**Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)**

# Policy Brief
# Role of Women in Peacebuilding Processes

## Introduction

The international community has taken several measures to mitigate the impact of conflict on women and girls, and has striven to ensure that women have a voice and an active role in conflict resolution. Among these measures is Security Council resolution 1325 of 31 October 2000 on Women, Peace and Security, which placed emphasis on women's participation in political negotiations and peacebuilding processes:

*Reaffirming* the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peacebuilding, and *stressing* the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security… (Preamble)

Further Security Council resolutions reiterated the importance of women's participation in conflict resolution. For example, paragraph 1 of resolution 2122 of 18 October 2013 stated that the Council:

…*intends* to focus more attention on women's leadership and participation in conflict resolution and peacebuilding, including by monitoring progress in implementation, and addressing challenges linked to the lack and quality of information and analysis on the impact of armed conflict on women and girls, the role of women in peacebuilding and the gender dimensions of peace processes and conflict resolution.

The women, peace and security (WPS) agenda is particularly relevant in an Arab region currently torn by conflict. In 2016 it accounted for about one third of the global refugee population while constituting merely 6 per cent of the world's population.[1] Out of the $18.2 billion requested by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in 2016, $12.2 billion were meant to address humanitarian needs in Arab countries.[2] This highlights not only the scale of conflicts in those countries, but also their large impact on the populations.

Women and girls experience more gender-based violence in periods of conflict and instability, in forms including slavery, sex trade and child marriage. In Iraq, for example, in 2016, over 80 per cent of households reported that women did not have a safe, female-friendly space outside their homes, and an estimated 128,000

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[1] Data from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, available from http:www.unhcr.org/globaltrends2016.

[2] Data from the Financial Tracking Service of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), available from fts.unocha.org (accessed August 2017).

displaced women were pregnant and had limited or no access to health care.[3] Today, instability is bringing about new forms of conflict-related sexual violence.[4]

This policy brief examines the participation of women in peacebuilding processes in several Arab countries. It presents arguments supporting such participation, which remains minimal to date, and provides options, mechanisms and recommendations to enhance it.

## Centrality of women's participation in peacebuilding processes

A peacebuilding process is a political process of ongoing negotiations aimed at achieving peace. The United Nations defines it as "a range of measures targeted to reduce the risk of lapsing or relapsing into conflict by strengthening national capacities at all levels for conflict management, and to lay the foundations for sustainable peace and development".[5] Other definitions elaborate further on these general principles and include elements of peacebuilding strategies and goals.

An analysis[6] of 117 conflicts from 1980 onwards indicated that 40.2 per cent ended with a peace agreement and 47.9 per cent remained unresolved. Of the 61 conflicts that ended during that period, 77 per cent were resolved through a peace agreement and 16.4 per cent through the military victory of one of the parties. The culture of negotiations is thus now a reality. Yet, peace negotiations still tend to exclude women and devote limited attention to gender-related issues, reinforcing patterns of violence against women. Although experiences in peacebuilding have generated significant evidence of the positive results of women's participation as negotiators, mediators, delegates, advocates, observers and members of pressure groups, only 16 per cent of 585 peace agreements and protocols concluded between 1990 and 2010 included references to women, and women were less than 3 per cent of the signatories of agreements reached since 1992.[7]

Security Council resolution 1889 of 5 October 2009 on women, peace and security reiterated the "need for the full, equal and effective participation of women at all stages of peace processes given their vital role in the prevention and resolution of conflict and peacebuilding". This role is strongly emphasized in the Global Study on the Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, which provides evidence of its positive impact.[8] Further research identifies several benefits of women's participation in peace processes, which are summarized in the following section.

## Why are women successful peacemakers?

- *Reaching an agreement*: An analysis of 40 peace processes between 1989 and 2014 showed that women's participation and influence in negotiations was correlated with the probability of reaching an agreement, with the correlation deemed statistically significant at a confidence level of 95 per cent.[9] This is attributed to reasons including the lobbying capacity and influence of women in official delegations at the formal negotiations table and their ability to harness that towards reaching an agreement and breaking dead-locks.

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[3] OCHA, 2016 Humanitarian needs overview: Iraq. Available from https://www.humanitarianresponse. info/system/files/documents/files/final_iraq_2016_hno.pdf.

[4] For more information on the topic, see S/2016/361.

