

# Including Women in Peace Processes in the MENA region

## The challenge

In 2000 the United Nations Security Council passed Resolution 1325 which seeks to involve women in crisis prevention, conflict resolution, and the consolidation of peace while protecting them from sexual violence in armed conflicts.

Implementing this resolution in practice remains a challenge, particularly in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. Here, women have fewer opportunities to participate in political processes than men. Meanwhile, women and girls are proportionally higher affected by conflict situations and face numerous instances of discrimination.

Women's participation in formal peace processes has been decreasing. In 2022, it constituted globally to 16% of representation in negotiations, mediation, and policymaking, primarily due to patriarchal structures and the lack of women in policymaking roles according to the UN Secretary General. This has resulted in inadequate consideration of gender perspectives in post-conflict reconstruction and transitional justice efforts. Countries like Iraq, Syria, Yemen, and Libya rank poorly in the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) Index, despite some progress such as political quotas in Iraq. Challenges persist, including resistance to women's involvement in Yemen and widespread gender-based violence in Syria. While National Action Plans (NAPs) and international conventions like The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) have aimed to involve women in peace processes, meaningful participation remains largely limited to local levels, background roles, or issues categorized as "women's concerns," despite references to gender equality in national plans for implementing the 2030 Agenda in specific reference to SDG 5 (Gender equality and women's empowerment).

Project name	Empowering women to participate in peace processes and policymaking in the MENA region (Women4Peace)
Commissioned by	Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)
Project region	MENA region, with a focus on Syria, Libya, Yemen, Iraq
Project Value	EUR 7,300,000
Project Partner	UN WOMEN
Project Duration	November 2022- January 2026

## Our approach

The project aims to promote gender-responsive changes in women's participation in peacebuilding and policy-making processes. It focuses on Iraq, Libya, Syria, and Yemen, extending its influence on the broader MENA region and the global level. Building on the successful approaches of Phases I and II, the current Phase III continues these methods while incorporating lessons learned and findings from an evaluation mission.

The project largely operates in close cooperation with UN Women, the implementation partner. This collaborative approach leverages the strengths of both organizations. UN Women contributes to regional knowledge exchange among diverse groups and advocates for women's participation in global peace processes. GIZ, on the other hand, concentrates on existing projects at local and national levels in the four focus countries. The project utilizes synergies with ongoing GIZ projects, using their established connections to women in target groups, activists, civil society, international organizations, and local and national partners.

The project focuses on empowering women's organizations, peace actors, and civil society at different levels by enhancing their



*(Left) Meeting of the Global Alliance for Women Mediators on the margins of the WPS Open Debate in New York, by UN Women in collaboration with GIZ (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit).*

*(Right) UN Women, LAS, and CCCPA training for the Arab Women Mediators Network on "Women Mediating Access to Resources in Climate-Affected Contexts".*

capacity. It emphasizes tailored knowledge-sharing and networking opportunities through collaboration with state and semi-state actors.

At an individual level, the project focuses on empowering women and feminist peace organizations by enhancing their skills for effective participation and decision-making. It prioritizes inclusivity, intersectionality, and the "leave no one behind" principle.

At the organizational level, efforts aim to strengthen the capacity and networking of selected feminist peace groups, ensuring gender-specific experiences influence formal policymaking.

At a regional and international level, the project contributes by generating knowledge and experience-sharing to inform about best practices and to foster meaningful gender-responsive changes in peacebuilding and policymaking processes.

## Areas of intervention

The project's primary focus is to enhance political communication and effectively utilize the results of our initiatives to align with the objectives of German feminist foreign policy. To achieve this, the project has established a structured approach with specific objectives and milestones, focusing on:

- Political communication: Our main objective is to improve political communication with our initiatives, promoting gender equality, women's empowerment, and feminist foreign policy. We will identify key topics and work with professionals to align our messaging with German feminist foreign policy and BMZ's development priorities.
- Capacity development: Our intervention focuses on enhancing the skills and knowledge of peace actors in the four focus countries. We are developing tailored capacity-enhancing programs for Tracks I-III of the peace processes and providing ongoing mentorship for effective skill application.
- Knowledge exchange: Our third goal is to promote knowledge exchange among peace actors at the local, national, and regional levels. We will identify and connect peace actors, creating communication channels to facilitate collaborative knowledge transfer and foster a supportive environment for effective peace-building efforts.

## Taking action

1. To facilitate networking and global visibility of feminist peace and security actors, the project has succeeded in launching PEACEFEM during its second phase a safe, digital space app highlighting female peacemaker's strategies to influence peace processes as well as the provisions created in agreements and the level of their implementation. The application also offers access to case studies and knowledge material, reaching downloads in over 60 countries. The updated 2023 app includes additional materials and languages to expand the outreach and accessibility among WPS actors in even more regions around the world.
2. To increase political visibility regarding women, peace, and security in the MENA region, in particular addressing feminist foreign and development policy, the project partners will organize and hold MENA's first annual WPS Regional Policy Forum, during which local and regional peace actors will participate, sharing knowledge and experiences. Similarly, the project organizes coordination and planning workshops with global, regional, and national project partners.
3. To foster networking opportunities for sharing knowledge and exchanging experiences, the project will organize technical, professional, and social exchange networking events in the four focus countries engaging local, national, and regional peace actors. To that end, four needs-oriented formal and informal formats for local and regional networking of relevant peace actors will be used. In partnership with Issam Fares Institute (IFI), the project will launch its second cohort of the WPS and YPS capacity-building program for young women peace-builders.
4. The project will ensure that four country-specific concepts of networking between and within the tracks are on hand. This will be complemented by the implementation of four capacity development and mentorship measures to sustainably network actors in the four countries and at a regional level.

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