



The Women, Youth, Peace and Security Program in Iraq

Implemented by Search for Common Ground
Iraq (SEARCH), in partnership with Women
Empowerment Organization (WEO)

NAP Annual Report 2
August 2025

Abbreviations

SEARCH	Search for Common Ground
WEO	Women Empowerment Organization
WPS	Women Peace and Security
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution
NAP	National Action Plan
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
GIWPS	Georgetown University's Institute for Women, Peace and Security
PRIO	Peace Research Institute Oslo
KRG	Kurdistan Regional Government
INAP	Iraqi National Action Plan
IWN	Iraqi Women's Network
WPN	Women's Peace Network
WYPS	Women, Youth, Peace, and Security
WRO	Women's Rights Organizations
YLO	Youth-Led Organizations
SIDA	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
WLO	Women-Led Organizations
ToT	Training of Trainer
DME	Design, Monitoring, and Evaluation

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The Purpose of this Report-

The NAP annual progress report is part of the deliverables of the Women, Youth, Peace and Security Program in Iraq, where one report per annum would be developed throughout the implementation period aiming at:

- 1- Highlighting the status and the progress of the NAP implementation in Iraq focusing on addressing the unique challenges Iraqi women face regarding active participation in all aspects of society.
- 2- Showcasing the contribution of the Women, Youth, Peace and Security Program in Iraq in the fulfilment of NAP and in laying the groundwork for integrating women into peace and security processes.

The Executive Summary

The Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda, as outlined in United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325, calls for the protection and meaningful participation of women in peace and security processes. Iraq, the first country in the MENA region to adopt a National Action Plan (NAP) for WPS in 2014, launched its second NAP in 2020, building on earlier lessons with a stronger monitoring framework and broader institutional engagement. Despite this progress, implementation remains challenged by ongoing instability, deeply rooted inequality norms, and financial and institutional constraints.

Iraq's persistently low WPS Index ranking highlights the barriers faced by women across sectors. The escalation of regional conflict has intensified security threats and diverted national attention from critical reform agendas. Simultaneously, global reductions in funding for equality programming, especially from the United States, have significantly impacted the ability of civil society and international actors to sustain WPS initiatives in Iraq.

In this context, the Women, Youth, Peace, and Security (WYPS) program, funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) and implemented by Search for Common Ground (SEARCH) in partnership with the Women Empowerment Organization (WEO), has made notable contributions toward advancing inclusive peace and security in Iraq. Now in its third year, the program emphasizes grassroots empowerment, institutional engagement, and multi-stakeholder collaboration to strengthen the WPS agenda.

In 2024, the program facilitated the creation of 19 sub-national WPS networks across Iraq's governorates, engaging 95 WLOs/WROs. These networks conducted over 228 coordination meetings to identify local priorities, shape joint advocacy efforts, and align with Iraq's forthcoming Third National Action Plan (NAP III). Tailored cascade trainings reached 229 civil society representatives, building knowledge on UNSCR 1325, national policy frameworks, and effective advocacy approaches.

Youth played a central role through the School of Peace initiative, which selected and trained young leaders from all governorates to lead local peacebuilding campaigns. Nineteen media campaigns were implemented, and three youth-led initiatives were selected through a national competition for their innovation in addressing environmental justice, disability rights, and emotional well-being.

The program also launched the Men Engage Campaign, which brought together male leaders from across Iraq to challenge stereotypes of inequality and support women's participation in peace and security. Through structured dialogue sessions and collaboration with women's organizations, men's networks helped foster more inclusive narratives and community support for the WPS agenda.

While these achievements demonstrate clear progress, persistent challenges remain. Cuts in global equality funding, limited state engagement with civil society, and entrenched cultural barriers continue to hinder the full realization of WPS goals. The report emphasizes the importance of enhancing institutional capacity, securing sustained financial support, developing inclusive policies, and fostering deeper engagement with marginalized communities.