[5] Decision of the Secretary-General's Policy Committee, May 2007, as cited in United Nations, Peacebuilding Support Office, *UN Peacebuilding: An Orientation* (September 2010), p. 5. Available from http://www.un.org/en/peacebuilding/pbso/pdf/ peacebuilding_orientation.pdf.

[6] Vicenç Fisas, *2016 Yearbook on Peace Processes* (Pau, Icaria editorial, 2016), p. 9.

[7] A/65/354-S/2010/466.

[8] Available from http://wps.unwomen.org.

[9] Thania Paffenholz, and others, *Making Women Count - Not Just Counting Women: Assessing Women's Inclusion and Influence on Peace Negotiations* (Geneva, Inclusive Peace and transition Initiative and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), 2016), p. 20.

- *Lasting agreements*: A study has shown that "when women are included in a peace process, the peace agreement that results is 20 per cent more likely to last at least two years. Women's participation has an even greater impact in the longer term: an agreement is 35 per cent more likely to last for 15 years if women participate in its creation".[10]

- *Quality agreements*: Peace agreements are 64 per cent less likely to fail when civil society representatives participate, particularly women-led groups.[11] Their contributions are key, especially in terms of the language and implementation modalities of these agreements, which make them more viable and sustainable.

- *Mitigating further conflict*: The experiences of women in negotiating local ceasefires, monitoring ceasing of hostilities, facilitating humanitarian corridors, mediating for releasing detainees and organizing local communities are a testimony to their role in conflict mitigation. As the United Nations notes, "it is widely recognized that the international community's objectives in countries emerging from conflict will be better served if women and girls are protected and if arrangements are put in place to allow for the full participation of women in the peace process".[12]

- *Increasing legitimacy:* Including women in peace processes increases the legitimacy and perceived fairness of these processes and their outcomes, in contrast with processes where decision-making is left to a small number of male leaders. It also provides a basis for future advocacy efforts during the implementation phase of the peace accords.

**Understanding peace processes**

Women's participation in peace processes is contingent upon several factors, most importantly the design of the process and the opportunities made available for this participation. Peace processes can take many shapes, such as formal, comprehensive and open, or can depend on parallel negotiations and informal talks. A discussion on these processes is necessary to explore avenues for women's participation.

*Formal peace processes*

A formal peace process takes place at the formal and internationally recognized negotiations table, where parties to the conflicts engage directly on the terms of a prospective peace agreement and their respective demands. The process itself is designed as a result of significant preparatory work by the mediator and with the input and consent of parties on an agenda and a modus operandi to proceed.

Evidently, such formal processes are complex and demanding, often starting at the height of the violence and experiencing numerous setbacks. In many cases, such processes take non-peaceful trajectories in response to geopolitical, security and other factors. This adds to the complexity of defining a clear approach to women's full and equal engagement. An important responsibility lies in the hands of the mediator, who should strive to facilitate women's participation in the process and address the barriers.

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[10] Marie O'Reilly, Andrea Ó Súilleabháin, and Thania Paffenholz, "Reimagining peacemaking: women's roles in peace processes" (New York, International Peace Institute, June 2015).

[11] Desirée Nilsson, "Anchoring the peace: civil society actors in peace accords and durable peace", *International Interactions*, vol. 38, No. 2 (April 2012), p. 258.

[12] United Nations, *United Nations Peacekeeping Operations: Principles and Guidelines* (New York, 2008), p. 41.

**Usual stages in formal peace processes**

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| **1** | • **Exploratory phase: Testing seriousness of parties in seeking peace** |
| **2** | • **Preliminary agreement: Agreeing to commit to a peace process** |
| **3** | • **Pre-negotiation agreement: Agreeing on how to reach peace** |
| **4** | • **Framework agreement: Road map and general principles on steps and agenda** |
| **5** | • **Partial agreements and protocols, including on issues outside the framework agreement** |
| **6** | • **General agreement: Defining how, what, and who is responsible** |
| **7** | • **Comprehensive implementation agreement** |
| **8** | • **Verification and solving controversies and emerging issues** |

*Source*: Adapted from Vicenç Fisas, *2016 Yearbook on Peace Processes* (Pau, Icaria editorial, 2016), p. 8.

