



# Yemen WPS National Action Plan

Everything you need to know about Yemen's National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security



**Acknowledgements:**

The Peace Track Initiative extend their gratitude to our partners at Wogood for Human Security and Mareb Girls Foundation, and members of the Women Solidarity Network, who contributed to this paper by generously giving their time and providing invaluable information. The Peace Track Initiative also extends special thanks to the Women International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), MADRE, the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD) for their continuous support.

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**Abbreviations:**

CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women
DDR	Demobilization, and Reintegration
ESCWA	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for West Asia
GPC	General People's Congress
IDPs	Internally Displaced Persons
MoSAL	Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour
NAP	national Action Plan
NCIAVHR	National Commission to Investigate Allegations of Violations of Human Rights
IOM	International Organization for Migration
SGBV	Sexual and Gender-based Violence
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHCHR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNSCR	United Nation Security Council resolution
WHRDs	Women Human Rights Defenders
WNC	National Women's Committee
WIN	Women Independent Network
WPS	Women, Peace, and Security

## 1. Background:

As the world celebrates the 20th anniversary of the United Nation Security Council resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on women, peace, and security, Yemen has finally joined as the fifth country in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region to develop a national Action Plan (NAP). In this paper, we shed light on the initially civil society-led process led regarding women, peace, and security in Yemen, and focus on the government of Yemen's subsequent efforts in developing the NAP.

### a) The National Agenda on Women, Peace, and Security:

In 2016, 76 Yemeni women leaders representing civil society organisations and government institutions drafted the National Agenda for Women, Peace, and Security (WPS). The effort was led by the civil society mainly through online facilitated sessions organized by Rasha Jarhum, Director of Peace Track Initiative. Once finalized, the National Agenda was shared in November 2016 with national parties, the UN Secretary General, the UN Special Envoy to Yemen, the Ambassadors to Yemen of the G19 states sponsoring the peace process, as well as the members of the UN Security Council. The National Agenda laid out a road map of priorities and recommendations to advance the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda in Yemen and particularly called for the development of a National Action Plan. The agenda was welcomed and noted<sup>1</sup> formally by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Sweden, H.E. Margot Wallström, during the UN Security Council Informal Working Group on Women, Peace, and Security in March 2017 organized by UN Women in New York. The UNSC responded with a Presidential statement<sup>2</sup> that was issued in June 2017 with strong gender language calling the national parties and the UN envoy for improved representation of women in the peace negotiations.

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***“The Security Council calls upon the parties to ensure at least 30 percent representation of women in peace negotiations, and calls upon the UN to regularly report on consultations with women leaders and women’s organisations in line with resolution 2122 (2013).” SC/12873***

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations Security Council. (2017) *S/20171267 Letter dated 18 July 2017 from the Permanent Representatives of Sweden, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and Uruguay to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General*, [https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s\\_2017\\_627.pdf](https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_2017_627.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> United Nations Security Council. (2017) *SC/12873 Security Council Issues Presidential Statement Calling on Parties in Yemen to Engage Constructively in Good-Faith Effort for Conflict Resolution*, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2017/sc12873.doc.htm>

## b) The National Action Plan Development:

When the war escalated in Yemen, the National Women's Committee (WNC), which acted as the government mechanism for developing women's plans and policies was split between the government and the Houthis de-facto authorities. The government stopped supporting the WNC in areas under their control. While the Houthis changed the leadership of the WNC with a chairwoman affiliated to them and gradually indictorined the mandate stripping it from values of women's rights. Strangely enough, developing a NAP was one of the priorities of the Houthi de-facto government programme developed for 2017<sup>3</sup>, which was pushed forward mainly by the General People's Congress (GPC) ministers who had a stronger say at the time before Former President Saleh was killed.

The government of Yemen mandated the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour (MoSAL) to take on gender justice issues. MoSAL recruited a consultant to develop a NAP in 2018 to start working on developing a NAP. By December 2019, the Ministerial Cabinet approved the NAP, making Yemen the fifth country in the Middle East and North Africa to have a National Action Plan for women, peace, and security. The NAP drafts remained confidential with limited circulation, at some point even civil society representatives that were supposedly part of the process did not have access to it. MoSAL was planning a launching event in Amman in March 2020, however, the COVID-19 pandemic prevented the official launch. The NAP was officially launched in May 2020<sup>4</sup>. Currently, UN Women Yemen office has allocated resources to recruit a local manager for the NAP and an assistant to support the government of Yemen.