The WYPS program has laid critical groundwork for inclusive and locally driven peacebuilding in Iraq. Continued investment in networks, skills, and cross-sector collaboration will be essential to ensure the sustainability and impact of WPS efforts. With shared commitment from government, civil society, and international partners, Iraq can move closer to realizing its vision for peace, equality between males and females in the future.

Introduction

The Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda, established under United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) in October 2000, marked a historic shift in recognizing the disproportionate effects of armed conflict on women. This landmark resolution emphasized that women are not only vulnerable victims but also essential agents in conflict prevention, peacebuilding, and post-conflict reconstruction. It called on UN agencies, Member States, and all parties to conflict to prioritize women's rights, protection from inequality-based violence, and meaningful participation in peace and security efforts.

Since 2000, the UN Security Council has passed nine additional WPS resolutions, reinforcing key pillars: women's equal representation at decision-making tables, improved protection mechanisms against inequality-based crimes (especially sexual violence), integration of inequality analyses into all stages of peace operations, and inequality-sensitive training for peacekeepers. These resolute steps reflect a global commitment to equality-responsive policies in conflict and post-conflict settings.

Iraq, having endured decades of conflict—from the Iran–Iraq War (1980–1988) and Gulf War (1990–1991) to the U.S. invasion in 2003 and the rise of ISIS—faces deeply rooted security, political, and societal challenges. The persistent effects of sectarian violence, internal displacement, and inequality-based violations have underscored the urgency of integrating WPS principles into national policy. Against this backdrop, Iraq became the first country in the MENA region to adopt a National Action Plan (NAP) for UNSCR 1325 in February 2014, developed through federal and Kurdistan Regional Government collaboration, involving multiple ministries and a coalition of women's rights organizations¹

Reinforcing the first NAP—including considering post-conflict implementation and factoring in equality-sensitive capacity in institutions—Iraq launched a second National Action Plan in December 2020 under the Prime Minister. This Plan was built upon robust

¹ https://1325naps.peacewomen.org/index.php/nap-overview/iraq-nap-overview/?utm_source=chatgpt.com

stakeholder consultations (over 60 women-led groups, ministries, and civil society actors), and introduced stronger monitoring frameworks, sectoral plans at the ministry and governorate levels, and a model portal for real-time tracking and reporting ²

Key achievements include embedding equality perspectives in the Ministry of Education, Health, and Migration sectors, creating local-level programs in governorates like Ninewa, Thi-Qar, and Duhok, and integrating WPS training in military curricula via cooperation with NATO Mission Iraq and the Canadian Dallaire Centre. Progress under NAP II reflects Iraq's resolve to institutionalize male and female equality in systems of governance, security, and rehabilitation.

In 2025, the government of Iraq in partnership with national and international bodies launched the third national action plan. In March 2025, Iraq launched its Third National Action Plan (2025–2030) on Women, Peace, and Security during a high-level event led by His Excellency Mohammad Shia Al-Sudani, the Prime Minister of Iraq. His Excellency announced the plan as a key step toward strengthening women's participation in decision-making, enhancing protection mechanisms for women and children from violence, and providing support to those affected by conflict. He also launched the National Data Platform, aimed at delivering accurate and up-to-date data on women to inform policy and programming and address the ongoing challenges facing women across Iraq ³.

² https://iraq.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/peace-and-security/iraq-national-action-plan?utm_source=chatgpt.com

³ www.PMO.iq

WPS Index – Iraq Performance

In 2014, Iraq became one of the pioneering nations in the MENA region to adopt a National Action Plan (NAP) for Women, Peace, and Security (WPS), a milestone largely driven by women's rights organizations that began mobilizing in 2012. The roots of the WPS agenda in Iraq, however, reach back to 2003, when UN Security Council Resolution 1483 established the framework for post-conflict governance, explicitly urging the formation of an inclusive government protective of all citizens, regardless of sex, ethnicity, or religion.

