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### Women's Contributions To Peacebuilding: A Comparative Analysis Of Middle Eastern Experiences

*Kadınların Barış İnşasındaki Katkıları: Orta Doğu Deneyimlerinden Karşılaştırmalı Bulgular\**

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#### Abstract

**Objective:** This article examines the contributions of women to peacebuilding in the Middle East through a comparative analysis of Lebanon, Palestine, Iraq, and Iran. It explores how women participate in formal negotiations, grassroots initiatives, and post-conflict reconstruction, and analyzes the conditions that enable or limit their effective engagement.

**Methods:** Adopting a comparative case study approach, the research synthesizes qualitative and policy data from 2019 to 2025. Directed content analysis was applied to map women's roles within four core pillars of peacebuilding: participation, protection, prevention, and relief and recovery.

**Results:** Findings reveal that Lebanon institutionalized women's participation through its National Action Plan but faced challenges in implementation due to political and economic instability. In Palestine, women have taken active roles in local peacebuilding dialogues, although their presence in formal negotiations remains limited. Iraq's second National Action Plan strengthened women's involvement in security sector reform and community rehabilitation, while in Iran, grassroots civic initiatives have demonstrated resilience and informal contributions to conflict prevention despite restrictive environments. Across these cases, greater inclusion of women in peace processes is linked to more sustainable and community oriented outcomes.

**Conclusion:** Women in the Middle East play substantive roles in shaping peace processes, yet structural and systemic barriers continue to constrain their influence, particularly at formal decision making levels. Strengthening institutional mechanisms and supporting women-led initiatives are key to achieving inclusive and durable peace in the region.

**Keywords:** Women, Peacebuilding, Middle East, Gender and Conflict, Women Peace and Security (WPS), Conflict Resolution

#### Özet

**Amaç:** Bu makalede, Lübnan, Filistin, Irak ve İran örnekleri üzerinden Orta Doğu'da kadınların barış inşasına katkıları incelemektedir. Kadınların resmi müzakerelere, taban inisiyatiflerine ve çatışma sonrası yeniden yapılanma süreçlerine katılımını analiz etmekte; bu katılımı kolaylaştıran ya da kısıtlayan koşulları ortaya koymaktadır.

**Yöntem:** Karşılaştırmalı vaka çalışması yaklaşımı uygulanmış olup; 2019-2025 dönemine ait nitel veriler ve politika belgeleri sentezlenmiştir. Kadınların rollerini; katılım, koruma, önleme ve yardım/iyileşme olmak üzere dört temel

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barış inşası eksenini çerçevesinde haritalandırmak amacıyla yönlendirilmiş içerik analizi uygulanmıştır.

**Bulgular:** Bulgular, Lübnan'ın Ulusal Eylem Planı ile kadın katılımını kurumsallaştırdığını ancak siyasi ve ekonomik istikrarsızlık nedeniyle uygulamada zorluklar yaşadığını göstermektedir. Filistin'de kadınlar yerel barış diyaloglarında aktif rol üstlenmiş, ancak resmi müzakerelerdeki temsilleri sınırlı kalmıştır. Irak'ta ikinci Ulusal Eylem Planı, kadınların güvenlik sektörü reformu ve toplumsal rehabilitasyon süreçlerine katılımını güçlendirmiştir. İran'da ise kısıtlayıcı ortamlar içinde dahi taban düzeyindeki sivil girişimler, çatışma önleme ve toplumsal dayanıklılıkta önemli katkılar sunmuştur. Ortak bir bulgu olarak, kadınların barış süreçlerine daha etkin şekilde dâhil edildiği durumlarda daha sürdürülebilir ve toplumsal temelli sonuçlara ulaşıldığı görülmektedir.

**Sonuç:** Orta Doğu'da kadınlar barış süreçlerini şekillendirmede önemli roller üstlenmektedir; ancak yapısal ve sistemik engeller, özellikle karar alma düzeyindeki etkilerini sınırlamaktadır. Kadın örgütlerine kaynak sağlanması, kurumsal mekanizmaların güçlendirilmesi ve arabuluculuk çerçevelerine toplumsal cinsiyet uzmanlığının entegre edilmesi, kapsayıcı ve kalıcı barışın tesisi için kritik adımlar olarak öne çıkmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:**Kadınlar, Barış İnşası, Orta Doğu, Toplumsal Cinsiyet ve Çatışma, Kadın Barış ve Güvenlik (WPS), Çatışma Çözümü

## Introduction

Women have long been recognized as essential actors in peacebuilding processes, yet their contributions often remain marginalized, particularly in regions affected by protracted conflicts such as the Middle East. Conflicts in this region have not only caused massive human and economic losses but have also reshaped social structures in ways that limit women's formal participation in decision-making arenas. Despite their critical roles in fostering community cohesion, mediating disputes, and supporting post-conflict reconstruction, women remain largely underrepresented in formal peace negotiations, security-sector reforms, and institutional policymaking (O'Reilly, Ó Súilleabháin, & Paffenholz, 2015; UN Women, 2023).

