

Report from a meeting on WPS

Inaugural meeting of the WPS Working Group for the Arab States

Amman, 4th – 5th June 2024



Swedish Dialogue Institute
for the Middle East and North Africa

Report

On June 5th and 6th, the Swedish Dialogue Institute for the Middle East and North Africa hosted the inaugural meeting of the WPS Working Group for the Arab States in Amman. This event marked the beginning of a series of consultations and dialogues, aimed at analyzing existing WPS frameworks, identifying gaps and challenges, and developing concrete recommendations for better implementing the WPS agenda in the Arab States region.

Background

The WPS Working Group for the Arab States was created following the cancelation of the WPS Regional Policy Forum that was supposed to take place in Beirut in October 2023, but had to be canceled due to regional developments¹. Instead, it was decided, amongst organizing partners, to join forces in creating a WPS Working Group for the Arab States and to arrange a series of smaller meetings.

The Working Group, which consists of some fifteen WPS experts (peacebuilders, peace practitioners, policy experts, researchers, and private sector representatives), is led by the WPS Regional Hub at the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs in collaboration with the UN Women Regional Office for the Arab States. Other organizations partnering in these efforts are Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, the Arab Reform Initiative, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung MENA, the Middle East Council on Global Affairs, Inclusive Peace, the Embassy of Switzerland to Lebanon and Syria, and the Swedish Dialogue Institute.

The group aims to be a regional mechanism that influences and informs WPS policy spaces and develops policy recommendations. As part of this work, a so-called “white paper” will be produced and shared with the international community, to ensure that voices from the region are included in global discussions about the WPS agenda.

This initiative has been taken as the global community prepares to commemorate the 25th anniversary of UNSCR 1325 and the landmark Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda, in 2025.

¹ Following the cancellation, the Dialogue Institute held an online meeting on October 16 titled "Women, Peace, and Security in Light of Recent Regional Trends and Developments" – [read full report here](#).

The inaugural meeting of the WPS Working Group

On June 5th and 6th, the Swedish Dialogue Institute for the Middle East and North Africa hosted the inaugural meeting of the WPS Working Group. This two-day meeting was an excellent occasion for networking, joint reflections and experience sharing, as well as for the developments of analysis and recommendations. The participants discussed past achievements, gaps and challenges and developed recommendations for the women, peace, and security agenda.

Past achievements within the WPS agenda

The meeting highlighted both the achievements and the gaps and challenges of the WPS agenda in the MENA region. Participants pointed to significant progress made, including amplifying women's voices, promoting their participation in peace and security efforts, and gaining global recognition. Achievements mentioned included Arab women briefing the UN Security Council, the formation of the Women Advisory Board, and active roles in some of the political dialogues in countries in conflict. The agenda has fostered collaboration through local and national networks and secured resources for initiatives and projects related to women, peace, and security. Policy impacts, including National Action Plans on UNSCR 1325 in various countries, underscore its significance.

Gaps and challenges

Despite these achievements, participants highlighted that significant gaps continue to hinder the WPS agenda's effectiveness. Challenges include resistance to changing gender roles, uneven implementation of National Action Plans (NAPs), inconsistent international support, limited public awareness, and perceived elitism. Economic hardships and specific threats faced by Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) complicate progress. The agenda also inadequately addresses women's situation under occupation, who face heightened risks and mental health challenges.

Identified Areas of Improvement

To improve the WPS agenda, the group identified several areas that need attention, including stronger accountability mechanisms, enhanced transparency, and comprehensive monitoring; protection strategies addressing state failures, cyberviolence, and militarization impacts; sustainable strategies for women's participation, economic empowerment, and overcoming language barriers. Strengthening international legal systems and ensuring adaptability to changes were also seen as vital. Additionally, attracting men and including them in this process is crucial. Fostering inclusive dialogue, promoting intersectionality, and employing strategic communication will enhance public awareness and support.



Reflection, active listening, participation and brainstorming were core elements of the dialogue.

Recommendations

Recommendations developed by the participants were directed to International Organizations, national governments, local NGOs, community organizers, donors, and human rights organizations. The recommendation included:

- *Cultural Sensitivity and Localization:* Implementing culturally sensitive educational programs and community dialogues is essential. This involves translating and adapting WPS terminology to local languages and contexts, ensuring that the materials are relatable and resonate with the target audience.
- *Mental Health and Protection:* It is important to develop and fund community-based mental health programs specifically tailored to women in conflict and under occupation. Comprehensive protection frameworks must be implemented, including legal, social, and physical protections for politically active women, WHRDs, activists, and peacebuilders.
- *Awareness and Inclusive Policy Development:* Public awareness campaigns using various media platforms should be developed to increase understanding of the WPS agenda. Partnering with governments and international organizations to disseminate WPS information and engage the public is key. Women from diverse backgrounds, including marginalized communities, must be involved in policy development and implementation processes.

- *Political Will and Funding:* Advocating for stronger political commitment and securing domestic funding for NAPs is crucial. International donors should be encouraged to support capacity-building for local ownership and sustainability. Additionally, a global campaign should be launched to re-engage support for the WPS agenda, and national budgets should be allocated to NAPs, prioritizing their implementation.
- *Sustainable Support and Engagement:* Supporting capacity-building initiatives for sustainable NAP implementation is necessary. Financial and diplomatic backing for the WPS agenda should be renewed. Donors are encouraged to build deeper relationships with recipient organizations, promoting project co-creation to meet local needs.
- *Holistic and Inclusive Approach:* The WPS agenda should be broadened to address all challenges facing women, advocating for comprehensive policy recognition. A task force should be established to address the needs of Palestinian women under occupation, ensuring their voices inform policies. Strengthening partnerships with human rights organizations will provide robust support for WHRDs and activists.

Ways forward to enhance the implementation of the WPS agenda

The WPS Working Group for the Arab States will continue with a series of closed-door meetings after the summer. This process aims to develop a WPS “white paper” to be shared with the international community as it prepares to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the landmark Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda in 2025.



A wealth of knowledge, experience and insights was shared among participants.