Iraqi women-led civil society organizations were instrumental in pushing for the 2014 NAP by advocating for women's active inclusion in conflict prevention, peacebuilding, negotiations, and post-conflict recovery. Initially, the government involved these groups in drafting the NAP, gathering their insights and proposals. However, the plan was later modified—without their involvement—with two major pillars stripped: social and economic empowerment, and law and legislations. Budget allocations were also removed, and no coherent implementation framework was established.

As is often the case, Iraq's progress toward fulfilling its WPS commitments has been impeded by inconsistent political will and significant resource constraints. Many political leaders continue to overlook the positive ripple effects of equal male and female participation—on economic growth, political stability, and societal well-being. The WPS agenda transcends tokenistic female representation in governance; its aim is to foster environments where women are empowered and enjoy full equality. Research consistently shows that societies with higher levels of women's participation in political decision-making and equitable access to education and economic opportunities are more peaceful and prosperous.

The WPS Index, jointly produced by Georgetown University's Institute for Women, Peace and Security (GIWPS) and the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO), offers a global yardstick for assessing women's inclusion, justice, and security. It uses 13 indicators—ranging from educational attainment and labour force participation to intimate partner

violence and discriminatory laws—yielding a composite score that enables comparison over time and across regions⁴. According to the most recent WPS Index, Iraq ranks 168th out of 177 countries, placing it as the third-lowest performer in the MENA region—ranking just above Syria and Yemen—with a score of approximately 0.424, showing a downward trend⁵. Despite modest improvements in overall political stability since the height of ISIS-related conflict, Iraqi women continue to face profound insecurity.

Contextual Overview of INAP

Iraq was the first country in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region to adopt the progressive agenda of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 in 2000, shortly after the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime. Since that historic milestone, Iraq has been plagued by recurring waves of violence and instability. These have stemmed from a wide range of sources, including the U.S. occupation, the rise of Al Qaeda and ISIS, internal and cross-sectarian conflicts, political and ethnic tensions, and ongoing foreign influence—particularly from Iran, the United States, and Turkey. The challenges and the political instability, along with the economic downturn in Kurdistan following the referendum, and the COVID-19 pandemic have further deepened Iraq's fragility. More recently, the escalating regional conflict between Israel and Iran has added another layer of uncertainty and security risk, intensifying fears of broader destabilization across the region. Throughout these turbulent years, Iraq's federal government has seen frequent leadership changes, often without effective handovers, hindering continuity in governance and long-term planning.

A- INAP I: Local civil society, hand in hand with the Kurdistan Regional and Central Iraqi governments, created a structure of intergovernmental initial response and cooperation

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women%2C_Peace_and_Security_Index?utm_source=chatgpt.com

⁵ https://giwps.georgetown.edu/the-index/?utm_source=chatgpt.com

under the first Iraqi National Action Plan for UNSCR 1325 (INAP I) (2014-2018) that brought together high-level officials from both the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and Iraqi Federal Government as well as local and international actors. This cross-sector task force 1325 also included the Women for Peace Network (WPN) and Iraqi Network 1325. A coordinator for the Iraqi CSTF 1325 has been appointed from a women-led civil society organization. INAP I was too idealistic in its design, plagued by a lack of government funding as well as the impacts of the ISIS invasion. Therefore, it was not fully implemented, though it was further supported by the development of additional plans such as an emergency plan to support women, girls, and IDPs affected by the conflict, both inside and outside the camps. Additionally, a master plan for the implementation of the 1st NAP was developed over the years 2016-2017, encompassing the involvement of 17 ministries— 11 in the federal government and 6 in the Kurdistan region. There was substantial support from the international community, INGOs, and UN agencies to assist in this implementation. A monitoring report was also produced to track the progress of the 1st NAP, providing numerous recommendations and lessons learned for the next plan. Finally, as an international recognition, the cross-sector task force was invited to the Security Council in 2018 to brief on the implementation of the 1st NAP 1325, the success, challenges and opportunities.