In this context, the adoption of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) in 2000 marked a significant milestone in recognizing women's role in peace and security. UNSCR 1325 calls for the inclusion of women in all aspects of conflict prevention, peace negotiations, peacekeeping, and post-conflict reconstruction. The resolution also highlights the importance of considering gender perspectives in designing policies and programs related to peace and security. However, the practical implementation of UNSCR 1325 across the Middle East has been uneven, with notable gaps in political will, institutional capacity, and societal support for women's participation (Köse et al., 2016; GIWPS & PRIO, 2023). Failures in implementing the Women, Peace, and Security agenda in the Middle East have hindered progress toward sustainable peace, underscoring the need for stronger institutional commitments (George, 2024).

This study addresses the following research question: *“What are the contributions of women to peace processes in the Middle East, and how can these contributions be strengthened?”* The focus is on Lebanon, Palestine, Iraq, and Iran, selected due to their varied political systems, levels of conflict exposure, and progress in implementing women, peace, and security (WPS) policies. Advancing the Women, Peace, and Security agenda in the Middle East requires addressing gender-specific barriers to ensure women's meaningful participation in peace processes (Kherfi, 2023). Lebanon has formalized women's participation through its National Action Plan but continues to face implementation challenges. In Palestine, women have been active in grassroots and local peace initiatives despite limited access to formal negotiation processes. Iraq demonstrates some progress through institutional reforms and community-level engagement, whereas Iran presents a case of informal yet resilient women-led initiatives operating under restrictive socio-political conditions.

Existing literature suggests that women's inclusion in peace processes enhances agreement durability, promotes social cohesion, and increases the responsiveness of post-conflict policies to

community needs (O'Reilly et al., 2015; Inclusive Security, 2015). Including women in peacebuilding processes significantly enhances the durability of peace agreements, as their involvement fosters inclusive and community-oriented outcomes in conflict-affected regions (Akeel, 2025). Women's participation also helps prevent relapse into conflict by addressing structural inequalities and incorporating gender-sensitive approaches into reconstruction efforts. However, structural barriers, cultural norms, and security challenges continue to limit the scope and effectiveness of women's engagement in formal decision-making arenas (UN Women, 2024).

Based on the literature and preliminary observations, the study proposes the following hypotheses:

**H1:** Women's participation in formal peace negotiations in the Middle East is positively associated with the sustainability of peace agreements.

**H2:** Women-led grassroots initiatives significantly contribute to community-level conflict prevention and social cohesion.

**H3:** Institutional support, including National Action Plans and policy frameworks, strengthens women's influence in peacebuilding processes.

**H4:** Structural and socio-cultural barriers negatively affect the effectiveness of women's participation in formal peace processes.

A growing body of literature underscores the essential role of women in peacebuilding, emphasizing their capacity to foster dialogue, reconciliation, and community resilience in post-conflict contexts (Anderlini, 2007; Puechguirbal, 2010; Olsson & Gizelis, 2015). Scholars have argued that women's inclusion in peace processes not only enhances the legitimacy and sustainability of peace agreements but also broadens the scope of social recovery by addressing issues of justice, equity, and local participation. Despite these acknowledged contributions, women's involvement often remains constrained by structural, cultural, and institutional barriers that limit their influence in formal decision-making arenas. By addressing these gaps through a comparative case study design, this article seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of the multi-level roles women play in peacebuilding. The study also aims to inform policymakers, international organizations, and civil society actors about strategies to enhance women's inclusion, overcome existing barriers, and support the effective implementation of Women, Peace and Security (WPS) commitments across the region.

