

Seize the moment! **Integrate WPS** in Lebanon's reforms

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While Lebanon's civic space is shrinking and women's rights are threatened, feminist civil society continues to lead on peacebuilding and reform. Now is a critical moment when Lebanon's security sector reform is progressing for policymakers to invest in local women-led efforts, uphold Women, Peace and Security commitments, and ensure that gender equality remains central to Lebanon's recovery and governance.

Introduction

Lebanon is at a critical juncture. Overlapping crises are exposing the fragility of state institutions, eroding infrastructure, heavily restricting civic space, and reversing hard-won gains in women's rights. Despite these pressures and the ongoing Israeli war on Lebanon, women's movements and feminist civil society remain powerful and resistant, providing essential services while driving legal and political advocacy. Grassroots actors continue to innovate, organize, and reframe Women, Peace and Security (WPS) principles in ways that reflect lived realities, even as state and donor frameworks risk depoliticizing women's rights.

With the efforts put into the operationalisation of UN Security Council resolution 1701, Lebanon has entered into a sensitive process of security sector reform. This offers a critical opportunity to integrate WPS, with targeted support and structural reforms, to safeguard vulnerable populations, strengthen democratic governance, and ensure progress on gender equality. Sustained international solidarity, legal reforms, and direct support for women's rights and peacebuilding organizations are essential to protect civic space and advance women's rights, political participation and gender equality in Lebanon.

Background

Lebanon adopted its first UNSCR 1325 National Action Plan (NAP) in 2019 (2019–2022), endorsed by the Council of Ministers. While this was a formal milestone for women's rights in the country, it was largely donor-driven and steered through the National Commission for Lebanese Women (NCLW) and UN Women. Consequently, like other NAPs in the region, its priorities and targets were disconnected from grassroots realities. The NAP functions more as a political placeholder, dislocated from lived struggle and real feminist political activists who lead grassroots organizing. Women's political participation in Lebanon continues to lack behind.

Since 2019, Lebanon has endured compounding crises: the October 2019 uprising and subsequent repression on activists and civil society; the 2020 Beirut Port explosion which devastated large parts of the city and infrastructure and exposed deep state negligence and corruption; the ongoing economic collapse and banking crisis which continues to exacerbate poverty and inequality; and the ongoing Israeli war on Lebanon which started in 2024 which killed thousands, displaced over a million, led to a sharp increase in SGBV and left many groups such as women, domestic workers and refugees particularly vulnerable.

These intersecting and cascading crises have revealed the fragility of Lebanon's sectarian governance system and exposed the limits of donor-dominated WPS frameworks. At the same time, feminist organizations have continued to lead grassroots organizing, reframing UNSCR 1325 principles through community action, migrant worker protections, engaging men towards feminist peace and collective care initiatives.

What is happening right now?

- Shrinking civic space and securitization: Since 2019, Lebanese authorities have revived dormant anti-terror statutes to interrogate and detain activists, including women documenting political violence. Peaceful assembly, NGO financing, and online expression are increasingly treated as security threats. Feminist activists are particularly vulnerable due to their visible political advocacy and the foreign funding they at times receive.
- Donor-driven WPS frameworks lack depth: Many NGOs treat UNSCR 1325 as a technical "checklist" rather than a political framework. Donor templates push service-delivery outputs over structural change, sidelining terms like *gender equality* and *empowerment*. Feminist critiques highlight that WPS implementation often ignores the sectarian and militarized realities shaping women's lives.
- Digital rights and feminist organizing: Feminist organizations have drafted amendments to strengthen Lebanon's cybercrime law, criminalizing non-consensual image distribution and cyber-extortion. The draft is pending parliamentary review. Parallel initiatives, such as the Arab Feminist Forum for Digital Content (2023), are building feminist digital spaces through secure archiving, storytelling, and counter-disinformation strategies.
- Reclaiming language and narratives: Grassroots actors translate UNSCR 1325 into everyday action—engaging men, migrant worker protection, and community care—without waiting for donor approval. Activists strategically use the discourse of "protection" to demand housing, care infrastructure, and welfare redistribution, reframing care as political labor and exposing state neglect.
- Feminist strength in crisis: Lebanese feminists practice "resistance in camouflage", appropriating donor and state language while preserving radical demands. This strategy secures resources and visibility while challenging both state repression and donor instrumentalism.

We need to act now

Recommendations to diplomatic actors

1. Integrate gender-sensitive approaches into Lebanon's reconstruction and recovery frameworks, ensuring women's leadership from grassroots to national levels.
2. Support women mediators and peacebuilders as key actors in rebuilding infrastructure, restoring trust, and advancing social cohesion.
3. Encourage embassies, UN partners, and development agencies to adopt coordinated strategies that align humanitarian, peacebuilding, and development efforts under the WPS and SDG16+ frameworks.
4. Facilitate policy dialogues and technical partnerships between local peace networks and donors to ensure context-specific, evidence-based interventions.
5. Promote accountability and transparency in international aid and in the national institutions to ensure resources directly reach those working on the ground.

Recommendations to donors

1. Shift to trust-based partnerships with local women leaders and networks who already have the legitimacy and community trust to act effectively.
2. Ensure that international assistance builds on existing local capacities rather than replacing them, they need space and resources to lead.
3. Promote co-creation of priorities with local civil society, ensuring funding and programming are shaped by regional and national contexts, not imported templates.
4. Move beyond donor-driven project cycles to strategically partner with organisations to strengthen their capacities to foster sustainable, community-led initiatives that contribute to long-term peace and social cohesion.
5. Provide flexible funding and capacity support that enable women-led organizations to engage substantively and independently.

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