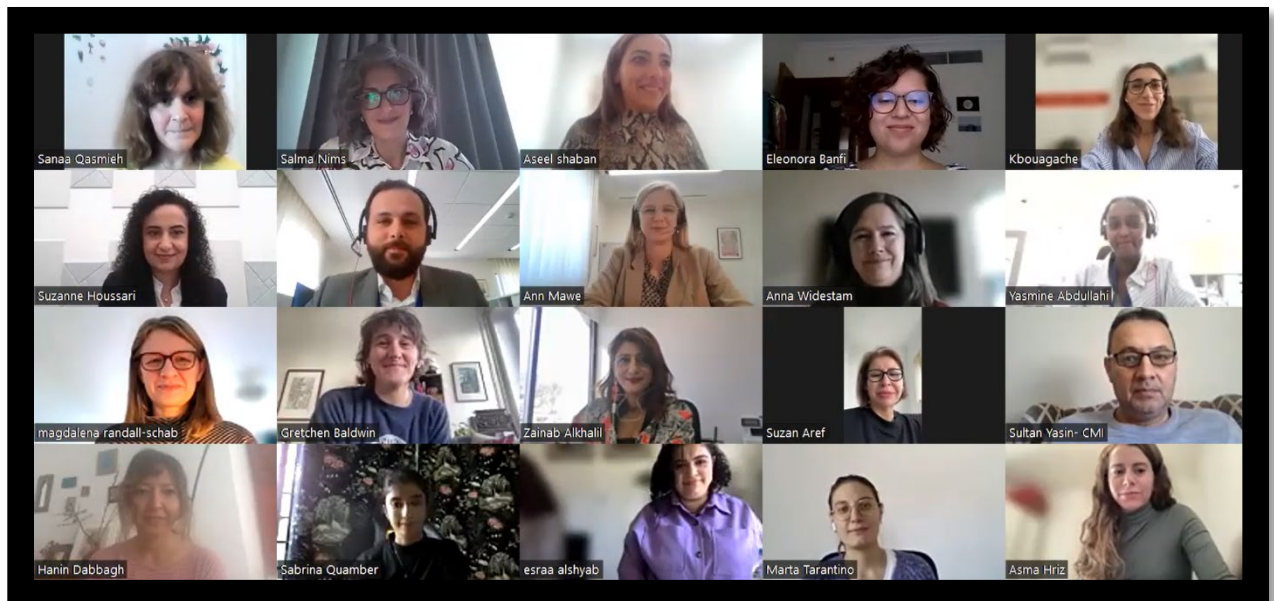# Report from the 6th online meeting with the WPS Informal Network

Towards the 25th Anniversary of UNSCR 1325: What's Next for the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda in the Arab States?

2024, October 24th

Swedish Dialogue Institute
for the Middle East and North Africa

Summary

On October 24th, 2024, the Swedish Dialogue Institute for the Middle East and North Africa co-hosted an online meeting on the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda with its **WPS informal network**[1] in collaboration with the Arab Renaissance for Democracy and Development (ARDD). As part of a series of meetings, held in connection with the WPS week at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), the session focused on the way ahead of the 25th anniversary of UN Security Council Resolution 1325, which will be marked next year. It provided an opportunity to reflect on the progress, challenges, and future of the WPS agenda in the Arab region.

During the discussions, network members highlighted the need for collaboration, inclusivity, and strategic action to advance the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda. **Key points** included the establishment of a Common Funding Arrangement (CFA) to support coalitions and equitable resource distribution, the importance of grants encouraging partnerships between well-established and newly formed organizations, and the creation of a community of practice to engage governments and civil society. Participants emphasized addressing challenges such as shrinking civic spaces, improving NAP implementation, revisiting terminology to suit local contexts ahead of the WPS agenda's 25th anniversary, and pursuing legal reforms and stronger donor-government coordination to ensure meaningful progress.

This meeting built on the momentum of recent regional WPS conferences, which emphasized the need for a unified Arab voice and coherent strategies to advance the agenda. By convening key stakeholders, including academics, civil society representatives, policymakers, and international experts, the meeting provided a platform for discussions and exchanges that reflected on regional priorities and contributed to the global reassessment of UNSCR 1325 in 2025.

The meeting commenced by three presentations

Moderated by **Dr. Eleonora Banfi**, Manager of Al Nahda Women Studies at ARDD, the discussion commenced with three brief presentations by three distinguished speakers. **Suzanne El Houssari**, Communications Director at the Middle East Council on Global Affairs in Doha, **Sanaa Qasmieh**, Team Lead and WPS System Strengthening at Chemonics International, and **Dr. Salma al-Nims**, Independent Gender and Social Inclusion Advisor.

