. An example of this is the limited legislative basis for exercising clear civilian oversight of the security sector,<sup>92</sup> with ingrained limitations on civil-military cooperation that are critical to the advancement of the WPS agenda.

This reality reflects a legal basis that needs to be implemented and significantly further developed. Such a basis would also provide the guidance and mandate for governmental agencies and other partners to facilitate implementation of the WPS agenda towards meaningful progress in advancing both gender equality, and peace and security in tandem. In addition, other legislation such as penal codes is also necessary to advance the agenda. .

## 2. Resilient institutional set-up

Across the region, the lead national entities for the WPS agenda are often NWMs, who are generally the governmental agencies mandated to advance women's rights. A key element in examining the institutional set-up is inferred from the position of NWMs and their existing mandates, role in national decision-making and capacities. Previous analysis found that NWMs in the Arab region continuously assumed different forms and mandates to remain relevant in challenging contexts.<sup>93</sup> The resilience of NWMs is dependent on their status, mandate, powers and roles, resources and capacities, and linkages.<sup>94</sup> NWMs vary in their structures and roles, serving as independent governmental agencies, line ministries or sectors within Government ministries with a significant variance in capacity to advance the WPS agenda. The responsibility for implementing the agenda also lies within national human rights institutions, security sector agencies and CSOs. Other State institutions often get involved in accordance with the issue, mandate and institutional infrastructure such as military and defense apparatus, legislative bodies and political parties, and the private sector.

However, when a State decides to take concrete action on the WPS agenda, it often sets ad-hoc structures comprising a wide variety of governmental agencies and other partners to engage in consultations and propose policy options to advance the agenda. These ad-hoc structures can be at the technical, thematic or decision-making levels, and are temporary and task-oriented in nature. The working methods of these committees are defined by their membership and secretariat – usually NWM. Once these committees are established, they tend to take over

WPS responsibilities from the various governmental entities despite their temporary nature. This leads to concerns associated with the institutional knowledge, continuity of work and ownership of the WPS agenda at the institutional level.

For instance, Lebanon and Tunisia established inter-agency committees tasked to lead the development of WPS NAPs, and included a wide representation of governmental agencies, the security sector and civil society. However, the mandates given to the members by their respective agencies differed. Where the participants in Lebanon's committee were given the responsibility and authority to represent their respective agencies in the process, participants in Tunisia's committee were asked to revert to their respective agencies, undertake in-institution consultations and convey whole-of-agency positions vis-à-vis NAP. Both experiences worked to ensure agency-wide ownership, including incorporating the voiced commitments in work plans and budgetary proposals of respective entities.

The success of many existing NAPs has arisen through the support of NWMs to champion the WPS agenda at high levels of their respective Governments whether NWMs themselves were embedded in governmental or independent bodies. Many NAPs that have emerged have had the support of active and politically connected individuals in

### 3. Vibrant civil society

CSOs, and particularly women's CSOs, play a crucial role in strengthening the WPS agenda worldwide. Multiple Security Council resolutions and presidential statements emphasize the crucial role of CSOs.<sup>97</sup> CSOs organize, advocate, document, respond, analyse, provide services, and work towards more inclusive decision-making – often with profound, first-hand knowledge of the communities they represent. International organizations may monitor and conduct advocacy at the United Nations and provide local capacity-building. However, while CSOs provide crucial implementation and monitoring of the agenda, they are often excluded from formal processes around WPS, such as formal conflict-resolution

The Arab region has a **rich history of women's feminist movements** which became a **powerful foundation** during the Arab uprising



lead governmental agencies who have been empowered to direct the process.<sup>95</sup> Many NWMs were also provided funding by donor agencies to lead and implement the WPS agenda. NWMs play a crucial role in acting as the bridge between civil society and Government, playing mediator between a relationship that has frequently been fraught and distant. The identity of NWMs, which inherently straddles civil society and the State, gives them important insight on the realities, needs and functioning of both actors. Most of the successful NAPs have enacted mechanisms, through the aforementioned committees and working groups, to foster collaboration between civil society and Government.<sup>96</sup>

processes, political dialogue and post-conflict peacebuilding systems.<sup>98</sup>

Women's civil society in the region continues to be the driving force behind the adoption of the WPS agenda in the Arab region. The Arab region has a rich history of women's feminist movements which became a powerful foundation during the Arab uprisings and continue to direct more current uprisings such as those in Algeria, Lebanon and the Sudan. The highly visible and crucial roles that women have played in these movements have had ripple effects over the years as seen in progress for women's rights socially and constitutionally.<sup>99</sup> However, women in the region have not achieved gender justice and equality as

envisioned and demanded over the past decade. But they continue to strengthen movements to fight for initiatives such as WPS.