B- INAP II: As INAP I drew to a close, no follow-up plan was negotiated. Two years passed without a governmental agreement on the INAP II. Although there was a civil society conference held in February 2020, to review the draft INAP II and the outcomes of this conference were submitted to the government and UN Women, but unfortunately, there was no sufficient response at that time. The cross-sectoral task force that oversaw INAP I and provided the necessary political will lost its might due to turnover in both the KRG and Central Iraqi government committee members. In 2021, UN Women entered the picture – armed with a UN mandate “to lead, promote, and coordinate efforts to advance the full realization of women’s rights and opportunities.” UN Women coordinated a second Iraqi National Action Plan for the implementation of UNSCR 1325 (INAP II). This process took a government-centered approach, while sidelining the contributions of civil society that had

previously enabled the aspects of INAP I that had been successful. While excluded from this official INAP II process, these CSOs continue to work on the ultimate objectives of UNSCR 1325, albeit without the coordinated power a more inclusive NAP could provide.

In an assessment conducted by Catalystas Consulting⁶ at the beginning of 2023, it was found that UN Women was able to create a superior framework for INAP II in terms of logical design, compared to that of its predecessor. However, for all it excels in, INAP II lacks an inclusionary process. There is a distinct lack of space for civil society, aside from a small awareness-raising programming offered directly by UN Women to select women's organizations. With civil society relegated to the role of simply overseeing the process, it is the Iraqi government left responsible for the plan's implementation. INAP II, scheduled to take place between 2020 – 2024, is only at the stage of fully agreeing on its targets and results framework in the final months of 2022.

C- INAP III: The Iraqi government, in partnership with UN Women and the National Directorate for Iraqi Women, worked on drafting the third National Action Plan—INAP III. On 5 February 2025, a high-level consultation in Baghdad convened 75 representatives from civil society and government to finalize the draft. INAP III focuses on strengthening legal frameworks, bolstering institutional capacity, and amplifying women's leadership—particularly within security institutions

The draft underscores a multi-actor approach: civil society engagement, governmental ownership, and UN coordination, focusing on pillars of participation, protection, prevention, economic empowerment, and resilience. It builds directly on mid-term evaluations of NAP II, which highlighted successes in ministry-sector integration and community-based implementation but noted the need for stronger legal enforcement and consistent tracking.

With civil society inputs informing its final form, INAP III was launched in March 2025. It represents Iraq's ongoing journey toward embedding WPS principles into national

⁶ <https://catalystasconsulting.com/shrinking-civic-space-and-unscr-1325-in-iraq/>

architecture—advancing justice, holistic protection, and sustainable peace for Iraqi women and their communities.

D- KRI-RAP: The Women, Peace, and Security Regional Action Plan (2025–2029) for the Kurdistan Region of Iraq has been finalized and officially endorsed in July 2025. It builds on the progress and lessons learned from earlier efforts, including the first regional action plan (2021–2024). This second plan aims to address evolving challenges faced by women, particularly those linked to underrepresentation in decision-making roles, pervasive inequality-based violence (GBV), limited access to economic resources, and the disproportionate impact of violent extremism and climate change on women. Drawing on recommendations from the previous plan, such as the need for unified coordination mechanisms, sustainable funding sources, stronger legal protections, and more effective monitoring and evaluation systems, the 2025–2029 plan seeks to create a more inclusive, equitable, and secure environment for women in the Kurdistan Region.

The 2025–2029 Regional Action Plan for the Kurdistan Region addresses key challenges facing women amid ongoing recovery from conflict. It prioritizes support for displaced women through healthcare, economic empowerment, and social protection. Recognizing the threat of violent extremism, the plan emphasizes women’s roles in building community resilience and preventing radicalization. Climate change impacts, particularly in rural areas, call for equality-responsive adaptation strategies. Despite some legal reforms, inequality-based violence remains widespread, requiring stronger protection mechanisms. Economic empowerment is central, with increased access to finance, training, and entrepreneurship in sectors like agriculture and tourism. The plan also promotes localized implementation across governorates, guided by a robust monitoring and evaluation framework to ensure accountability and impact.