## Methods

### 1.1. Research Design

This study employs a comparative case study design to examine women's contributions to peacebuilding in the Middle East, focusing on Lebanon, Palestine, Iraq, and Iran. Comparative case studies are particularly suitable for exploring similarities and differences across diverse political, social, and conflict contexts, providing a nuanced understanding of factors that enable or constrain women's engagement in peace processes (Yin, 2018; Ragin, 2014). These four cases were selected to reflect variation in governance systems, conflict intensity, and institutional engagement with the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda ranging from Lebanon's formal National Action Plan to Iran's predominantly grassroots and informal initiatives. The study adopts a qualitative framework, emphasizing both formal institutional mechanisms and informal grassroots initiatives within the WPS agenda.

### 1.2. Population and Sample

The population of this study includes all women participating in peacebuilding processes, both formally and informally, in Lebanon, Palestine, Iraq, and Iran between 2019 and 2025. The sample was selected purposively based on three criteria: (1) exposure to protracted or recurring conflicts, (2) presence of institutional support for women's participation, such as National Action Plans (NAPs), and (3) availability of publicly accessible policy documents, reports, and academic studies (UN Women, 2019; State of Palestine, 2020; UN Women Iraq, 2022; GIWPS, 2023). The period between 2019 and 2025 was chosen to capture the most recent phase of WPS agenda implementation in the region, encompassing the adoption of second-generation NAPs, the rise of women-led grassroots initiatives following major protest movements, and the evolving security dynamics that have shaped peacebuilding priorities. These cases provide diverse contexts to assess the effectiveness and limitations of women's contributions across both formal and informal levels.

### 1.3.Data Collection Process and Method

Data were collected from **multiple sources** to ensure triangulation and enhance reliability. Primary sources included National Action Plans for WPS, official policy documents, and reports on women-led initiatives. Secondary sources comprised peer-reviewed journal articles, policy briefs, and reports by international organizations such as UN Women, GNWP, GIWPS, and WILPF (O'Reilly et al., 2015; Inclusive Security, 2015; Caprioli, 2000). The study employed **directed content analysis** to map women's engagement according to the four pillars of WPS: participation, protection, prevention, and relief/recovery (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; UN Women, 2023).

### 1.4. Data Analysis

Each case was coded based on the scope and nature of women's involvement in formal negotiations, community-level initiatives, and post-conflict reconstruction. Key indicators included leadership roles, participation rates, influence on policy outcomes, and sustainability of implemented initiatives. Thematic analysis was used to identify recurring patterns, contextual variations, enabling factors, and barriers to participation (Paffenholz, 2014; Hudson, Ballif-Spanvill, Caprioli, & Emmett, 2009). Triangulation across multiple sources enhanced reliability and validity, while detailed analytical memos documented coding decisions to ensure transparency and replicability. Limitations include restricted access to sensitive or non-public data, particularly in Iran, which required reliance on open-source documentation and secondary literature.

Ethical standards were upheld by using publicly available data without direct interaction with human participants, ensuring confidentiality. The study also follows **SAGER guidelines**<sup>2</sup> to integrate gender considerations into the research process (Heidari et al., 2016; European Commission, 2020).

By integrating a comparative case study design, triangulated data sources, directed content analysis, and rigorous ethical practices, this methodological approach provides a robust framework for investigating women's contributions to peacebuilding and testing the study's hypotheses regarding formal and informal participation, institutional support, and socio-cultural constraints.

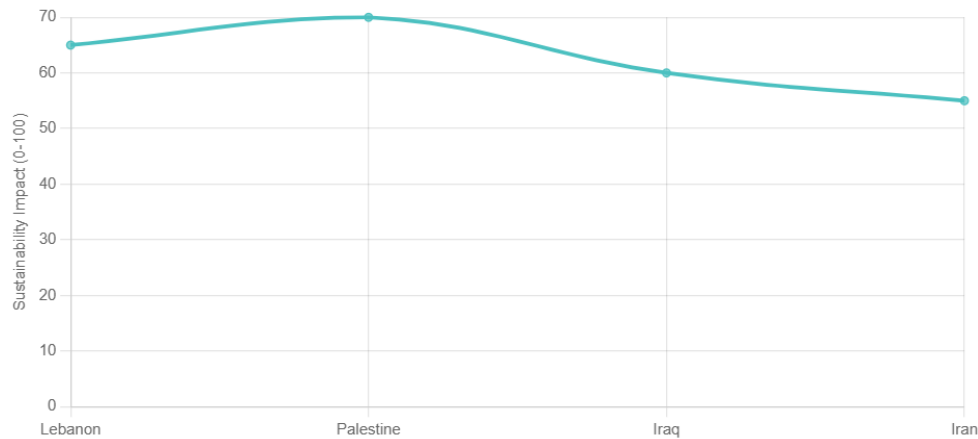
## Findings

### 2.1 Lebanon: Formal and Grassroots Engagement

In Lebanon, the implementation of the National Action Plan (NAP) for Women, Peace, and Security (2019–2022) created formal mechanisms for women's involvement in peacebuilding. Following the conclusion of this first NAP, the Lebanese government approved development of a second action plan