CSOs and the broader women's movements played a profound role in lobbying for the establishment of the WPS agenda and the endorsement of UNSCR 1325 in the year 2000, and continue to play strong roles in advancing the agenda at international, regional and local levels. In the State of Palestine, the National Coalition for Implementing UNSCR 1325 initiated efforts to develop WPS NAP in 2010, and it took two years of lobbying and advocacy to mobilize Government partners in dialogue towards the creation of WPS NAP. In 2020, the National Coalition launched its advocacy strategy for implementing UNSCR 1325.<sup>100</sup> Similarly, Yemen's Women Solidarity movement undertook consultations with over 70 women leaders and CSOs, and developed a civil society vision document for implementation of the WPS agenda in 2016.

Beyond advocacy and lobbying, CSOs play important roles in the implementation of the WPS agenda such

as providing social services for women affected by SGBV and sexual exploitation and abuse, as well as delivering life-saving humanitarian relief for conflict-affected populations. They also play vital roles in community engagement, identifying emerging issues and monitoring the implementation of the WPS agenda. CSOs also have the advantage of working with a variety of governmental and non-governmental stakeholders, including on sensitive issues such as peace mediation, conflict de-escalation and PCVE.

The space for civil society engagement varies significantly by country, issue and proposed interventions. Civil society activism is often governed by complex legislative frameworks, executive measures and informal restrictions that are politically and socially motivated. For instance, CSOs in Lebanon and Morocco do not require official permits to receive domestic or international funding for their operations,<sup>101</sup> while the penalty for accepting funding outside pre-approved sources for predefined activities is punishable by a fine in Egypt.<sup>102</sup>

#### 4. Diverse sources of financing

The dominant approach to financing the WPS agenda across the region is to integrate WPS activities within the work plans and activities of various entities, and therefore fund the WPS agenda through already allocated resources. However, this financing is dependent on how relevant agencies interpret the political will to implement the WPS agenda into their budgetary proposals; the allocation and liquidity of finance;

the absorptive and technical capacity to implement; and the ability to deliver the intended results. This approach, therefore, is dependent on having the mandates and institutional infrastructure in place to implement the WPS agenda.

Several States have adopted innovations in financing the WPS agenda such as Jordan's development of a stand-alone basket fund

##### Box 8. Financing the Jordanian National Action Plan\*

The Jordanian National Commission for Women, with support from UN Women, adopted lessons on financing from the Global Study and held discussions with all key stakeholders to adopt a pooled fund modality. This modality allowed multiple donors to come together and leverage their individual contributions towards the implementation of the four priorities of the Jordanian National Action Plan. In doing so, all partners shared the political risks and operational costs which lowered reporting burdens on implementing partners. This became possible because the Government first announced its contribution to the implementation of the plan from the general budget.

\* UN Women, n.d.; Interview with the Jordanian National Commission for Women.

which is used to channel financing for various activities within NAP, or the adoption of a multi-partner financing mix which includes core governmental funding as well as donor-allocated resources for civil society initiatives (box 8). A third modality used by States is to rely on existing funding mechanisms such as humanitarian response plans and development compacts, and employ NAP as a mechanism to divert or mobilize additional resources. Regardless, it is crucial that NAPs include gender-responsive budgets or plans for funding as the first step in ensuring their implementation. Yemen's NAP, for example, has no mention of budgets or resource allocation. Iraq's NAP (2014–2018) included an estimated budget in the draft NAP, however, the budget was omitted from the draft endorsed by the Government and, therefore, no funds were allocated through the national budget for its implementation.<sup>103</sup>

Since the WPS agenda is intended to be mainstreamed within broader national efforts on gender equality, and peace and security, it is critical to account for the resources channelled for WPS activities. This requires a comprehensive gender audit and earmarking of resources to facilitate attribution and accountability for financing progress on WPS. For example, the National Strategy for Women in Lebanon (2011–2020) and NAP were developed by the National Commission for Lebanese Women (NCLW) in 2012 and 2019, respectively, in close collaboration with ministries and feminist organizations, and with the support of UNFPA. In 2020, in a joint project with the German Government through Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), six gender auditors were trained by three members of NCLW to carry out gender audits in different institutions, and to ensure that women are at the core of any activity whether in international organizations or corporations.<sup>104</sup> Current practices for undertaking gender audits remain on an agency-specific basis where adopted, a limitation that requires developing stand-alone WPS NAPs with budgets in order to successfully finance the implementation of the WPS agenda at the national level. It is recommended that NAPs are not only appropriately financed/budgeted to ensure realistic implementation, but also costed to better understand the impact of proposed interventions. These are priorities that cannot be ignored.

## 5. External support in the development of National Action Plans

A common theme of NAPs is external technical or financial support in the process of the development of their WPS agendas. Most countries in the Global South, particularly those experiencing conflict or in post-conflict periods, obtain funding for the development and implementation of their NAPs from external donors such as the United Nations and Governments in the Global North;<sup>105</sup> this is also true of Arab States.

Many Arab States with NAPs have had access to funding from a United Nations entity or another external donor, and support in the design and

Several States  
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**WPS agenda**



consultative process.<sup>106</sup> Many Arab States have thus seen their role in the WPS agenda evolve around funding efforts by other States. It is of relevance that, while external support – financial or technical – is helpful, NAPs must engender local ownership to be context-appropriate and sustainable.