Challenges and Way Forward

Despite some progress achieved under Iraq's National Action Plans on WPS, implementation continues to face significant challenges. The intensifying regional conflict—particularly the ongoing confrontation between Israel and Iran—adds another layer of instability, heightening security risks and shifting attention away from critical domestic priorities, including women's rights and protection. On a local level, entrenched social norms continue to restrict women's meaningful participation in peacebuilding, especially in rural areas where traditional beliefs often override national policies. These challenges are compounded by limited institutional capacity, a shortage of skilled personnel, and chronic underfunding of equality-focused programs.

Most concerning, global financial support for male and female equality has declined sharply in recent years. Cuts to funding for women and equality programs—especially by major donors like the United States—have had a direct and detrimental impact worldwide. In Iraq, these reductions have weakened the ability of international and local organizations to deliver services, sustain protection mechanisms, and advance male and female equality. Key programs supporting women's leadership, survivors of male and female-based violence, and women's economic empowerment have been scaled back or suspended due to funding shortfalls. The U.S. cutbacks have also affected the operations of UN agencies and international NGOs, many of which play a vital role in supporting WPS implementation. This loss of financing has reduced training, monitoring, and grassroots engagement—undermining hard-won progress in an already fragile context.

Women, Youth, Peace, and Security (WYPS) Program in the Region

The Women, Youth, Peace, and Security (WYPS) program is a multi-year initiative designed to enhance the meaningful and lasting participation of women and youth in promoting inclusive peace and security in Lebanon, Iraq, and Yemen. In Iraq, Search for Common Ground (SEARCH) has partnered with the Women Empowerment Organization (WEO) to implement the WYPS program. The program acknowledges that inclusive peace is best achieved through a combination of grassroots and top-down approaches. Therefore, WYPS aims to amplify the voices of WLO and WRO peacebuilders at the grassroots level, integrate these grassroots peacebuilders into municipal and national institutions and peace processes, and promote social norms that support the inclusion of diverse stakeholders in peace and security.

By consolidating influence, motivating institutions, and shifting social norms, the program aims to create an environment where diverse women and youth can participate more effectively and sustainably in peace and security efforts. The program also focuses on engaging influential male allies to support women and youth leadership in peace and security. Additionally, it seeks to advance regional networks and synergies to strengthen inclusive peace and security. Involving men and boys in appropriate ways is crucial to changing social norms and fostering male allies who support women's participation.

WYPS will tailor its in-country programming to meet local needs while identifying regional opportunities for collaboration and knowledge-sharing. This includes building sustained relationships and networks for YPS and WPS practitioners through digital platforms. This regional component ensures that national and sub-national WPS/YPS agendas benefit from shared lessons and best practices across countries, making national and regional activities complementary and mutually reinforcing.

Despite progress in Iraq, which was the first Middle Eastern country to adopt a WPS National Action Plan (NAP), several structural barriers hinder the achievement of inclusive peace and security. Key barriers include the lack of collaboration among women's rights

organizations (WROs) and youth-led organizations (YLOs) across dividing lines. Participation in peace and security processes is often limited to elite women and youth, excluding young women and other marginalized groups. Some WROs and YLOs also lack the technical skills and strategic direction needed to influence municipal and national-level peace processes and build broad-based coalitions for expanded impact.

Institutional efforts to promote the involvement of diverse women and youth in official peace and security processes often fall short, facilitating inclusion only in so-called "women's issues" or "youth's issues" while excluding them from main peace or political negotiations. Patriarchal and gerontocratic social norms further undermine the meaningful participation of women and youth in peace and security, while conventional norms of masculinity pressure men and boys to conform to strict standards of masculinity.