### Women-led NGOs that participated in developing the NAP:

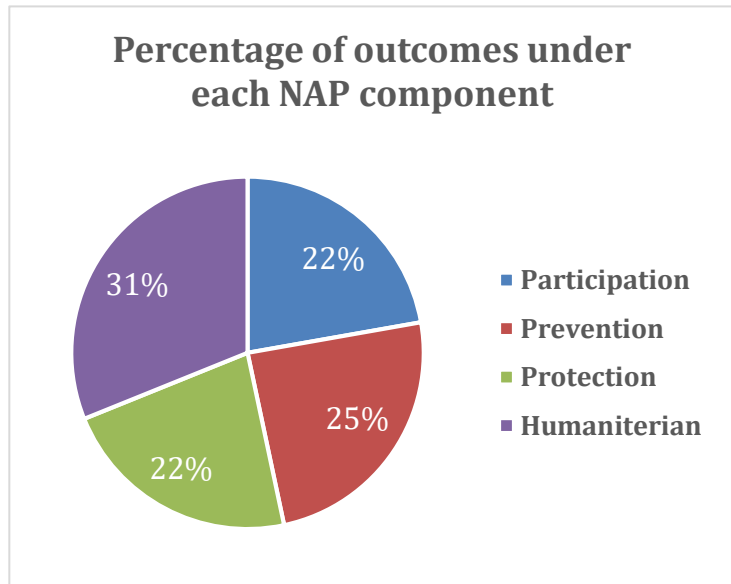
1. Women Union
2. To Be Foundation for Rights and Freedom
3. Wogood for Human Security
4. Rasil for Development and Media
5. Hand by Hand for Development
6. Leaders Development Network
7. Kun Insan [Be Human] Initiative

To produce the NAP, the Yemeni government hosted three workshops, one was for planning, the other was to revise the draft, and the last one focused on building the capacity of staff. There were 16 government entities that participated, four UN entities including UNFPA, ESCWA, IOM, UNHCHR, two international NGOs mainly Care and Fredrich Ebert, and only seven Yemeni NGOs (four of which are Women Solidarity Network members).

<sup>3</sup> Houthis de-facto government (2017). برنامج حكومة الإنقاذ الوطني. <http://www.yemen.gov.ye/portal/gov/برنامجالحكومة/tabid/946/Default.aspx>

<sup>4</sup> [Internationally-recognized] Government of Yemen, Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour (MoSAL) (2020). *Yemen National Action Plan (NAP)*, <https://pmo-ye.net/post/369-لخطة-الوطنية-الخاصة--وزارة-الشؤون-الاجتماعية-تطلق> - "بالمرأة-الأمن والسلام"

The current draft of the NAP has 45 outcomes categorized under thematic areas including: 1) participation 2) prevention of conflict, Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), and terrorism, 3) protection, and 4) humanitarian gender responsive aid. However, the type of the activities proposed can be described as activities focusing on 1) capacity building of women and government staff, 2) development of databases, guidelines, research and documentation of women's rights issues, 3) awareness campaigns, and 4) services.



The services proposed included establishing early warning system for conflicts, a referral system, providing protection services for terrorism survivors, granting micro-loans, developing Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) programme for women fighters, offering mobile clinics for Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and refugees, food and water and in-kind humanitarian aid, Girls Education programmes, and livelihoods programmes for IDPs and refugees.

### c) Civil Society Efforts to support the NAP development:

A member of the Women Solidarity Network was able to facilitate a four hour ceasefire process in Hodaida. She approached the conflict parties and pushed for the temporary ceasefire in order to evacuate families stuck in a village at cross-fire. After parties granted the ceasefire she sent buses to evacuate the families to safety.