<sup>2</sup> The Sex and Gender Equity in Research (SAGER) guidelines provide a framework for integrating sex and gender analysis into research reporting (Heidari et al., 2016; European Commission, 2020).

in 2024 to sustain progress and update priorities under the WPS agenda (NNA, 2024; UN Women, 2023). Women were appointed to local councils, advisory boards, and NGOs tasked with conflict resolution, creating opportunities to influence policy-making and negotiation processes (UN Women, 2019; GIWPS, 2023; WILPF, n.d.). Specific initiatives included inter-community dialogue programs in Southern Lebanon and youth-focused projects in Tripoli to reduce sectarian tensions (O'Reilly et al., 2015; Rehn & Sirleaf, 2002).



**Figure 1.** The Sustainability Impact of Women's Contributions to Peacebuilding in Countries

Despite these formal mechanisms, political instability, governance challenges, and overlapping administrative authorities limited women's overall influence in national-level peace negotiations (Köse et al., 2016). At the grassroots level, however, Lebanese women's organizations successfully facilitated reconciliation dialogues, mediated local disputes, and implemented social cohesion programs (UN Women, 2019; Paffenholz, 2014). Women mediators in the Middle East, particularly in Lebanon, have advanced Track II dialogues, contributing to informal peacebuilding efforts (Slim, 2023). These initiatives contributed significantly to community resilience and local peace, supporting **H1**, which posits that women's participation enhances the sustainability of peace processes.

## 2.2. Palestine: Grassroots Leadership and Informal Initiatives

In Palestine, women's engagement in peacebuilding is primarily grassroots and informal. Organizations such as the Palestinian Women's Research and Documentation Center and local civil society networks lead reconciliation efforts, community dialogue programs, and psychosocial support initiatives for conflict-affected populations (State of Palestine, 2020; Moghadam, 2019; UN Women, 2022). Women in Iraq and Palestine have significantly contributed to local mediation efforts, fostering dialogue and conflict resolution at the community level (UN Women, 2023). Women have also conducted non-violence education programs, promoting conflict resolution skills among youth and marginalized communities (Ahmadi, 2021). Israeli-Palestinian women's partnerships, such as Women Wage Peace, have fostered cross-community dialogues, enhancing grassroots peacebuilding efforts (Murad et al., 2024).

While these informal efforts are effective, formal peace negotiations remain largely male-dominated, highlighting structural and cultural barriers (O'Reilly et al., 2015; Hudson, Ballif-Spanvill, Caprioli, & Emmett, 2009). Women's leadership at the grassroots level supports **H2**, which emphasizes the importance of community-level initiatives in fostering social cohesion, and demonstrates the limitations posed by the lack of institutional support in formal negotiations (H3).

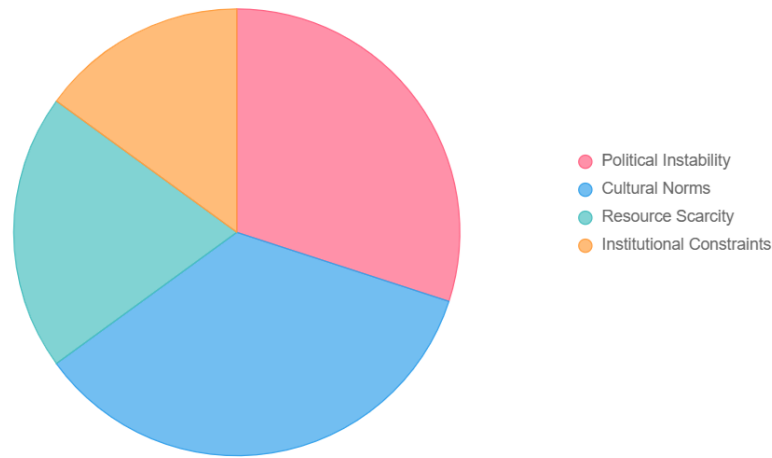
## 2.3. Iraq: Institutional Support and Post-Conflict Reconstruction

Iraq provides a case where formal institutional support has been partially effective. The second NAP (2020–2024) reinforced women’s participation in governance, security sector reforms, and post-conflict reconstruction programs (UN Women Iraq, 2022; GIWPS, 2023). Women engaged in initiatives supporting internally displaced persons (IDPs), community rehabilitation, and social cohesion among fragmented populations (Inclusive Security, 2015; Caprioli, 2000). In Iraq, women within Shi’a religious institutions have played a pivotal role in community-based peacebuilding, facilitating reconciliation and social cohesion (Alshamary, 2023).