*Informal peace processes*

Informal peace processes encompass all efforts towards peace outside the formal negotiation table. They can be led by individuals, third parties, internal mediators (including from among conflict parties), or be community-driven, rooted in cultural and social dynamics. Often these processes are very useful to draw different peace scenarios or mitigate further escalation.

Informal peace processes have rarely led to the resolution of conflicts, but they play a significant role in facilitating formal processes. It seems that formal peace processes that are not paralleled with informal ones often stumble or stall.[13]

**Examples of informal peace processes**

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| Mediation through personal networks | Networks of individuals connected through social relationships, enjoying a significant degree of trust and respect. Such networks can exist within formal institutions, transcend political and geographic boundaries and depend on voluntary efforts. |
| Internal mediation | Internal or insider mediators are individuals, groups or entities within a party to the conflict who have their own agendas and interests, and have influence over the views of others and the collective position through leverage, relationships or other means. |
| Parallel talks | These can take many forms, such as track-two diplomacy, women and civil society consultations or localized negotiations. These talks are often mediated by independent non-governmental organizations and think tanks, or other stakeholders. |
| Back-door negotiations | Tactical negotiations that take place through informal or secret channels for specific purposes, such as to provide information, advance an agenda item, or propose concessions under a reciprocity arrangement among, within or against specific peace stakeholders. |
| Others | These include processes that are rooted in social and cultural customs. They sometimes carry specific objectives, such as reiterating the code of conduct of parties to the conflict, facilitating arbitration and suggesting transitional justice and remedial actions. |

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[13] Simon Mason, *Inside Mediators: Exploring their Key Role in Informal Peace Processes* (Berlin, Berghof Foundation for Peace Support, 2009).

**Modalities for women's participation in peace processes**

Women's participation in peace processes depends on several factors, such as positions on this participation, ability of mediators to design an inclusive process, lobbying and advocacy by stakeholders, and the capacity of women and women's groups to impose themselves.

The United Nations has adopted a detailed action plan to improve women's participation in these processes.[14] It includes specific measures, such as:

- Appointing women as chief mediators in United Nations-led peace processes;

- Including gender expertise, at senior levels, in mediation support activities;

- Investing in strategies for the inclusion of more women in negotiating parties;

- Assisting the establishment of forums for women's civil society organizations (CSOs) to ensure that mediation teams and negotiating teams engage in consultations with them.

The experiences of special envoys, political missions and other United Nations bodies with a mandate to support peace processes present a wide range of institutional and tactical measures to promote women's participation in peacebuilding processes, implemented directly at the negotiations table; through linked and parallel processes; and through mass and popular civic action.

*At the negotiations table*

Women can participate as negotiators, advisors, consultants, observers or witnesses within formal delegations of negotiating parties. Usually, in such instances, they advance the agenda of the negotiating parties they belong to, and the scope of influence they have depends on the roles assigned to them within the delegations.

As negotiators, the space allotted to them to raise issues relating to the WPS agenda and to gender equality is linked to factors including agenda items, receptiveness of the parties to the negotiations, their ability to bring forwards these issues for discussion, and the general dynamics of the negotiations. This, however, represents a key form of women's participation in the peacebuilding process and allows for significant influence on the proceedings.

As advisors and consultants, women have an opportunity to lobby within the delegations and make proposals to address issues related to the WPS agenda. They can work with negotiators and other members of the delegations to provide counsel, develop background material and documentation, and work with the delegations to increase the overlap between the WPS agenda and their respective negotiation agendas. Often advisors can point out issues that may aggravate or disregard gender biases.

Observers and witnesses play varying roles according to the details of their status, ranging from non-speaking observers to signatory witnesses on the record of negotiations. However, this role carries minimal influence on the negotiations process.

Another important modality is to include a women's delegation in the negotiations, which would be apolitical but mandated to uphold the WPS agenda. The engagement of such a delegation is governed by the consent of parties to the negotiations and their internal modus operandi, which would give them the representation, legitimacy and capacity to champion gender equality at the negotiations table.

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[14] A/65/354-S/2010/466.3166

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**Box 1. Yemeni women's participation in the national dialogue process**

The National Dialogue Conference (2012-2013) of Yemen, which comprised 565 members, adopted a 30 per cent quota for women. This was the result of the direct engagement of women's groups in the preparatory phase and coordinated lobbying with power brokers. Women were also elected presidents of three out of nine thematic working groups, and three women were also elected as vice-presidents or rapporteurs. Women's representation greatly influenced the agenda, deliberations and outcome document of the Conference.