Jordan, for example, received funding from the Governments of Finland and Japan as well as technical support from UN Women to meet with stakeholders and draft the Jordanian National

Action Plan (JONAP).<sup>107</sup> Members of the JONAP Pooled Fund Donor Consortium include the Governments of Canada, Finland, Norway, Spain, and the United Kingdom to aid in NAP implementation.

Iraq had the financial and technical support of UN Women while drafting its NAP;<sup>108</sup> the State of Palestine received financial and technical support from UN Women and the European Union;<sup>109</sup> and during the development of its NAP, Tunisia was supported by UN Women and the Government of Finland.<sup>110</sup>

## 6. Periodic monitoring and progress measurement

A key challenge of the WPS agenda is that it is an evolving framework that lacks clear parameters for the measurement of progress across the different pillars and actions. At the time of writing this report, there have been limited efforts to ensure comprehensive monitoring and evaluation of NAPs and other WPS interventions. Yet, there are several resources, instruments and frameworks that can be used to monitor and report on the progress of the WPS agenda including reports of the United Nations Secretary-General; Security Council deliberations and special sessions; reporting by United Nations agencies and partner civil society; regional frameworks; and indices such as the Women, Peace and Security Index by the Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security and the Peace Research Institute Oslo. The WPS agenda also turns to existing,

overlapping mechanisms such as the periodic reporting on CEDAW or other international and human rights frameworks (such as special rapporteurs, working groups or special representatives of the Secretary-General), or national voluntary reports on the implementation of Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development, particularly SDG 5 on gender equality, SDG 10 on inequalities, SDG 16 on peace and justice, and SDG 17 on partnerships for development.

At the international level, monitoring mechanisms include the Security Council's IEG. UN Women chairs the Standing Committee on Women and Peace and Security of the United Nations Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality, which tracks the United Nations' own performance under the system-wide Strategic Results Framework on WPS. The Committee also coordinates the collection and analysis of data for the United Nations Secretary-General's annual report to the United Nations Security Council on WPS. Other monitoring mechanisms include initiatives by non-governmental entities such as the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, which tracks WPS commitments at different levels.<sup>111</sup> The African Union also published the CRF in 2019, which provides a tool to help guide monitoring and evaluation on the implementation of the WPS agenda in Africa.

there are **several resources**, instruments and frameworks that can be used to **monitor** and **report** on the **progress** of the **WPS agenda**



States that have adopted dedicated NAPs allow for the creation of clear mechanisms to monitor progress in the implementation of goals and targets identified in those NAPs, which often carry their own quantitative and qualitative indicators to measure progress in the implementation of various activities

and towards the identified outcomes. NAPs also often identify the entities responsible to monitor the indicators and report on progress. States may turn to external assistance from bodies such as UN Women in developing progress indicators, tracking systems, dedicated budgets, and time-bound targets.

The measurement of progress also plays a critical role in informing the review and development of

interventions to confirm their viability in advancing the intended goals, as well as responding to the needs of targeted populations and policy targets. These measures also enable the development of subsequent generations of NAPs, and devising more targeted and relevant activities along the four WPS pillars and beyond.





# 3

## Analysis of Women, Peace and Security National Action Plans in the Arab region





A key limitation of the WPS agenda is the lack of a specialized, internationally recognized framework for monitoring progress on the implementation of the various elements of the agenda. This allows States to identify their priorities and make national commitments defined within their respective NAPs, which can enable a measurement of progress. This chapter delves into these national priorities as defined in NAPs, categorizing them within the four pillars of WPS (prevention, protection, participation, and relief and recovery). The analysis in this chapter is guided by AU's CRF which presents a useful framework to guide discussions on the responsiveness of NAPs to the various elements of the broader WPS agenda, particularly from a Global South perspective. Furthermore, the African Union framework also has the advantage of having broad regional and global recognition, as well as being directly relevant to 10 Arab States.

As table 2 illustrates, Iraq was the first country in the region to launch its NAP in April 2014 and the first to undertake an assessment of its implementation before embarking on its second-generation NAP. The Iraq NAP identified six focus areas, namely, participation; protection and prevention; advocacy and awareness; social and economic empowerment; legislation and law enforcement; and resource mobilization, monitoring and evaluation. The Iraq NAP pioneered regional action in two ways. The first was to go beyond a thematic focus to incorporating elements related to implementation within the NAP itself, such as advocacy and resource mobilization. This emerged because of strong calls by civil society for an emphasis on implementation and identifying factors critical for success as focus areas for NAP. The second was in relation to the governance mechanisms of NAP, not only in terms of national and subnational implementation in the Kurdistan region, but also in identifying the governance structures and responsibilities for implementation. However, the year immediately following the Iraqi NAP endorsement was particularly volatile, and the rise and expansion of ISIL created a profound peace and security shock. This promoted the enactment of an Emergency NAP in May 2015, focusing on specific measures for

protection and prevention elements accompanying ISIL and anti-ISIL military operations.

