



IN BRIEF



WOMEN'S MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION IN PEACE AND POLITICAL PROCESSES IN FRAGILE CONTEXTS

May 2022

The artwork above was created by a survivor of conflict-related sexual violence for an exhibition organized by UN Women. Photo credit: UN Women

THE ISSUE

Formal mediation processes around the world remain largely stalled, and women are still mostly absent from peace processes. This, in turn, results in peace agreements and ceasefires that rarely address the perspectives, needs, and concerns of women and other vulnerable groups.

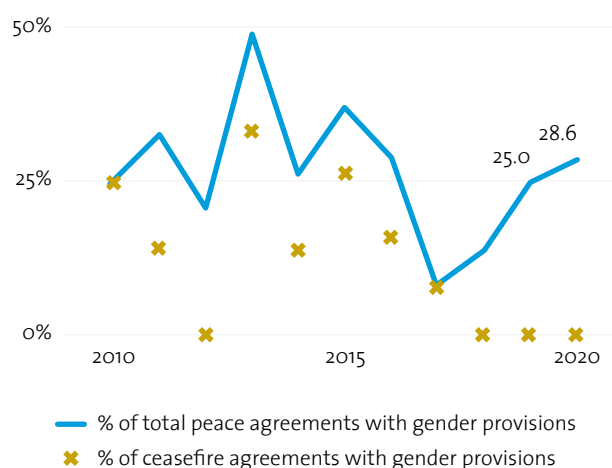
Women's participation in mediation is essential for achieving lasting and positive peace that goes well beyond the silencing of guns, and their absence from mediation spaces can endanger the long-term sustainability of any peace agreement.

Gender-inclusive peacemaking is an area of focus within the women, peace, and security (WPS) agenda of UN Women that remains particularly resistant to change, despite the progress made since the passing of the landmark Security Council resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325). Between 1992 and 2018, women's inclusion in formal processes globally has been far from full or equal¹. In 2020, women represented only 23 per cent of delegates in global peace processes led or co-led by the United Nations – a share that would have been even lower without persistent measures by the UN².

Policy actors are increasingly calling for inclusive and holistic peace processes, new approaches to conflict resolution, effective conflict prevention and a sustained focus on transition and recovery. This call demands smarter design and

the involvement of women and others traditionally excluded from shaping pathways to peace. The most important effects of women's engagement in peace processes are not just increased attention to gender-related elements in deliberations and texts of peace agreements, but also a shift in dynamics and a broadening of the issues discussed. This, in turn, increases the possibility of addressing the different root causes of conflict, as well as community's buy-in for a negotiated, inclusive peace agreement – and it puts pressure on conflict parties to either reach an agreement or go back to the negotiating table when talks have faltered.

Peace agreements with gender provisions, 2010-2020



The need for effective and sustainable solutions has only grown more **urgent since COVID-19 outbreak, which has brought into sharp relief the criticality of the WPS agenda** as a lens to understand and respond to peace and conflict dynamics. While the response to COVID-19 has demonstrated the effectiveness of women's leadership at the highest levels, women continue to be underrepresented in that response and in other decision-making forums.

While overall support for inclusive peacemaking has largely increased within policy spaces, this has not been matched by equivalent, bold and timely change in everyday practices.

THE APPROACH

UN Women works to increase the availability of gender expertise and support greater and more effective participation of women at all levels of conflict resolution, ensuring that outcomes are gender responsive. Since 2017, UN Women has been implementing the programme **“Enhancing Women’s Leadership for Sustainable Peace in Fragile Contexts in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Region.”**

The Programme’s envisaged outcome is for women in the MENA region to participate meaningfully in peace and transition processes across all phases, from process design to negotiation and implementation. Cumulative evidence demonstrates that, when women are included, peace agreements are more likely to be reached, peacebuilding initiatives are more responsive to community needs and peace is more sustainable.

The Programme seeks to address two major challenges to women’s participation and influence in official peace processes: the first is the restrictive operating environment for women’s participation; the second is the lack of sufficient technical expertise and space for strategic planning and partnerships to support women’s meaningful participation.