The Conference outcome document stipulated that women's representation in all power structures of the State, in appointed or elected positions, shall not be less than 30 per cent. It also banned marriage before the age of 18 for both sexes. These two issues were highly contested during the deliberations, but the provisions were ultimately introduced owing to women's determination and lobbying as negotiators within the Conference.

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*Linked bodies and parallel tracks*

These refer to the work of political entities, CSOs, women's groups, private sector organizations and other institutions that have an interest in peace and have an established, direct or indirect, relationship with the main peace process. These bodies can influence the peace process directly through their links to the negotiating parties, and they can engage in parallel track dialogues and consultations on issues that can have an impact on the peace process.

Such bodies present a significant opportunity for the participation of women. Within them, they can evaluate the progress of formal negotiations, make mediation efforts and influence the positions of negotiating parties on matters related to the WPS agenda.

The capacity to organize and engage in constructive dialogue in parallel tracks can provide a wealth of creative solutions to address key impediments on the negotiations table. Such efforts are particularly helpful in mitigating unintended consequences of peacebuilding processes when they are exclusionary or carry an inherent bias against women.

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**Box 2. Syrian Women Advisory Board**

In 2016, the Syrian Women Advisory Board was established as an independent body comprising 12 Syrian civil society leaders, 6 of whom were affiliated to the Syrian Women's Initiative for Peace and Democracy. It was established to provide support in organizing and amplifying the voices of Syrian women so that they feed into the peace process, and to ensure that the concerns, experiences and priorities of Syrian women from different backgrounds were at the forefront of the peace talks. The Board played an important role in supporting mediation efforts and shuttle diplomacy, and informed the work of the Joint Special Envoy for Syria. In addition to women's concerns, the Board works on a broad list of priorities, upholding the principles of inclusion, justice, diversity and partnership.

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*Mass and popular civic action*

Popular civic action is key for the realization of peace. It can be spontaneous, as in protests or boycott movements, or can manifest itself in elections or the mushrooming of initiatives at the grassroots level, particularly in the absence of an organized formal civil society. Civic action can take place at the national or local level.

Women can play leadership roles in such community mobilization efforts. Their activism for peace can take many forms, ranging from informal efforts at the local level to the initiation of nation-wide social movements.

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**Box 3. Rise of the Libyan civil society**

Since 2011, Libya has experienced significant instability and violence. Armed militias have taken advantage of the power vacuum to control parts of the territory. The country's governance is divided between the General National Congress, which first emerged in 2012; the House of Representatives resulting from the 2014 elections; and the United Nations-backed Government of National Accord announced in early 2016. The fragmentation of the country persists with competing governance structures taking over different parts of it, while conflict and civil unrest continue to cause substantial deterioration in living conditions.

In response, the Libyan civil society and women's groups are working at the grassroots level to bridge the gaps in service delivery and address the needs of their communities, in close cooperation with elected and appointed local councils. A 2014 mapping exercise[a] undertaken by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in six Libyan cities listed over 1,000 women's organizations actively working on issues ranging from humanitarian relief to civic and political activism. This is a great achievement under the country's current conditions.

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[a] Available from http://www.ly.undp.org/content/dam/libya/docs/Libyan%20CSO%20Roster.pdf.

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## Recommendations

Women's participation in peace processes is hampered by issues ranging from limitations in the design of the processes to inherited barriers lowering their voice and the level of their participation in public life. Following are policy recommendations aimed at supporting such participation:

1. Tackle barriers facing women's participation in formal delegations through quotas for women within delegations and other comparable measures.

2. Include WPS issues on the negotiations agenda, require negotiating delegations to clarify their position on WPS issues and work towards reaching a positive consensus.

3. Make technical capacity and advisory support services on matters related to the WPS agenda available to negotiating parties.

4. Design inclusive and transparent formal peacebuilding processes that present opportunities for the engagement of women in different capacities.

5. Work with women and civil society groups to improve the quality and consistency of their contributions to informal peace processes in order to advance the WPS agenda.

6. Provide financial and technical support for informal peace processes that include advancing the WPS agenda and empowering women in their agendas.

7. Establish learning and institutional development mechanisms to promote women's activism for peace within formal and informal processes.