Institutional frameworks enabled measurable contributions, supporting **H3**, which suggests that formal mechanisms strengthen women’s influence. Nevertheless, socio-cultural norms and structural constraints continue to limit women’s access to high-level negotiations and decision-making bodies (Rehn & Sirleaf, 2002; Heidari et al., 2016). These findings illustrate the interplay between formal frameworks and societal acceptance, emphasizing that institutional support alone does not guarantee substantial impact without broader social legitimacy.

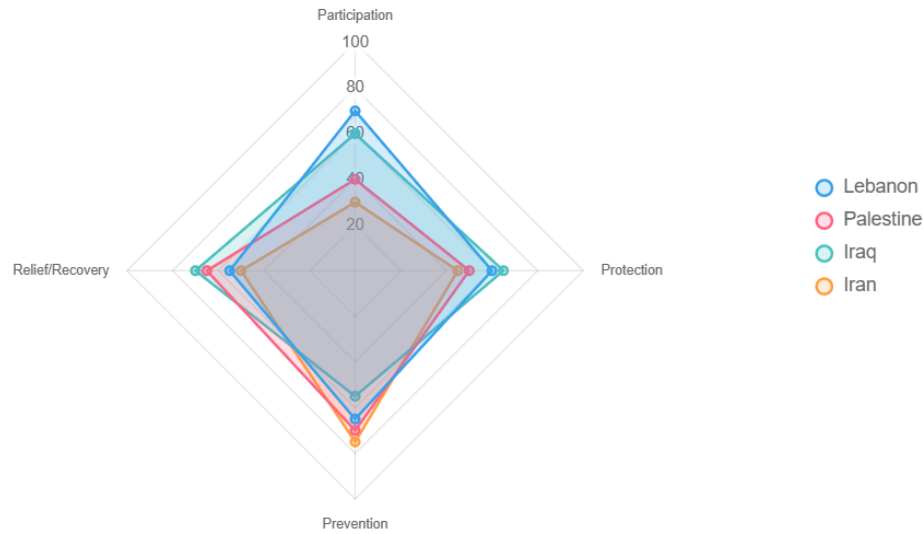
#### 2.4. Iran: Informal Civic Participation under Restrictive Conditions

Iran represents a contrasting scenario due to the absence of formal WPS mechanisms. Women-led initiatives operate predominantly in informal civic spaces, engaging in conflict prevention, local mediation, and community resilience programs (GIWPS, 2023; UN Women, 2023). Despite restrictive socio-political conditions, these initiatives have effectively addressed local disputes, supported vulnerable populations, and promoted social cohesion (Moghadam, 2019; Ahmadi, 2021). In Iran, women’s informal networks have been instrumental in promoting community resilience and conflict prevention despite restrictive socio-political environments (Rezaeizadeh, 2025).



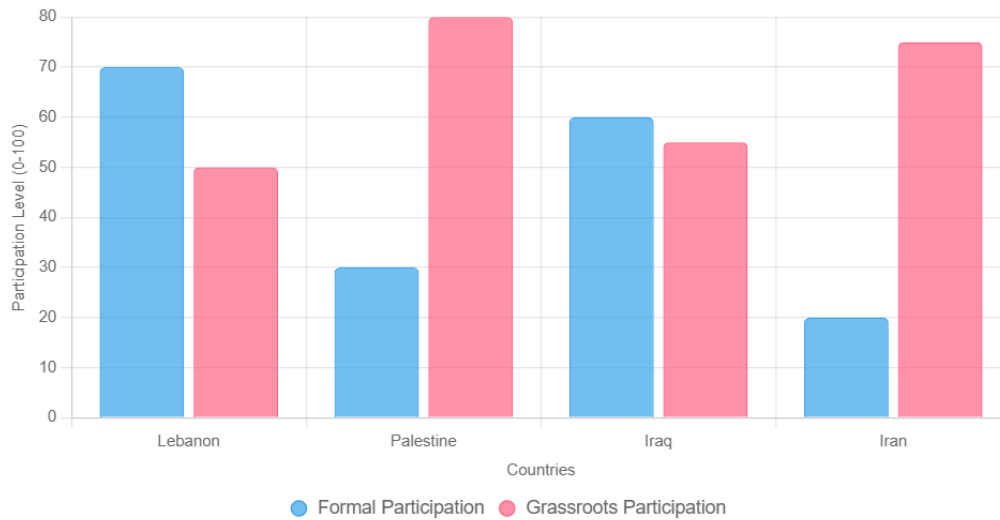
**Figure 2.** Barriers to Women's Participation in Countries