**The State of Palestine** was the second Arab State to adopt a NAP in 2017. The Palestinian NAP followed three years of extensive deliberations on the priorities and collective action despite the Israeli occupation and segmentation of Palestinian society. Included in the NAP were elements relating to service delivery to strengthen the protection and resilience of Palestinian women, participation of women and measures for accountability for the crimes and human rights' violations of the Israeli occupation forces. Using the WPS framework for accountability is seen to play a dual role, namely a deterrence against further violation of Palestinian rights by the occupation, and a mechanism for coordination and organized action in support of the Palestinian cause for statehood and justice.

**Jordan** developed a first draft of its NAP in 2014 with four goals, namely, participation in decision-making; strengthening the role of women in peacebuilding and conflict prevention; protection of women and girls; and building capacities and partnerships for implementation.<sup>112</sup> However, deliberations and discussions were organized to further develop the NAP towards its approval in December 2017. The approved NAP had a much stronger emphasis on women's participation in peace and security compared to previous drafts, and included a dedicated funding instrument to support its implementation.

In July 2018, **Tunisia** launched its first NAP following a comprehensive multi-agency consultative process which actively included the security sector. The consultations identified a range of priorities for actions under the prevention, protection, participation, relief and recovery, and advocacy pillars. The priorities were based on the ongoing sectoral plans and strategies of various entities, as well as identifying specific interventions needed to advance the WPS agenda such as the development of an early warning system and further legislative reform. Tunisia's NAP was followed up by specific sectoral WPS NAPs.

**Lebanon** endorsed its NAP in September 2019, where it identified five priorities: participation in decision-making at all levels; women’s participation in conflict prevention; prevention and protection from SGBV; gender-responsive relief and recovery; and strengthening the normative framework in support of WPS and to prevent gender-based discrimination. Lebanon’s NAP included a particular emphasis for the protection of Syrian refugees.

**Yemen** adopted its NAP in December 2019 and included strengthening women’s participation; prevention of conflict, sexual violence,

radicalization, and terrorism; strengthening women’s protection from violence; and provision of humanitarian needs for women in a gender-responsive manner.

**The Sudan** is the latest State in the region to adopt a NAP in June 2020. The aim of the Sudan’s NAP is to actively involve women in peacebuilding, peacekeeping, peace negotiations, and decision-making processes at all levels, as well as in relief, reconstruction and development; to promote the recognition of women’s rights before, during and post-conflict; and to ensure protection against SGBV and to end impunity.

**Table 2. National Action Plans on women, peace and security in the Arab region (as of August 2022)**

State and date	Name of policy document
Iraq 2014	National Action Plan for Security Council Resolution 1325 (Women, Peace and Security).
Iraq 2015	2015 Emergency Plan: Security Council Resolution 1325 Women and Security and Peace.
State of Palestine 2017	National Strategic Framework for Security Council Resolution 1325 and National Action Plan for the Implementation of UNSCR 1325 – Women, w Peace and Security, 2017–2019. <sup>a</sup>
Jordan 2017	Jordanian National Action Plan to Operationalize Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Security and Peace (2018–2021). <sup>b</sup>
Tunisia 2018	National Action Plan 2018–2022 to Implement Security Council Resolution 1325 (Women, Peace and Security) and its Complementary Resolutions.
Lebanon 2019	Lebanon National Action Plan on United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325: The Path to a Fair and Inclusive Society through the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda 2019–2022.
Yemen 2019	National Action Plan to Implement Security Council Resolution 1325 – Women, Security and Peace 2020–2022.
Sudan 2020	National Plan to Implement Security Council Resolution 1325 (Women, Security and Peace 2020–2022).
League of Arab States 2015	Protection of Arab Women: Peace and Security – Executive Action Plan 2015–2030.

<sup>a</sup> The second generation NAP was completed but not finalized in time for this review.

<sup>b</sup> The JONAP 2.0 was completed but not finalized in time for this review.

## Review of existing National Action Plans

Following AU’s CRF, this analysis categorizes the current WPS NAPs adopted by Arab States under the four categories of prevention, participation, protection, and relief and recovery. This section builds on the broader

discussions presented in chapter 2 through reviewing the specific commitments indicated in WPS NAPs against AU’s CRF. This allows for clarifying existing priorities and commitments as well as gaps in NAPs.

The purpose of CRF is to ensure that there is an effective, articulate and organized way of monitoring and reporting on the implementation of the WPS agenda in Africa. Its two main objectives are to institutionalize regular and systematic monitoring and reporting, and to strengthen accountability for the implementation of the agenda. The indicators

were developed to be accessible, relevant, user-friendly, and context-specific to encourage member States to use the indicators. The 41 indicators, classified under the four UNSCR 1325 pillars, aim to conceptualize peace and security holistically, applying the concepts of ‘positive peace’ and ‘human security’.<sup>113</sup>

## 1. Prevention

Prevention remains a significant concern within the region and should be strongly prioritized in harmony with other national frameworks and legislation that aims to prevent violence broadly, and VAW specifically. This resonates closely with existing national obligations under CEDAW and its recommendations, particularly recommendation 30 in relation to women in conflict and in post-conflict situations. In fact, the CEDAW committee’s observations on Iraq’s combined fourth, fifth and sixth periodic reports called on the State to adopt preventative measures to protect women, which were reflected in Iraq’s NAP.<sup>114</sup>

All NAPs included a variety of references to early warning systems as preventative measures at the strategic level. However, these references varied significantly in terms of the types of measures and tactics, ranging from comprehensive systems engaging a variety of stakeholders to relying on post-facto research and reporting. Lebanon’s NAP includes a direct reference to women’s participation and leadership in effective early warning systems to prevent conflict, violence and extremism.<sup>115</sup> It also contains references to Lebanon’s National Strategy for Preventing Violent Extremism, which includes a pillar on gender equality and women empowerment in PCVE activities. Jordan and Tunisia’s NAPs also refer to the importance of PCVE.