The Peace Track Initiative with support from WILPF and NORAD funding, worked with local women led organisations mainly Wogood Foundation for Human Security and Mareb Girls Foundation to hold consultations with women groups on the components of the draft NAP. At least seven consultations were held with women representing different governorates including Aden, Abyan, Dhale, Lahj, Shabwa, Mareb, and Jouf, taking into consideration an intersectional approach, by consulting women of various backgrounds

including displaced women, mothers of recruited children, women relatives of detainees, injured women, women working in the security sector, and women civil society leaders.

Recommendations were developed based on those consultations and were presented by Wogood Foundation to the Prime Minister. However, these recommendations<sup>5</sup> were not taken into consideration and the final plan was approved without integrating all of the civil society organizations recommendations. Wogood Foundation for Human Security then submitted an objection letter to the Prime Minister demanding that the revision of the NAP.

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**Maha Awad, Chairperson of Wogood for Human Security: “The NAP in its current form is a slap in the face of Yemeni women who are disadvantaged in times of relative stability, but more so now as the country is embroiled in a prolonged state of conflict. Without going back to the drawing board, it is still possible to engage us and use our feedback in order to salvage this plan and strengthen it to tackle the huge challenges women face in Yemen. Without women’s true integration in the peace and post-conflict processes, Yemen’s chance at achieving sustainable peace remains a distant dream. After all, this plan was designed to implement UN Resolution 1325, the essence of which is inclusive participation. It is hypocritical to create the National Action Plan without adhering to the very principle for which it was supposed to stand.”** Wilson Center, 2020

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<sup>5</sup> Maha Awadh (2019). *Unfulfilled Ambition: Yemen’s National Action Plan for Women Leaves Much to be Desired* in Wilson Center, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/unfulfilled-ambition-yemens-national-action-plan-women-leaves-much-be-desired>



The women-led organisations have been supporting the implementation of the 1325 with limited resources through carrying out programmes for protecting women, peacebuilding and recovery. Women led organisations continue to work on providing legal aid, psychosocial support, relocation grants for women survivors of violence. They are also carrying out community peacebuilding activities including local ceasefires, negotiating humanitarian access, and mediating to end conflicts over water and land resources. Women are also supporting economic recovery through their contribution in small businesses and entrepreneurship projects.

Muna Luqman, chairperson of Food for Humanity was able to mediate to end an armed conflict over water resource in a remote village in Taiz. She supported the formation of a local committee for preventing conflict and sent a team to upgrade the water station contested to increase its capacity to distribute water to 9 surrounding villages.

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**Rasha Jarhum, Director of Peace Track Initiative: “We lobbied for supporting Yemen to develop a National Action Plan. The international actors working on Yemen had split views, while some supported us from the beginning, others disregarded our lobbying efforts to support the NAP saying it is too early for Yemen, or questioning the viability and applicability of a NAP in a country with multi-governing bodies. While there could be legitimate concerns, the reasons in my view were not convincing as what better time for Yemen to have a NAP if not during conflict and we can always regionalize and localize the NAP to make it implementable.”**

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**Nevertheless, developing the NAP by the Yemeni government remains a remarkable step that requires support and reforms.** In the following sections, we highlight how the National Agenda developed in 2016 influenced the current NAP, as well as, we highlight the gaps in the current NAP and recommendations to move forward.

## 2. Synergies between civil society led recommendations and the government NAP:

One of the major priorities of women civil society leaders that was added to the NAP was the support for adapting a comprehensive law for women’s protection. The Women Independent Network (WIN) formed in 2014 started to work on a draft law for combating violence against women. This was the first time women led civil society organisations led on drafting a law in Yemen. However, the escalation of the war hindered this progress. Calls for adapting such a law continues. Additionally, the NAP integrated some key demands from the 2016 National Agenda for WPS. The table below highlights which demands were addressed by the government’s NAP.