Iranian women’s experiences support **H2** and **H4**, demonstrating that informal participation is crucial for local peacebuilding while socio-cultural and structural barriers restrict formal engagement. Grassroots initiatives serve as essential platforms for women to contribute meaningfully to conflict prevention and recovery, particularly when institutional mechanisms are absent.



**Figure 3.** Women's Contributions According to the Pillars of Peacebuilding

## 2.5. Cross-Country Comparison



**Figure 4.** Levels of Women's Participation in Peacebuilding Across Countries

Comparing the four cases reveals consistent patterns. Women's participation is generally stronger at community and grassroots levels than in formal negotiation settings (O'Reilly et al., 2015; Rehn & Sirleaf, 2002). Institutional support, such as NAPs in Lebanon and Iraq, enhances formal participation but is often hampered by implementation gaps, political instability, and societal resistance (UN Women, 2019; GIWPS, 2023). In countries lacking formal mechanisms, such as Iran, informal initiatives are pivotal in sustaining local peace and resilience (Inclusive Security, 2015; Heidari et al., 2016).

The broader political and security environment also significantly affects women's effectiveness. In contexts with unstable governance or restricted civic space, women face substantial limitations, whereas supportive institutional frameworks and societal acceptance allow for more substantive engagement (Caprioli, 2000; Paffenholz, 2014; Moghadam, 2019). These patterns underline the

importance of integrated strategies that combine formal institutional support with grassroots initiatives to maximize women's impact on sustainable peace.

## 2.6. Hypotheses Evaluation

The findings provide robust evidence for the study's hypotheses:

- **H1:** Women's participation enhances the sustainability and effectiveness of peace processes, particularly through local initiatives and community engagement (Rehn & Sirleaf, 2002; UN Women, 2019).
- **H2:** Grassroots and community-level initiatives are highly effective in fostering social cohesion and conflict prevention (Ahmadi, 2021; Moghadam, 2019).
- **H3:** Institutional frameworks strengthen women's visibility and influence in formal negotiations, although gaps in implementation limit their impact (UN Women Iraq, 2022; GIWPS, 2023).
- **H4:** Socio-cultural and structural barriers constrain women's effectiveness, especially in formal negotiation processes (Hudson et al., 2009; Heidari et al., 2016).

Overall, the comparative analysis demonstrates that while country-specific contexts differ, universal principles emerge: inclusive participation, institutional recognition, and grassroots engagement are essential for maximizing women's contributions to sustainable peace in the Middle East (Ahmadi, 2021; Moghadam, 2019; UN Women, 2023; Hudson et al., 2009).

## Discussion

This study examined women's contributions to peacebuilding in Lebanon, Palestine, Iraq, and Iran, highlighting the interplay between formal institutional frameworks, grassroots initiatives, and socio-cultural contexts. The findings indicate that women's participation is multifaceted and context-dependent, reinforcing prior research emphasizing the critical role of women in sustaining peace and promoting social cohesion (Rehn & Sirleaf, 2002; Hudson et al., 2009; Paffenholz, 2014). In Lebanon and Iraq, the existence of National Action Plans (NAPs) facilitated structured participation, enabling women to engage in policy-making, post-conflict reconstruction, and negotiation processes (UN Women, 2019; GIWPS, 2023; O'Reilly et al., 2015). Integrating women into peace processes in the Middle East and North Africa requires robust institutional frameworks and targeted capacity-building programs (GIZ, 2023). These formal mechanisms allowed women to influence peace-related decisions and participate in advisory boards and local councils, contributing to the sustainability of peace processes. However, implementation gaps, political instability, and entrenched gender norms limited the overall impact of formal participation, suggesting that institutional frameworks alone are insufficient without broader socio-political support and cultural acceptance (Caprioli, 2000; Heidari et al., 2016).