Women, Youth, Peace, and Security (WYPS) Program in Iraq

The WYPS program is supported by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) in Iraq and implemented by Search for Common Ground in partnership with WEO, focusing on promoting women's inclusion in peace and security processes. The program aims to empower women-led organizations (WLOs) and women-rights organizations (WROs) to participate actively in peacebuilding and reconciliation processes. The program emphasizes capacity building, mentorship, and strategic engagement across national and local levels.

The program is designed to carry out barrier and landscape analyses to identify existing women, peace, and security (WPS) networks and groups in Iraq. This involves data collection and a literature review to highlight barriers and opportunities for women's participation in peace processes. Building an evidence base for the effectiveness of women's leadership in peacebuilding, the program maps local women-led peace initiatives and creates a database for advocacy and policy analysis.

The program uses a competitive application process across Iraq's 19 governorates to select 20 WLO/WROs, aiming for at least one organization per governorate. Through consultations and capacity needs assessments, SEARCH and WEO engage selected WLO/WROs to understand their capacity needs, leading to the development of tailored capacity-building action plans. Training sessions based on these action plans cover topics like financial management, advocacy, equality between men and women, and project management, enhancing the operational capacities of the WLO/WROs.

SEARCH and WEO facilitate coordination meetings to connect WLO/WRO participants with established Iraqi WPS networks, promoting collaboration between grassroots and formal WROs. Through Training of Trainers (ToT) programs, SEARCH and WEO prepare WLO/WRO participants to train other women and youth-led organizations in their regions, ensuring knowledge transfer and skill development. The program encourages WLO/WRO participants to create sub-networks in their home governorates, supporting smaller

organizations in joining active WPS networks. Mentorship opportunities between existing and startup WLO/WROs focus on bridging ethnic, religious, and generational divides.

The program includes WPS sensitization training for government representatives, community leaders, and decision-makers on social justice and equitable-sensitive policymaking. Establishing a monitoring plan for the National Action Plan (NAP) implementation, SEARCH and WEO contribute to quarterly newsletters and annual progress reports. Advocacy initiatives are supported through grants to WLO/WSOs, enabling them to lead advocacy efforts on WPS issues and promote diverse voices in NAP implementation and policy change.

National coalition-building summits are organized to strengthen cross-sector and cross-geographical movement building and knowledge sharing among WLO/WRO participants. The School of Peace training program for youth activists promotes the WPS agenda and peacebuilding through media campaigns and competitions. Additionally, the Men Engage Campaign trains male activists to support the WPS agenda, establishing networks to promote equality between men and women in their communities.

Structured over three years, the program sets specific activities and targets for each year. It aims to consolidate the strategic engagement of WLOs/WSOs in peace processes, incentivizes institutions to adopt inclusive policies, and transform social norms to support women's participation in peace and security at all levels.



Progress of the WYPS Program in Iraq

Throughout the current annual period, the Women, Youth, Peace, and Security (WYPS) program made significant strides in strengthening the WPS civil society ecosystem in Iraq by fostering inclusive partnerships, building grassroots capacities, and amplifying the voices of women and youth in peace and security processes. The program's foundational efforts focused on enhancing coordination among Women-Led Organizations (WLOs) and Women's Rights Organizations (WROs), beginning with the second national coordination meeting in July 2024. This gathering, which brought together 20 organizations from 19 governorates, served as a critical platform for dialogue on shared challenges, such as limited access to advocacy opportunities and persistent male and female-based barriers. Through rich exchanges and goal setting, participants deepened their understanding of regional priorities and began establishing collaborative networks to advance collective influence on local and national policy processes.