A key element of the WPS agenda is enabling women’s active participation and leadership in actions that prevent and mitigate conflict to reinforce peace. NAPs included repeated emphasis on women’s roles in this area, indicating the importance of women’s participation in decision-making positions in institutions working on peace and security such as police services and similar entities. Lebanon’s NAP refers to actions to

advocate for the recruitment of women municipal police officers in communities and train them in conflict mitigation, while Yemen’s NAP refers to women’s participation in early actions to prevent conflict and armed escalations. However, AU’s CRF highlights six categories of peace and security institutions for women’s engagement, which call for distinctively different tactics to facilitate women’s engagement. Such a differentiated approach remains largely underdeveloped across all NAPs.

Matters relating to SGBV are also present, particularly in relation to the institutional set-up for response under the protection pillar. However, the issue of using monitoring and follow-up on reparations and remedial measures to deter and prevent repeat violence and further escalation is present in only four out of seven NAPs, with emphasis on documenting the cases as a part of policy-oriented research efforts to advise on the prevalence of SGBV.

The issue of allocating budgetary provisions to prevention activities remains rather limited, with only two NAPs, namely those of Jordan and Yemen, making direct and separate reference to this element. Financing of prevention activities was a critical gap globally and the weakest link in supporting preventive actions, as highlighted in the Global Study on the Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (2015),<sup>116</sup> and clearly requires more attention and study. Table 3 provides a summary of thematic focus areas under the prevention pillar in the seven NAPs, with a particular emphasis on laws and policies that act as deterrents to prevent SGBV, as well as bases for broader prevention work and possibly serving as early warning systems for conflict.

Table 3. Prevention priorities within Arab National Action Plans on women, peace and security

Indicator	Iraq 2014	Iraq 2015	State of Palestine 2017	Jordan 2017	Tunisia 2018	Lebanon 2019	Yemen 2019	Sudan 2020
Laws and policies to integrate gender perspective into peace and security	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
National budget allocated to Government departments for WPS agenda	-	-	-	✓	-	-	✓	-
Women in decision-making positions in peace and security institutions	✓	-	-	-	✓	✓	✓	✓
Response mechanisms that integrate gender in early warning	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Records of SGBV incidents against women and girls	-	-	-	-	✓	✓	✓	✓

Source: Authors

## 2. Participation

Participation in political life and peace and security processes remains the dominant theme across NAPs in the region, showing significant support and consensus on the centrality of participation as a priority. For instance, participation is mentioned in three of the four goals of Jordan's NAP, while seven out of the plan's fifteen performance indicators are directly related to this issue. The Sudan's NAP includes specific measures for women's participation in various levels of decision-making, including a quota of 40 per cent in local governance.

Emphasis on participation can be categorized broadly into three areas.<sup>117</sup> The first refers to women's participation in political leadership and decision-making, which includes elected and appointed offices, leadership of political structures,

as well as senior diplomatic positions. The State of Palestine's NAP refers to increasing the effective and relative participation of women in decision-making positions, including at the international level, and contains specific indicators on women's leadership in Government ministries and institutions, within the diplomatic corps and in political appointments. Similar language is visible across all NAPs with emphasis on senior civil service and elected roles. Several NAPs, such as those of the State of Palestine, Tunisia and Yemen, also refer to senior judicial positions.

The second area refers to the broader participation in public life such as women as voters and candidates, within civil service, in the security sector and other fields. These references emphasize women's equal and equitable rights to participate in all walks of life.

Table 4. Participation priorities within Arab National Action Plans on women, peace and security

Indicator	Iraq 2014	Iraq 2015	State of Palestine 2015	Jordan 2017	Tunisia 2018	Lebanon 2019	Yemen 2019	Sudan 2020
Laws and policies that promote women's participation and leadership in peace and security decision making	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Women in senior decision-making positions in political and civil service	✓	-	✓	✓	-	✓	✓	✓
Women in decision-making positions at peacebuilding oversight structures	-	-	-	-	-	-	✓	✓
Women in elected and nominative positions in political structures and offices	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Measures dedicated to promoting women participation in political processes	✓	-	-	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Women participating in political processes as voters and candidates	-	-	-	✓	-	✓	✓	-
Percentage of women personnel in security institutions at different levels	-	✓	-	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Measures to encourage women to join the security forces	-	✓	-	✓	-	✓	-	✓
Women in leadership positions in the foreign service related to peace and security	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	-	✓	-
Women involvement as peace negotiators and mediators	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Women's CSOs participating in Government-led peacebuilding processes	✓	-	✓	✓	-	✓	-	✓

Source: Authors

“promoting **women to leadership** positions continues to be a **challenge** and is often met with resistance”



The specificity of references to political processes and political parties, the military – including military leadership and the diplomatic corps, among others – highlights key areas prioritized within NAPs. Lebanon’s NAP includes explicit reference to working with 10 political parties to adopt internal policies to promote women’s participation. Some references are also made in peace and security areas such as policing, conflict resolution and peace negotiations.

