



## From Military Integration to Sustainable Peace *Redefining the Role of Civil Society in the WPS Agenda*

### Introduction

The Women, Peace and Security Agenda established by the United Nations Security Council through Resolution 1325 in 2000 represents a transformative milestone in international policy. Initially conceived to address the unique impacts of conflicts on women and to promote their active participation in peace and security efforts, the WPS agenda has since expanded into a comprehensive framework designed to support women's involvement in all aspects of public life, including during peacetime and in crises situations that do not involve armed conflict. However, despite its broad scope and ambitions, the implementation of the WPS

agenda has increasingly skewed towards militarized approaches, particularly through the development of National Action Plans.

**This paper argues that the emphasis on integrating women into military roles in Jordan and across the Arab region, while important, is insufficient. Gender equality and meaningful participation can only be achieved with a paradigm shift towards more inclusive, non-militarized strategies that can empower women within and beyond military structures.**

### Military and Civil Society: Where is the Balance?

NAPs, in particular from Western countries, have tended to focus on making "war safe for women" rather than promoting demilitarization efforts. This approach not only normalizes war but also reinforces an elite-centric security politics dominated by a narrow group of "security experts". Such a focus diverts attention from the original goals of the WPS agenda, which sought to promote demilitarization and empower civil society as key actors in achieving gender equality and sustainable peace. Militarism, as defined by scholars, extends war-related activities and meanings into social and political life, shaping how societies understand and engage with violence and authority. Within the WPS framework, this militaristic approach has resulted in security policies that prioritize military solutions, **integrating women into these structures without challenging the underlying militaristic ethos.**

**The militarization of the WPS agenda raises critical concerns as the integration of women into military roles often reinforces existing patriarchal structures.** Gender equality and military operations inherently conflict due to the militarized nature of security forces which traditionally uphold masculine norms and values. Studies on gender advisors in NATO militaries reveals that while these advisors play crucial roles, their impact is limited by the entrenched military culture that resists substantive gender equality changes. Furthermore, research on women's participation in peace negotiations underscores that true and lasting peace is more likely

when women are meaningfully included in peace processes outside of military frameworks. Instead, the current trend towards militarization not only undermines the WPS agenda's original goals but also perpetuates a cycle where women's roles are limited to fitting within existing security paradigms rather than transforming them.

The rise in women's participation in the military across the Arab region, For example in Jordan, underscores these challenges. For instance, in the first phase of the Jordanian National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325 (2018-2022), a huge investment in military gender mainstreaming was made. Data from the Second National Progress report (2018-2021) showed significant increases in women's representation in the security sector:

- Security sector overall: from 3.18% in 2019 to 7.38% in 2020.
- Jordanian Armed Forces (JAF): from 6.8% in 2017 to 8.83% in 2020.
- Public Security Directorate (PSD): from 4.97% in 2019 to 5.92% in 2020.
- Women in peacekeeping operations (JAF): from 13% in 2019 to 14% in 2020.
- Women in peacekeeping operations (PSD): from 3.60% in 2019 to 21.1% in 2020.

However, these increases in numbers have not translated into significant advancements in leadership roles or meaningful participation. Women remain underrepresented in senior leadership positions, with a decrease in such roles:

- JAF: from 1.65% in 2019 to 1.37% in 2020.
- PSD: from 2.63% in 2019 to 1.98% in 2020.

Furthermore, the fact that women are primarily assigned to non-combat and medical roles suggests a level of tokenism rather than meaningful integration. The slight increase from 1% to 1.4% in non-traditional positions within the JAF also indicates slow progress in diversifying roles for women. Perception surveys reinforce these concerns, revealing significant gender gaps in the positive perceptions of women's deployment in peacekeeping operations, as well as their entry, advancement, and leadership in security sectors. While 69.45% of women viewed their deployment positively, only 28.65% of men shared this view, highlighting ongoing cultural and attitudinal barriers within the military and security sectors.

## The Crucial Role of Local Civil Society in Advancing the WPS Agenda

Given the limitations of a militarized approach, it is imperative to refocus on the role of civil society. Women-led organizations are uniquely positioned to address the cultural and societal challenges that military integration cannot, making them indispensable to the success of the WPS agenda.