Across all four countries, women's grassroots initiatives proved highly effective in fostering local peace, social cohesion, and conflict resolution. Women's leadership in health systems has been critical in fostering peacebuilding by addressing community health needs in conflict-affected regions (Meagher et al., 2023). Women's resilience-focused initiatives in the MENA region have significantly contributed to social cohesion, particularly in post-conflict settings (Hajir et al., 2023). Palestinian and Iranian women-led programs, despite operating in largely informal or restrictive environments, provided essential services, mediation, and educational programs that strengthened community resilience (Moghadam, 2019; Ahmadi, 2021; Inclusive Security, 2015). Women's roles in conflict transformation in the Middle East highlight their capacity to bridge divides through community-based initiatives (Bernad, 2024). These initiatives highlight the critical role of community-level engagement in achieving tangible peace outcomes, supporting the hypothesis that local participation contributes significantly to social cohesion (H2). Furthermore, grassroots programs offer alternative avenues for women to exert influence, especially in contexts where formal mechanisms are absent or ineffective (Hudson et al., 2009; UN Women, 2023).



The study also confirms that socio-cultural and structural barriers remain significant constraints to women's engagement, particularly in formal negotiation settings. Gender-sensitive approaches in Middle Eastern peace processes face persistent challenges due to patriarchal structures and limited institutional support (Moaveni, 2023). Male-dominated political structures, traditional norms, and limited access to decision-making positions hinder women's ability to shape outcomes at national levels (O'Reilly et al., 2015; Hudson et al., 2009; Ahmadi, 2021). Progress in women's rights in the Middle East is closely tied to their ability to influence peacebuilding processes, yet structural barriers continue to limit their impact (Zadeh, 2024) across. These findings support H4, emphasizing that effective peacebuilding requires not only institutional opportunities but also cultural transformation and empowerment strategies to overcome systemic inequities (Caprioli, 2000; Moghadam, 2019).

Comparative analysis reveals both similarities and divergences across contexts. Countries with institutional support, such as Lebanon and Iraq, show measurable and structured women's engagement, yet the impact remains contingent on societal acceptance. In contrast, countries lacking formal mechanisms, such as Iran and Palestine, rely heavily on informal initiatives, which demonstrate adaptability and resilience but face limitations in scaling their influence. Overall, the integration of institutional frameworks and grassroots initiatives emerges as the most effective strategy for sustainable peace, reflecting the combined importance of formal recognition and community-based action (Inclusive Security, 2015; Paffenholz, 2014; Heidari et al., 2016).

The findings provide robust evidence supporting all four hypotheses. Globally, women's participation in peace processes increases the likelihood of agreements lasting at least 15 years by 35% (UN Women, 2024). Women's participation enhances the sustainability and effectiveness of peace processes, particularly through community engagement and local initiatives (H1) (Rehn & Sirleaf, 2002; UN Women, 2019). Grassroots and community-level initiatives are highly effective in fostering social cohesion and preventing conflict (H2) (Ahmadi, 2021; Moghadam, 2019). Institutional frameworks strengthen women's visibility and influence in formal negotiations (H3) (UN Women Iraq, 2022; GIWPS, 2023), while socio-cultural and structural barriers constrain their effectiveness, especially in formal processes (H4) (Hudson et al., 2009; Heidari et al., 2016).

The study's findings also suggest practical policy implications. Strengthening institutional frameworks such as NAPs and ensuring effective implementation and monitoring can enhance women's formal participation. Supporting grassroots initiatives through funding, training, and capacity-building can amplify local peacebuilding efforts, while addressing socio-cultural barriers through advocacy, education, and inclusive policymaking can expand women's access to decision-making spaces. Integrating formal and informal approaches creates synergies between national-level mechanisms and local community engagement, maximizing the impact of women's contributions to sustainable peace (Caprioli, 2000; Paffenholz, 2014; Moghadam, 2019).

Limitations of this study include reliance on publicly available reports, policy documents, and secondary literature, particularly in contexts such as Iran where access to primary data is restricted. Future research should incorporate direct interviews, longitudinal analyses, and mixed-method approaches to provide deeper insights into women's roles in peacebuilding. Additionally, intersectional analyses examining how factors such as age, ethnicity, and socio-economic status shape women's participation and impact could further enhance understanding of the dynamics at play.