After the successful conclusion of Phase I at the end of 2019, UN Women is now in the final year of Phase II programme implementation (1 January 2020 – 31 October 2022), with lessons learnt from political and technical perspectives being reflected and acted upon. The scope of the programme was expanded in December 2021 in response to the changes in situation in Afghanistan to include a series of targeted initiatives to support the continued and

Focus Countries

Global and MENA region, with Iraq, Libya, Syria, and Yemen as focus countries, in addition to supporting Afghan women peacebuilders and human rights defenders.

Supporters

Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), in cooperation with Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH

Programme Duration

14 December 2016 - 31 October 2022

Financial Volume to Date

Approximately 10,097,560 EUR

increased participation of Afghan women and women-led organizations in political and peace and security processes.

UN Women’s **quick responsiveness and ability to adapt to a fast-paced, ever-changing political landscape** and the **establishment of key partnerships** (including with civil society, international organizations and others influencing and making decisions at formal levels) has proved essential in achieving results and meeting the programme’s goals. UN Women has also worked in partnership with Member States, including with those who are part of the UN Security Council Informal Experts Group on WPS and the WPS National Focal Points Network to achieve common and critical gains. Finally, being at the forefront of global knowledge generation and policymaking, as well as having a unique ability to convene a diversity of actors, allows UN Women to continue widening the programme’s impacts and results.

In turn, the programme has been instrumental in enhancing coherence across UN Women, enabling the institution to strengthen its leadership role on women’s meaningful participation, driving and shaping global policy discussions which are informed by implementation experiences on the ground.

OUTCOME AND OUTPUTS

The main Programme's outcome is for women to participate meaningfully in peace and transition processes. Activities are structured around three main components, or output areas:



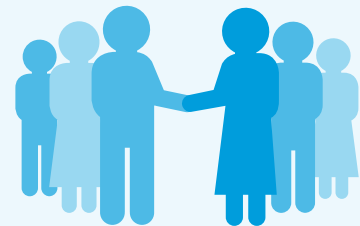
increased evidence-based knowledge and systemization

generated and available to inform peace process actors



strengthened capacity and technical expertise

through strategic and needs-based advice and learning for peace process actors



enhanced dialogue and partnerships for strategic action

between UN Women and global, regional and national policy institutions and actors, alongside targeted support in linking track-two to track-one actors for increased inclusivity.

RESULTS

After nearly five years of programme implementation, substantial progress has been demonstrated at the outcome level. In addition to increased consultation with women through official mechanisms, the programme has helped ensure women's participation is increased at all levels of negotiations and their rights and interests are reflected in peace process design, outcomes and relevant global- or country-level policy. Still, women's direct participation in formal peace processes remains far from being full, equal, and meaningful, and this is where further commitment and continued investment remain needed.

Examples of the **Programme's successes** to date, with a focus on 2021 activities, are presented below.

COMPARATIVE LEARNING:

Creating spaces and opportunities for global and regional cross-country peer exchange of ideas, strategies, and approaches to ensure women's meaningful participation.



Following the outbreak of COVID-19 in 2020 and the UN Secretary-General's calls for a global ceasefire, which was echoed by similar calls from women civil society actors in the MENA region, UN Women continued its ongoing work of partnering up with other UN entities as well as international partners to shed a light on and foster women's meaningful participation in ceasefires and peace processes. In this context, in July 2021 UN Women organized the [global convening on Gender-Inclusive Peace Processes: Strengthening Women's Meaningful Participation through Constituency Building](#), in partnership with CMI – Martti

Ahtisaari Peace Foundation. This month-long convening gathered more than 140 actors from more than 35 countries worldwide, including the MENA region, who came together to exchange views, experiences and expertise for enhanced knowledge on the topic of gender-inclusive constituency building and its linkage to women's meaningful participation in formal peace processes. The event was successful in pushing the agenda for women's participation forward through policy formulation and online outreach to attract widespread global attention. The conference motivated and enabled women civil society activists and peacebuilders on the frontlines of gender-inclusive peace to come forward and share their voices and experiences in a global [feature story](#) that attracted widespread attention, in addition a background policy paper and conference report were produced with lessons learnt and best practices to push forward the agenda for women's participation.