**The lack of mechanisms to ensure active civil society participation in security-related issues indicates a top-down approach, potentially limiting grassroots engagement and broader societal support for gender mainstreaming.** The overemphasis on militarized approaches within the WPS agenda has marginalized the role of civil society organizations, particularly those that are women-led. This significant investment in military gender mainstreaming has resulted in insufficient support for civil society, undermining the efforts to achieve comprehensive gender equality and sustainable peace. Civil society organizations, essential for promoting grassroots engagement and non-military peacebuilding strategies, have been included in the development and implementation of the WPS agenda in Jordan. However, their involvement has not been fully leveraged, indicating a need for greater integration and support to enhance their impact. Effective gender mainstreaming should go beyond increasing the number of women in military roles; it should focus on transforming the underlying principles of security to promote true equality and peace. The current militarized focus has not only diverted resources away from civil society but also created significant challenges in localization efforts, ownership of goals, and the overall effectiveness of the WPS agenda.

The importance of women-led civil society organizations in effectively implementing the WPS agenda cannot be overstated. They are essential agents of change within their communities and through their organizations. Achieving women's full and equal participation in Jordan, requires their wider and more organic involvement in the civic space. This involvement is crucial for women to develop leadership roles across various sectors of Jordanian society, influencing both policy and practice at all levels.

However, despite significant efforts to train civil society in Jordan on UNSCR 1325, there have been persistent challenges in effectively communicating its importance to a wider audience. Gaps and challenges often arise from unequal partnerships between local and international levels. These issues have prevented local organizations from taking the lead and ownership of implementation strategies and projects.

To address these challenges, there is a pressing need for more effective communication strategies and training programs that not only disseminate information but also build the institutional capacity of local organizations to understand and advocate for the WPS. Stronger partnerships are crucial in creating an environment to foster women's inclusion and participation in the political, social, and economic spheres. To do so, women-led organizations need to be engaged on a deeper and wider level in the elaboration and implementation of strategies as they are the actors that can better understand and bring the perspectives and needs of their communities.

For the WPS agenda to be successful, both governments and international donors need to more widely acknowledge and support the role of civil society organizations to develop a work that allows them to take ownership and lead in efforts to achieve the WPS objectives. It is not enough to involve them as mere implementers of externally designed strategies; they must be empowered to shape these strategies in ways that are most relevant and effective for their communities. Moreover, there is a critical need to invest in building the knowledge, skills, and capacities of these organizations so that they are better equipped to translate the WPS agenda into practical actions within their contexts. This includes providing resources for capacity-building initiatives, facilitating knowledge exchange, and ensuring that local organizations have the tools they need to monitor and evaluate their progress effectively.

Furthermore, greater cooperation and dialogue between different sectors of society, including the military and defense forces, is necessary for the successful implementation of the WPS agenda. Collaboration across these sectors can help in building long-lasting results that address the unique needs of society. By fostering partnerships between civil society, government, and the military, it is possible to create a more holistic and inclusive approach to peace and security. This collaboration will also help to localize the WPS agenda, ensuring that its principles are not just implemented in theory but are also adapted to the specific cultural and societal contexts of the local context and the broader Arab region.

## Conclusions

Arab countries serve as a significant example of the challenges that several countries face regarding policies aimed at increasing women's roles in peace and security. The Jordanian context illustrates that while important steps have been made, there is still considerable room for further significant improvement. By addressing the current gaps and fostering more inclusive and cooperative approaches, Jordan can continue to serve as a model for how the WPS agenda can be effectively implemented in ways that truly empower women and promote sustainable peace.

## Recommendations:

### Integrating civil society into national security mechanisms

Introduce policy changes that formally integrate representatives from women-led civil society organizations into national security mechanisms, committees, and decision-making bodies. This inclusion would ensure that the voices of women and grassroots communities are heard at the highest levels of policy formulation. This strategy would diversify perspectives and challenge the traditional militaristic paradigms that have dominated security discussions.

### Promoting cross-sectoral partnerships for peacebuilding:

Facilitate the creation of cross-sectoral partnerships between civil society, the military, and government entities. These partnerships would focus on collaborative peacebuilding projects that combine the strengths of each sector—military expertise, governmental authority, and civil society's deep community ties. By working together on joint initiatives, these sectors can develop more holistic and inclusive strategies for achieving the WPS agenda's goals.

### Donor-Supported WPS Programming for Civil-Military Cooperation:

Encourage donors to prioritize funding for WPS programming that fosters collaboration between civil society organizations and the military. By supporting initiatives that bring together these traditionally separate sectors, donors can help create integrated approaches to peacebuilding that leverage the strengths of both sectors. This cooperation could include joint training programs, shared peacebuilding projects, and regular dialogue between civil society and military actors. Such initiatives would ensure that gender perspectives and community needs are central to security strategies, ultimately enhancing the effectiveness and inclusivity of WPS efforts.

