

Implementation of Women, Peace and Security Agenda: NOW MORE THAN EVER

25 November 2024

Every year, on November 25th, the international movement for women's rights recalls that violence against women and girls (VAWG) is one of the most widespread, persistent and devastating human rights violations with no country being spared from this scourge.

VAWG is rooted in the historically, systemic, and structurally unequal power relations between women and men that keep women and girls in inferior position. It is both a cause and consequence of VAWG, which on its part is a major barrier to women's participation in decision making at all levels. According to the *Regional Guidelines for the Implementation of Women, Peace and Security Agenda (WPSA)*¹ developed by EuroMed Feminist Initiative, VAWG is closely linked with peace and security as "The subordinated position of women and their marginalization in times of peace, place them in an even more vulnerable situation during war, military conflict, and occupation. Women find themselves trapped and denied economic resources, opportunities, and services" (p. 9).

The continuous violence, the ongoing instability and armed conflicts in the euro-Mediterranean region, notably the on-going armed attacks by Israel on Gaza and recently on Lebanon exacerbate existing inequalities and place women and girls at increased risk of violence, displacement, and economic hardship.

Since October 2023, the Israeli attacks on Gaza resulted in unnumerable people killed, a greater majority being women and children, hundreds of thousands injured or missing under the rubbles, hundreds kidnapped and tortured in Israeli prisons, and 1.9 million people internally displaced.

Complete destruction of infrastructure, health and educational institutions, denying the entry of humanitarian aid, and the siege on Gaza has been devastating the Palestinians' rights and lives for more than 13 months now. In West Bank, Israeli raids killed more than 780 people including 167 children, blocking and destroying roads, and kidnapping Palestinians while allowing settlers to attack civilians.

In Lebanon, as a result of the Israeli aggression on South of Lebanon, more than 3,380 people have been killed, more than 14,400 people injured and around 1.4 million people internally displaced. These are not only numbers, but these are also lives lost, lives severely impacted. Meanwhile the several calls for a cease fire and de-escalation by the United Nations have failed drastically, and Israel keeps ignoring the international law with impunity and even support from some Western powers.

Women and girls face heightened vulnerabilities, with increased domestic violence, sexual violence, early marriages and non-registered children, trauma and mental health challenges like depression and anxiety, along with food insecurity. Women and girls are under the constant threat of death and displacement in Gaza. In addition, displaced women in Palestine and Lebanon face significant challenges in accessing services and meeting basic needs including healthcare services, sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services, as well as protection, hygiene, and nutrition support. In war and conflict, women's voice continues to be silenced due to social, political, and cultural constraints, as well as legal discrimination that limits their access to power structures.

This has underscored the critical importance of the WPSA for ensuring women's protection, creating the conditions for their participation in peace processes, and addressing the specific challenges they face in protracted crises. The WPSA emphasizes protecting women and girls from violence, especially

¹ https://www.efi-ife.org/en/extra/hub/publications-reports-studies-and-fact-sheets?modal_page=pdf-detail&modal_detail_id=97178-regional-guidelines-for-the-implementation-of-women-peace-and-security-agenda-in-the-south-mediterranean

sexual violence. By focusing on protection, the civil society organizations in Palestine and Lebanon have been actively working to align with the WPSA's goal of safeguarding vulnerable groups and providing comprehensive support for women and girls in crisis situation, through interventions such as distributing the dignity kits, providing legal counselling and provision of protection services.

The change in the actions of civil society from advocacy to direct service provision showcases the vital role these groups, especially led by women, play in implementing the WPSA on the ground. They have adapted their activities in response to immediate needs, demonstrating their essential role in crisis response and aligning their work with the WPSA pillars of protection, relief, and recovery for women and girls.

EuroMed Feminist Initiative, in the present context continues to call for the immediate ceasefire, stop of the genocide in Gaza and of the attacks on Lebanon and other countries, for the end of the inhumane siege on Gaza and the opening of all borders for humanitarian support.

We continue to call for the implementation of the UN resolutions calling to end the Israeli Occupation and for the establishment of a sovereign Palestinian State without further delay, along with the implementation of the right of return of Palestinians to their original homeland.

EuroMed Feminist Initiative continues more than ever to demand political solutions to all conflicts, where, in reference to WPSA, women's rights defenders are an integral part of all political and peace negotiations. By prioritizing protection, promoting women's leadership in peacebuilding, and ensuring economic and social support for affected women, the WPSA not only aids those in immediate need but also builds foundations for long-term peace and stability in the region. This approach calls for an urgent commitment from both local actors and the international community to support the resilience, rights, and access to leadership of for women in Lebanon and Palestine amidst the ongoing and intensifying war.

To effectively implement the WPSA in Lebanon and Palestine, international actors, including the United Nations, donors, and humanitarian organizations, must increase support for women-centred initiatives, particularly in high-risk areas affected by ongoing violence. This includes:

- **Targeted and flexible funding for women-led organizations:** many of these organizations are directly addressing the needs of women and girls during war and require flexible financial support to continue their work effectively.
- **Enhance protections for women and girls:** provide support to local actions providing support services, including trauma support, counseling, and legal aid, along with the provision of protection services, healthcare, education, and shelters, for displaced and vulnerable women.
- **Promote women's leadership in crisis response:** support women-led organizations responding to the crisis ensuring sustained funding and resources in the humanitarian efforts and making sure women's voices are integrated in peace negotiations and policy discussion.
- **Strengthen community based and grassroot peacebuilding efforts:** by supporting local women's initiatives and actions, fostering dialogues between communities (including host communities, refugees and IDPs in Lebanon for example), and creating safe spaces for women to voice their analyses and demands, and supporting the creation of inclusive spaces for community resilience. There is a need to emphasize a gender sensitive perspective in resolving conflict and building peace. There is also a need to support local and national actions providing economic assistance and aid to women to address economic challenges faced by vulnerable women including refugees and IDPs.
- **Accountability:** make sure documentation of human rights violations of women and girls and violations of the international human rights law by Israel is ongoing and is not silenced, and to provide evidence to ensure accountability for such violations.
- **Regional collaboration and knowledge sharing:** coordinated efforts between women's organizations, across Lebanon, Palestine and the wider in the Euro-Med region by exchanging resources, strategies, and experiences in conflict management, crisis response and advocacy can strengthen the WPSA's impact and its role in the solution of the conflict.