The third area focuses more on women’s participation in conflict-related activities, such as conflict prevention, peace mediation, humanitarian response and post-conflict arrangements. These measures vary significantly by context. For instance, Iraq’s Emergency NAP includes measures to facilitate women’s participation as civilian monitors and military observers of

ceasefire and implementation of de-escalation arrangements.<sup>118</sup> Tunisia’s NAP refers to women’s roles in PCVE as well as other measures to strengthen civil peace.

Despite being the dominant theme across the examined NAPs, there are numerous gaps in response that remain limited or underdeveloped. These gaps include the quality, depth and breadth of women’s participation, the institutional mechanisms for engaging women groups and the broader women’s movement, as well as dialogue among various civil society and other entities to facilitate their inclusion in decision-making activities. For example, Iraq’s assessment of its first NAP noted that “promoting women to leadership positions continues to be a challenge and is often met with resistance”.<sup>119</sup> These gaps limit the efficacy of women’s participation to successfully influence decision-making and allow for meaningful change and advancement of the WPS agenda.

Another key gap are the sporadic references to women organizations and the broader women’s civil society, where the references to women’s participation focus on women as individuals and not the participation of the women’s movements in a manner that allows for collective efforts and stronger institutional engagement. For instance, the Sudan’s NAP includes repeated references to the role of women’s CSOs, including nine references in the implementation matrix; however, only one indicator includes a reference to the number of organizations engaged. Table 4 illustrates participation-related priorities within the examined NAPs.

### 3. Protection

The protection pillar of the WPS agenda has a particular focus on protection from SGBV, but this can be expanded given the varied forms of harm that women and girls experience during and after conflict and displacement. There is a broad consistency among NAPs on their identification of protection interventions, mainly focusing on the legal framework to deter and prosecute SGBV, as well as put in place the policy framework and the

institutional set-up to provide services to survivors. There are also measures to extend protection to conflict-affected population groups such as refugees and IDPs.

Several NAPs are more comprehensive in deconstructing the protection needs of women including physical protection and their bodily integrity, in addition to psychological and emotional

support, with particular emphasis given to young and elderly women, and women with special needs. For instance, Iraq's NAP includes a wide spectrum of activities that include the provision of legal aid as well as information to facilitate women's access to a variety of social services, particularly for IDP women and girls. An interesting dimension is the variance across NAPs in the responsibility to deliver these services which divides these responsibilities between Government agencies with a wide range of civil society constituents. For instance, the protection of women's economic interests and well-being was strongly present across all NAPs; however, it appears that associated measures were deferred to external partners such as the private sector and development agencies. Yemen's NAP, for example, mentions microfinance institutions as responsible for the implementation of associated

activities, but these institutions were not engaged in NAP consultations or development processes.

This issue reflects the approach NAPs adopted in addressing protection issues, where NAPs make assumptions and predispositions on what the protection needs are for all target groups, and hence lists measures and activities in line with these assumptions. No NAP includes reference to grounded continuous assessments of protection needs or mechanisms to ensure the adequacy of proposed support to the targeted populations. Another key underdeveloped area is the protection of women's voices and political activism, such as protecting women against violence in politics, and tailoring support for women human rights defenders and feminist advocates. A summary of the protection priorities can be seen in table 5.

**Table 5. Protection priorities within Arab National Action Plans on women, peace and security**

Indicator	Iraq 2014	Iraq 2015	State of Palestine 2015	Jordan 2017	Tunisia 2018	Lebanon 2019	Yemen 2019	Sudan 2020
Legal and policy frameworks to protect women from SGBV and protect their rights	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Measures taken by security forces to respond to and prevent SGBV	✓	-	✓	✓	✓	✓	-	✓
Measures to respond to women and girl survivors of SGBV	✓	-	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	-
Quality of SGBV protection and response measures	✓	✓	✓	✓	-	✓	-	-
Measures to protect women refugees and IDPs	✓	✓	-	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Source: Authors



#### 4. Relief and recovery

This pillar includes a dual focus on humanitarian action and relief operations to respond to the immediate life-saving needs of women and girls during and post crises, as well as on post-conflict transitional and recovery planning. Despite the wide array of interventions that fall within the relief and recovery pillar, emphasis across Arab NAPs seems to be concentrated on two activities, namely, engendering delivery of humanitarian relief and women's participation in these operations; and women's participation in post-conflict violence

reduction through transitional provisions associated with disarmament, demobilization and reintegration. While these are important elements, significant gaps remain in responses such as women's leadership of humanitarian action and occupying decision-making roles in relief and humanitarian programming, and decision-making roles in post-conflict recovery processes. It is important to differentiate between the current language referring to broader women's participation in these processes and women's leadership of these processes.