In conclusion, this study highlights that women's contributions to peacebuilding in the Middle East are substantial, multidimensional, and context-dependent. Institutional frameworks, grassroots initiatives, and socio-cultural conditions collectively shape the effectiveness of women's participation. Sustainable peace requires inclusive approaches that recognize women as critical actors, both formally and informally, in shaping resilient and equitable societies (Rehn & Sirleaf, 2002; UN Women, 2023; Moghadam, 2019; Hudson et al., 2009). The results provide strong support for all four hypotheses and underscore the need for integrated strategies that combine policy, practice, and cultural transformation to maximize women's impact in peacebuilding.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

### Women's Formal Participation

In Lebanon and Iraq, National Action Plans (NAPs) and related institutional frameworks have created formal avenues for women's participation in peacebuilding. Women engaged in policymaking, post-conflict reconstruction, advisory roles, and conflict resolution initiatives, contributing to the shaping of local and national policies (UN Women, 2019; GIWPS, 2023; Caprioli, 2000). These formal mechanisms, however, are influenced by political instability, incomplete implementation, and deeply entrenched gender norms. As such, institutional support alone is insufficient to guarantee meaningful and sustainable influence, highlighting the need for complementary strategies to empower women effectively.

### Grassroots and Community-Led Initiatives

In Palestine and Iran, where formal mechanisms are limited or absent, women have demonstrated remarkable resilience through grassroots and community-led initiatives. Their activities span dialogue facilitation, non-violence education, local dispute mediation, and community mobilization, which have collectively strengthened social cohesion, mitigated conflict, and supported vulnerable populations (Moghadam, 2019; Ahmadi, 2021; Inclusive Security, 2015). These findings illustrate that women's participation is multidimensional and context-dependent, aligning with the study's four hypotheses:

- **H1:** Women's engagement enhances the sustainability of peace processes.
- **H2:** Grassroots initiatives foster social cohesion and community resilience.
- **H3:** Institutional frameworks amplify women's visibility and influence.
- **H4:** Socio-cultural and structural barriers constrain formal engagement (Rehn & Sirleaf, 2002; Hudson et al., 2009; Paffenholz, 2014).

### Integrated Approaches to Peacebuilding

Sustainable peace cannot be achieved through formal or informal strategies alone. Investing in women's participation across all levels of post-conflict reconstruction enhances equity, strengthens social foundations, and contributes to more durable peace outcomes in the Middle East (World Bank, 2023). Combining institutional support with robust grassroots engagement maximizes the potential of women's contributions. Policy frameworks should not only establish participatory mechanisms but also actively address socio-cultural barriers through education, advocacy, and promotion of gender equity in political and security spheres. Women peacebuilders require increased protection, resources, and institutional backing to sustain their contributions effectively (United Nations, 2023).

### Policy Implications

Supporting community-based initiatives through targeted funding, capacity-building programs, and international collaboration further strengthens local resilience, providing women with platforms to exert meaningful influence at multiple levels of peace processes (Ahmadi, 2021; Moghadam, 2019; UN Women, 2023). Funding women-led organizations through mechanisms such as the Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund has proven particularly effective in amplifying women's contributions and ensuring continuity of initiatives across different contexts. These interventions highlight the importance of integrating formal policies with local practices to achieve tangible peacebuilding outcomes.

### Practical Recommendations for Practitioners

Interventions must account for the interplay between formal and informal participation. Female peacebuilders have played instrumental roles in protecting civil rights, promoting human dignity, and supporting community well-being in conflict-affected areas across the Middle East (FHI 360, 2023).

Recognizing women's contributions for their substantive impact -not merely procedural representation-is critical. Policymakers and practitioners should integrate legislative, institutional, and community-based measures to create enabling environments where women's leadership in peacebuilding is protected, supported, and amplified.

### Future Research Directions

Future studies should employ longitudinal, mixed-method, and participatory approaches to capture the dynamic and evolving roles of women in peace processes. Environmental peacebuilding, which intersects with climate change and conflict mitigation, offers promising avenues for fostering sustainable community resilience (Elhadidy, 2024). Intersectional analyses examining the influence of age, ethnicity, socio-economic status, and other identity dimensions on women's participation would provide deeper insight into conditions that facilitate or constrain effective engagement. Comparative studies across additional Middle Eastern and global contexts could help identify best practices and adaptable models for integrating women into formal and informal peacebuilding mechanisms.

The evidence from this study confirms that women are not ancillary actors but central agents of change in Middle Eastern peacebuilding. Recognizing and empowering women through integrated strategies, sustained institutional support, and robust community-level engagement is imperative for cultivating resilient, inclusive, and enduring peace. By addressing structural inequalities and socio-cultural barriers and by fostering women's leadership at all levels, policymakers, practitioners, and scholars can ensure that peace processes are equitable, effective, and generate long-term stability and social cohesion throughout the region.

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