[CUTTING-EDGE RESEARCH:](#)

Identifying knowledge gaps and commissioning research with partner institutions that are equipped to help fill those gaps.



The successful roll-out of the programme over the years enabled UN Women to work with academia and think-tanks to produce, support and/or commission a wealth of cutting-edge research and publications on WPS, including the following:

[PeaceFem](#) app, developed in collaboration with Inclusive Peace, Monash University, and the University of Edinburgh to support civil society and mediation actors to access information on peace agreements and gender provisions.

[Financing gender-inclusive peace: Gaps in implementing the Women, Peace and Security Agenda](#), in collaboration with Monash University's Gender, Peace and Security Centre, raising awareness around the persistent under-investment in gender-inclusive peace in conflict and post-conflict settings, with a focus on Colombia, Iraq, and the Philippines.

[Gender-inclusive peacemaking. Strategies for mediation practitioners](#), produced by the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD) with support from UN Women, as part of HD's ongoing Mediation Practice series. The paper is the first ever to be produced on the topic of gender equality.

[DiploWomen podcast](#), providing a platform for women mediators and practitioners from the MENA region to share their insights and experiences and raise awareness on the WPS agenda, women's specific experiences of conflict, and the role they can play in mediation and conflict resolution. The podcast is produced by the Issam Fares Institute (IFI) for Public Policy and International Affairs at the American University of Beirut (AUB) in collaboration with UN Women.

Other publications:

[Women's meaningful participation in peace processes: Modalities and strategies across tracks](#)

[COVID-19 and conflict: Advancing women's meaningful participation in ceasefires and peace processes,](#)

[Increasing the Representation of Women Peace Mediators: Collaborative Leadership Models for Ensuring Equality](#)

[Models for Women's Inclusion in Track One Mediation in Peace and Transition Processes](#)

REGIONAL SUCCESSES:

Establishing fruitful and lasting partnerships with key global actors to influence peacemaking and implement gender-responsive action across the MENA region.

UN Women has strengthened its partnership with the League of Arab States to enhance women's role in peace processes and negotiations across the Arab region. This has led to the establishment of the Arab Women Mediators Network (AWMN), bringing together women peacebuilders from across the region.



LIBYA:

Providing on-demand expertise to women peacebuilders and continued support to allow women's participation in high-level peace discussions.

In Libya, UN Women continued to work toward ensuring Libyan women's participation in political deliberations, including through supporting the Libyan Women Network for Peacebuilding (LWNP) to build the mediation skills of women peacebuilders and ensure their mobilization to resolve conflict. It also supported peacebuilders to build their online presence to raise awareness on the importance of Libyan women's engagement in peacemaking.



IRAQ:

Supporting women's political participation and raising awareness on the importance of women's participation in the elections.

In Iraq, the most significant normative achievement of UN Women in 2021 was the roll-out of the second Iraq National Action Plan (INAP II) for the implementation UNSCR 1325 through extensive participation and buy-in of governmental and non-governmental stakeholders across the country and across different areas of intervention. Specifically, UN Women worked with Iraqi institutions and civil society to promote women's political participation and protection in the Iraqi parliamentary elections (October 2021), supporting women candidates to build their capacities, carrying out inclusive civic education and sensitization campaigns, and advocating for the change of electoral regulations to ensure women's fair access to the political sphere both as voters and candidates. This in turn led to a historic number of women being elected in the Council of Representatives, surpassing the 25 per cent quota.



YEMEN:

Enhancing advocacy efforts to strengthen collaboration between peace tracks.

UN Women is pursuing its advocacy and efforts to strengthen the collaboration and linkages between peace tracks, including in the current context of the stalled peace process. In partnership with international partners and the Yemeni civil society, UN Women conducted various consultations with women peacebuilders and is reflecting on an alternative track for women to contribute to the peace process.

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ENDNOTES

- 1 UN Women and Council on Foreign Relations, "Women's Participation in Peace Processes" (2019).
- 2 UN Security Council Report of the Secretary General on Women, Peace, and Security (2021). (Accessed May 20, 2022). https://www.security-councilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_2021_827.pdf