**Table 6. Relief and recovery priorities within Arab National Action Plans on women, peace and security**

Indicator	Iraq 2014	Iraq 2015	State of Palestine 2015	Jordan 2017	Tunisia 2018	Lebanon 2019	Yemen 2019	Sudan 2020
Gender provisions on peace agreements (implementing and monitoring mechanisms)	-	-	-	-	-	✓	-	✓
Post-conflict recovery budget	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Girls and women enrolled in schools and educational institutions (during/post conflict)	-	✓	-	-	✓	-	✓	✓
Women in decision-making positions in relief and humanitarian programmes	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Women in decision-making positions in post-conflict recovery processes	-	-	-	✓	-	-	✓	✓
Maternal mortality rate in post-conflict situations in the last calendar year	-	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Source: Authors

Another key element are women’s roles in transitional and post-conflict recovery planning. Only two countries include specific provisions on peace agreements and monitoring mechanisms. The Sudan, for example, includes independent monitoring mechanisms that range from monitoring humanitarian relief to monitoring the degree of mainstreaming gender in transitional institutional building. Lebanon also includes the development of women mediators who will ensure that gender-sensitive provisions are included in peace negotiations and dialogue outcomes.

Another noteworthy observation is the degree of detail in discussing issues relating to transitional

justice, disarmament and security-sector reform, and State-building processes. Only the Sudan, Tunisia and Yemen included reference to these elements, with relatively few references to broader peace and security arrangements that are central to political transition and post-conflict recovery. This links to the omission of any discussion on post-conflict recovery budgeting, and the established containment of relief and recovery elements to specific humanitarian operations and economic survival goals. Table 6 provides an illustration on relief and recovery priorities within Arab NAPs.



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**Conclusion and  
recommendations**



This report began by presenting the evolution of the WPS agenda in the Arab region to provide brief snapshots of the progress that Arab States have made in advancing the WPS agenda identifying ongoing gaps, challenges and priorities for the way forward. The publication thereafter presented research findings on Arab States' implementation of the WPS agenda's core pillars, informed primarily through submissions received from member States as well as enabling factors that have supported the advancement of the WPS agenda in the Arab region. Finally, the publication undertook a closer examination of the efforts of member States in the adoption of seven NAPs using CRF devised by AU.

The examination concludes that, while the political climate across the region demands action on the WPS agenda, there are varying degrees of political will to take concrete measures based on clearly defined national goals and targets. The current piecemeal approach applied by many States focuses on areas of overlap with existing policies, frameworks and institutional setup with gradual expansions of these areas to address emerging priorities and opportunities, particularly in relation to strengthening both women's participation and protection measures. This can be seen, for example, with emerging VAW laws and revisions to penal codes. The approach remains a far cry from the spirit of the WPS agenda with over 20 years since its endorsement by UNSCR 1325.

The increasing number of Arab States opting to develop dedicated NAPs is a positive sign. NAPs have progressed somewhat in terms of the range of activities and aspirations of outcomes. This includes coordination structures and partnerships between Governments and CSOs, innovative financing and monitoring mechanisms, as well as joint initiatives to bridge specific gaps on protection and livelihood issues. However, NAPs are most useful when they are written in an inclusive manner, are adequately budgeted and timebound, and are strategically focused.

The participatory processes for developing NAPs illustrates recognition of the contributions that a wide array of partners can offer to advance the WPS agenda, and allows diverse actors to strengthen working relationships including among governmental agencies, both civilian and non-civilian, civil society partners and international development organizations. These processes have provided opportunities for women's participation on a wide range of matters relating to both gender equality and peace and security. The development of NAPs has helped initiate national conversations on the WPS agenda and its relevance at the national level from the perspective of various institutions and stakeholders.

Implementation of NAPs is yet another central challenge to advance the WPS agenda. Iraq was the first State in the Arab region to develop its NAP, and the first to undertake an assessment of its implementation. The assessment identified areas of progress as well as limitations related to a variety of enabling factors, particularly in relation to the institutional set-up and financing.<sup>120</sup> This illustrates the importance of a supportive legal base for action on WPS, as well as a conducive institutional and organizational set-up for successful implementation.

In conclusion, member States must note that engagement with the WPS agenda is not an alternative to other international obligations that aim to ensure gender equality and empower women and girls, such as CEDAW and the Beijing Platform for Action and Agenda 2030, among others. The WPS agenda and the timely adoption of NAPs serve to enhance and complement – not replace – these treaties, frameworks and reporting mechanisms.