Building on this momentum, the program expanded its reach by establishing 19 sub-networks—one in each governorate, with an additional structure in Baghdad due to its size and complexity. Comprising 95 organizations, these local platforms became the bedrock of the program's grassroots strategy. Each sub-network convened 12 planning and coordination meetings to identify context-specific priorities, strengthen internal cohesion, and shape joint initiatives that would later be submitted under the Advocacy Grant Competition. This inclusive approach fostered consistent, decentralized engagement and enabled grassroots actors to build alliances, surface shared challenges, and coordinate strategic responses aligned with Iraq's Third National Action Plan (NAP III) on Women, Peace, and Security.

To reinforce the capacities of these newly formed networks, a series of cascade trainings were delivered in all 19 governorates. Facilitated by trained partners who had previously undergone a Training of Trainers (TOT), each session brought together two to three representatives per sub-network, resulting in a total of 229 participants. These sessions equipped participants with a deeper understanding of Resolution 1325, the WPS Agenda,

the NAP framework, and effective advocacy tools. Delivered through interactive discussions and hands-on exercises, the training not only strengthened technical knowledge but also cultivated confidence among emerging community leaders.





Recognizing the value of horizontal learning, the program launched a peer-to-peer mentorship initiative linking experienced and emerging WLOs and WROs across governorates. Nine mentorship pairings were developed in Year 3, with participants engaging in monthly online sessions over an eight-month period. The initiative prioritized mutual learning and collective problem-solving on pressing issues such as electoral participation, implementation of NAP III, and the intersection of climate change with male and female and youth. Each pairing brought together diverse perspectives and thematic expertise, including peacebuilders, youth leaders, and environmental advocates, fostering a rich exchange of strategies for local and national advocacy. This cross-governorate collaboration promoted solidarity, innovation, and the co-creation of locally grounded responses to shared challenges.

In parallel with civil society strengthening, the program actively engaged institutional stakeholders. A sensitization meeting was convened with representatives from key ministries in the Kurdistan Region—supported by the High Council for Women and Development—to foster collaboration on NAP implementation and clarify the roles of government actors in supporting civil society’s WPS work. The dialogue provided a space for state and non-state actors to align on priorities and strengthen coordination mechanisms.

Youth engagement formed another pillar of the WYPS program. The launch of the School of Peace initiative invited young changemakers from all 19 governorates to apply for a yearlong training and mentorship program aimed at transforming social norms and advancing inclusive peace. The selection process emphasized diversity, accessibility, and leadership potential, successfully enrolling a cohort of youth advocates committed to

community transformation. Participants received comprehensive training on peacebuilding, UNSCR 1325 and 2250, advocacy, and communication, preparing them to lead localized campaigns and initiatives.

Building on this foundation, the program awarded 19 media campaign grants to School of Peace participants to implement awareness-raising initiatives within their communities. These campaigns leveraged social media, video, radio, and print materials to spotlight issues such as women's rights, youth inclusion, and social cohesion. By tailoring messages to local audiences, these youth-led efforts brought the WPS agenda into public discourse and highlighted the role of young people as agents of peace.

Further elevating youth leadership, a national School of Peace competition was launched, culminating in the selection of three winning initiatives. These included efforts to increase women's environmental advocacy, promote the rights of women with disabilities, and raise awareness of psychological harassment and its impact on girls. Each winning initiative was supported by a collaborative team from multiple governorates, ensuring broader reach and shared ownership. The competition showcased the power of youth-driven change and demonstrated how local leadership can translate into sustainable impact.





In an effort to broaden the WPS constituency, the Men Engage component of the program sought to include male allies in promoting male and female equality and peace. A targeted call for applications identified motivated men aged 34–54 from all 19 governorates, who were then trained in male and female sensitivity, WPS principles, and community advocacy.

The program formed Men Engage Campaign Networks in coordination with local WLOs/WROs, ensuring accountability and alignment with feminist values.