WPS Working Group for the Arab States

The first presentation was delivered by Suzanne El Houssari about the work of the WPS Working Group for the Arab States[2], which is developing a White Paper to revisit the WPS agenda and

---

[1] **The Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) informal network**: a network facilitated by the Swedish Dialogue Institute, serves as a regional platform connecting a diverse range of stakeholders from the Middle East, North Africa, Sweden, and Europe. Participants include academics, policymakers, civil society representatives, media professionals, private sector actors, and think tanks. **The network aims** to bring together individuals and organizations dedicated to advancing the WPS agenda in the MENA region through regular online meetings, fostering collaboration, dialogue, and knowledge exchange across sectors and regions.

[2] **The WPS Working Group for the Arab States**, comprising around 15 WPS experts from various fields, is led by the WPS Regional Hub at the Issam Fares Institute in collaboration with UN Women's Regional Office for the Arab States. Key partners include GIZ, the Arab Reform Initiative, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung MENA, the Middle East Council on Global Affairs, Inclusive Peace, the Swiss Embassy to Lebanon and Syria, and the Swedish Dialogue Institute – read more here.

create an Arab regional narrative ahead of its 25th anniversary. She outlined key achievements, including increased visibility for women in peacebuilding and enhanced funding for organizations supporting women's inclusion, despite recent funding declines. Challenges highlighted include uneven implementation of WPS National Action Plans and the lack of locally tailored terminology in WPS efforts. The group's recommendations focus on fostering cultural sensitivity in implementation, strengthening domestic funds for civil society organizations, increasing political will for women's inclusion in decision-making, and improving communication to build alliances for the WPS agenda.

Regional Conference in Amman to Advance WPS agenda

The second presentation was by Sanaa Qasmieh about a regional workshop organized by Chemonics in Amman, which convened stakeholders to share recommendations on advancing the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda. A key focus of the workshop was on the pillar of participation, emphasizing women's meaningful involvement in political and diplomatic spaces. Workshop participants discussed barriers specific to the region, such as Yemen's protracted conflict, Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories, and Iraq's instability, which create unsafe environments for women. Sanaa highlighted key takeaways from the workshop including the importance of sustainable WPS initiatives through domestic funding, integrating WPS into education systems, and fostering partnerships with key stakeholders within countries. She also stressed the need for culturally sensitive advocacy, avoiding a blaming approach by WPS actors, engaging religious leaders as gatekeepers, and encouraging collaboration with male and female peacebuilders to promote inclusivity and effectiveness.

Broader regional analysis of WPS

Dr. Salma al-Nims provided a regional analysis of WPS implementation, highlighting gaps and opportunities for progress. She noted that while some MENA countries have adopted WPS National Action Plans (NAPs), implementation remains weak due to structural challenges and regional conflicts, with low indexes indicating the region is lagging. She emphasized that WPS should not be treated as a separate compartment but integrated into all frameworks and processes, such as national development plans, conflict resolution strategies, peacebuilding initiatives, and gender equality policies. Global factors such as occupation, militarization, and insufficient action to address conflicts further hinder progress. Dr. al-Nims urged women in the region to intensify collaboration and coordination now, rather than waiting for the next WPS anniversary, stressing the need to avoid competition and work collectively. She also highlighted the idea of "global peace" and south-south partnerships to advance the WPS agenda effectively.

Discussions

After the presentations, network members engaged in a discussion, sharing ideas and insights based on the topics presented.

A Lebanese participant emphasized the importance of establishing a Common Funding Arrangement (CFA)—a pooled fund where donors align resources to efficiently support shared goals. This mechanism would encourage coalitions among like-minded women's groups and organizations. They also highlighted the need for recipient governments to take a more active role in equitably distributing funds across geographic regions, reinforcing the value of the CFA concept. Additionally, the participant urged donors to set conditionalities for recipient governments to guarantee free and safe civic spaces.

Building on this, **a representative from Chemonics** stressed the value of encouraging grants that prioritize coalitions, particularly between well-established and newly formed organizations. They also underscored the importance of creating a community of practice that fosters collaboration between governments and civil society organizations.

An Iraqi participant raised concerns about the challenges of coordination among like-minded organizations and emphasized the need for strategizing in light of shrinking civic spaces, particularly in Iraq. They called for the establishment of robust monitoring, evaluation, and enforcement mechanisms to ensure accountability and the effective implementation of National Action Plans (NAPs).

Similarly, **a Jordanian participant** highlighted the importance of developing strategies to present the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda as mutually beneficial, with clear entry points that engage key societal stakeholders. They also pointed to the need for revisiting terminology and adjusting language to reflect local contexts, ensuring inclusivity and resonance as the 25th anniversary of the WPS agenda approaches.

Finally, **an Algerian participant** emphasized the need for legal reforms following the adoption of NAPs and called for stronger political will from both donors and governments. They urged donors to think beyond grassroots initiatives—while acknowledging their importance—and focus on effective coordination with governments to advance the WPS agenda comprehensively.

This discussion highlighted the interconnected challenges and opportunities in advancing the WPS agenda, with a strong call for collaboration, inclusivity, and strategic action.