The following recommendations are intended to build on good practice and aim to support the ongoing efforts of Arab States to implement the WPS agenda:

- ▶ Establish a political commitment to the WPS agenda by working with a broad spectrum of stakeholders to initiate action, including

addressing barriers to advancing discussions on WPS, highlighting the roles of various actors and stakeholders, and establishing a self-sustaining and durable mechanism for engagement on WPS at the national level. Working closely with civil society and women's movements can accelerate contributions to the WPS agenda, particularly on issues relating to the prevention and protection pillars. Endorsing permanent national structures with mandates, capacities and responsibilities to advance the WPS agenda including through NAPs is a critical element in coordinating whole-of-State responses to the agenda and all matters relating to WPS.

- ▶ Identify clear and measurable targets for action and benchmarks for implementing the WPS agenda including through the establishment of dedicated NAPs that respond to specific priorities at the policy, programmatic and grassroots levels. Ensure that the legal framework and budgetary allocations for WPS-related structures enable their successful operationalization, particularly in relation to the design and implementation

of NAPs, as well as monitoring progress and evaluating results.

- ▶ Develop a comprehensive response to conflict and post-conflict engagement that enables women's participation as peacebuilders and decision-makers, linking the WPS agenda to political processes associated with mitigating and ending conflicts through the development of a participatory mechanism to inform WPS interventions.
- ▶ Ensure that any legal reform or policy development in line with the WPS agenda is implemented holistically and complementarily and avoids a piecemeal or ad-hoc approach. This includes mainstreaming the WPS agenda in various State strategies, plans and institutional structures to ensure its thorough implementation and not serve as a stand-alone agenda, as well as mainstreaming elements related to WPS within humanitarian responses, including humanitarian action partners and mechanisms, needs assessments and relief operations.



## Annex. African Union Women, Peace and Security agenda indicators

African Union indicators on States' implementation of the Women, Peace and Security agenda	
Category	Indicators
<b>Prevention</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▷ Laws and policies to integrate gender perspective into peace and security.</li> <li>▷ National budget allocated to Government departments for the WPS agenda.</li> <li>▷ Women in decision-making positions in peace and security institutions.</li> <li>▷ Response mechanisms that integrate gender in early warning.</li> <li>▷ Records of SGBV incidents against women and girls.</li> </ul>
<b>Participation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▷ Laws and policies to promote women's leadership in peace and security.</li> <li>▷ Women in decision-making positions in political and civil service.</li> <li>▷ Women in decision-making positions in peacebuilding structures.</li> <li>▷ Women in elective and nominative positions in political structures.</li> <li>▷ Measures adopted to promote women's participation in political processes.</li> <li>▷ Women participating in political processes (voters and candidates).</li> <li>▷ Women in security institutions.</li> <li>▷ Measures to encourage women to join security institutions.</li> <li>▷ Women in leadership positions in the foreign service.</li> <li>▷ Women as experts supporting peace-related processes.</li> <li>▷ Women civil society organizations participating in peacebuilding.</li> </ul>
<b>Protection</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▷ Legal and policy frameworks to protect women from SGBV and protect their rights.</li> <li>▷ Measures taken by security forces to respond to and prevent SGBV.</li> <li>▷ Measures to respond to women and girl survivors of SGBV.</li> <li>▷ Quality of SGBV protection and response measures.</li> <li>▷ Measures to protect women refugees and internally displaced persons.</li> </ul>
<b>Relief and recovery</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▷ Laws and policies to integrate gender perspective into peace and security.</li> <li>▷ National budget allocated to Government departments for the WPS agenda.</li> <li>▷ Women in decision-making positions in institutions for peace and security.</li> <li>▷ Response mechanisms to integrate gender perspective.</li> <li>▷ Records of incidents of SGBV against women and girls.</li> </ul>
<b>Emerging security threats</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▷ Integrating WPS principles into efforts towards preventing and responding to emerging security threats.</li> <li>▷ Presence of the WPS agenda in prevention and response strategies for emerging security threats.</li> </ul>

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- 116 UN Women, 2015, p. 372.
- 117 Measures to advance progress in these areas are included in chapter 2.
- 118 Iraq (2015) Emergency National Action to Implement SCR1325, p. 8.
- 119 Cross Sector Task Force on UNSCR 1325 [Iraq], 2018, p. 16.
- 120 Cross Sector Task Force on UNSCR 1325 [Iraq], 2018, p. 16.





The adoption of dedicated National Action Plans (NAPs) remains the most concrete action that States can undertake to advance the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda in the Arab region. The increasing number of Arab States opting to develop NAPs dedicated to WPS is a positive sign and a step in the right direction. However, despite this progress, implementation of NAPs remains a challenge in the Arab region.

The present report serves as a stocktake of the WPS agenda in the Arab region. It finds that Arab States have increasingly been advancing their respective WPS agendas, particularly over the past five years. As more States develop NAPs, it is anticipated that the region will shift towards the establishment of a normative framework on WPS. Overall, however, the approach has been piecemeal, focusing on areas of WPS that overlap with existing policies, frameworks and institutional set-ups with a modest gradual expansion of these overlapped areas to address emerging priorities and opportunities, particularly in relation to enhancing women's participation and strengthening protection measures. Whatever progress has occurred at the structural level has not necessarily translated into significantly noticeable or substantive gains for women and girls within the region.