These networks subsequently hosted structured dialogue sessions that tackled national and community-level issues, including women's political participation, the male and female inequality effects of climate change, and the role of men in advancing inclusive peace. By creating reflective and collaborative spaces, the program encouraged male participants to challenge harmful norms and become advocates for positive change. The integration of women's organizations into the planning and facilitation of these sessions further reinforced the centrality of women's voices in all aspects of the initiative.

Collectively, these activities contributed to a more cohesive, capacitated, and inclusive WPS movement in Iraq. Through network-building, joint advocacy, youth mobilization, and male engagement, the WYPS program not only elevated the visibility of women and youth in peace and security processes but also laid the groundwork for sustained grassroots action. The progress achieved over the reporting period reflects a dynamic and interconnected civil society increasingly equipped to influence policy, shift norms, and build a more inclusive and peaceful Iraq.



The Conclusion

The second annual report of the Women, Youth, Peace, and Security (WYPS) program in Iraq reflects a year of substantial progress in advancing inclusive peacebuilding, alongside enduring structural, political, and financial challenges. The program has succeeded in expanding grassroots mobilization, enhancing organizational capacities, and deepening institutional engagement across Iraq's 19 governorates. Through a series of coordinated efforts—ranging from the establishment of local WPS sub-networks and cascade trainings to youth-led initiatives and men's engagement dialogues, the WYPS program has laid a strong foundation for sustained and male and female-responsive peace and security efforts.

This year's activities reinforced the critical role of Women-Led and Women's Rights Organizations in shaping and implementing Iraq's WPS agenda. Strategic investments in mentorship, horizontal learning, and advocacy have empowered civil society actors to form durable alliances and take leadership roles in their communities. The development of 19 local sub-networks and 228 coordination meetings has fostered decentralized and inclusive participation, aligning grassroots priorities with national policy frameworks such as Iraq's Third National Action Plan (NAP III).

Youth and male allyship were key drivers of progress during this reporting period. The School of Peace initiative provided youth leaders with tools and platforms to design and implement media campaigns, while the national competition surfaced creative solutions to local WPS challenges—from environmental justice to disability rights and psychological wellbeing. Simultaneously, the Men Engage component created space for male participants to critically reflect on male and female norms and actively support women's participation in peacebuilding. These efforts together advanced a more holistic and inclusive movement, engaging in new constituencies across social and geographic lines.

Despite these achievements, the program continues to confront significant obstacles. Regional instability, particularly the escalating conflict between Israel and Iran, has

diverted attention and resources from national peace and development agendas. Deep-seated social and cultural barriers continue to impede women's full participation, especially in rural areas. Moreover, global funding cuts—especially those stemming from reductions in U.S. support for male and female programs—have placed strain on the operational capacity of national and international organizations alike. The resulting gaps in training, service delivery, and monitoring efforts threaten to reverse hard-earned gains.

In response, the WYPS program has demonstrated adaptability and resilience. Its engagement with government stakeholders, as evidenced by sensitization sessions and joint coordination efforts, has helped maintain institutional dialogue around WPS issues. At the same time, civil society's continued commitment, despite shrinking resources, reflects a deep-seated dedication to advancing male and female equality and inclusive peace.

Looking ahead, the sustainability of these gains depends on several key priorities: strengthening institutional capacity at all levels, scaling equality-sensitive policies and practices, sustaining robust financial and technical support, and engaging men and boys as allies. Enhanced collaboration with local communities, particularly marginalized and conflict-affected groups, will also be critical to broadening participation and ownership. Monitoring and evaluation frameworks must be institutionalized to track outcomes and inform adaptive strategies.

The WYPS program's achievements to date affirm the potential of an inclusive, locally anchored approach to peacebuilding. By continuing to invest in networks, build capacity, and foster intergenerational and cross-sectoral dialogue, the program is well-positioned to drive forward Iraq's WPS agenda. The ongoing commitment of national authorities, civil society, international partners, and grassroots actors will remain vital to realizing a peaceful, just, and male and female-equal Iraq.





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