Topic	Demands from the 2016 WPS National Agenda	Goals from the 2019 Government's National Action Plan
Participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Committing to 30% representation of women.</li> <li>- Seek its serious implementation at all levels of political leadership, including the committees formed as a result of peace negotiations such as the de-escalation, security &amp; military, and any government formations, etc.</li> <li>- Ensure that expert women are included in the early recovery and reconstruction process.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Involving women in peace negotiations by at least 30%.</li> <li>- Involving women representatives in Monitoring Committees for Ceasefire, Detainees, Prisoners of war, and Reconstruction Program.</li> <li>- Including women's organizations in committees &amp; activities that prevent conflicts and address them</li> <li>- Increasing women's participation in the Army and Security Forces.</li> </ul>

<b>Protection</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Support for GBV comprehensive intervention: through establishing a comprehensive system to support GBV survivors, including shelter services, psychosocial support, and legal aid.</li> <li>- Economic empowerment and improved livelihoods of women is critically needed.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Providing legal support services, health care, education, psychological support, and protection for women and girls who are victims of violence</li> <li>- Establish shelters that are gender responsive for women survivors of violence.</li> <li>- Women trained in Projects management and marketing of products</li> </ul>
<b>Relief &amp; recovery</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Gender-responsive and inclusive humanitarian plan ... The plans are not developed in an inclusive way where women's voices are heard.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Involve displaced and refugee women in planning and implementing aid programs and relief.</li> </ul>

### 3. Shortcomings & Gaps

While some key demands from the National Agenda for WPS made it into Yemen's NAP, vital needs and priorities that have been identified by women groups were not addressed in the plan. This section analyzes the NAP's weaknesses and shortcomings in a view to lay a foundation for its revision, these fall under four main categories: the lack of guiding frameworks; inadequate response to women's needs; poor inclusivity and elusive implementation strategy.

#### a) Lack of analysis and guiding frameworks:

**Limited Gender Analysis:** The NAP did not include a comprehensive gender analysis and touched lightly on issues affecting women mainly relevant to humanitarian needs and exclusion from participation. This did not provide a sufficient context to analyze all the gender gaps that exist

**Lack of clear frameworks:** The only framework mentioned in the NAP is the International Humanitarian Law (IHL). There is no mention of gender-specific international frameworks, such as the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) or the Beijing platform of action, the international covenants on economic and social rights and political and civil rights, and the Convention on the Rights of the child...etc. Additionally, there was limited reference to the UNSC resolutions that form the WPS agenda, limiting it to only UNSC resolutions 1325 (2000), 2242(2015), and 2250(2015) only.

**National Dialogue Conference (NDC) Outcomes reference:** While the NDC produced at least 135 outcomes focused on women rights. The NAP only mentioned partially the participation

outcome limiting to elected bodies only, although the NDC outcomes were more comprehensive in calling for inclusion of women in all decision-making spaces and set up a quota of no less than 30%.

## **b) Inadequate response to women's needs:**

**Too many training activities:** The NAP proposes more than 10 training for women capacity-building on negotiations, transitional justice, mediation, project management and marketing, types of violence against women, refugee rights, education for displaced women, disaster management and evacuation, humanitarian response, and first aid. These areas are not necessarily reflecting women's actual needs, because there was not enough consultation. The suggested training proposed by the NAP also shows the lack of understanding of the role of women at the ground and contributes to negative stereotypes that women are not qualified.

**Poor economic empowerment goals:** The objective to make "available loans for women to set up small projects" is ill-adapted to the current economic circumstances. Women need to be given grants, not loans that will keep them in debt.

**Lack of commitments for gendered justice:** The NAP has no reparation plan for women affected by the war. It also doesn't address the new forms of violations women are subjected to with the war, such as torture, detention and sexual rape and violence as a tool of war. It also did not address issues related to force marriages and force recruitment of boys and girls.

## **c) Poor inclusivity**

**Lack of inclusion:** During early drafts, Peace Track Initiative partners, whose names are mentioned in the draft as contributors, were kept in the dark about its existence. Additionally, recommendations by civil society women-led organisations submitted to the government were not integrated.

**Selective quota use:** In the plan's first goal "to enhance women's participation at all levels in decision-making positions", there is a clear and tangible mention of increasing women's participation to 30% at negotiation. However, in other commitments such as "women presence in decision-making positions", there is no clear mention of any quota to be reached.

**Considering women as a monolithic entity:** The NAP ignores the various experiences of women in Yemen. Groups like girls, young women, as well as mothers of recruited child soldiers, women with disabilities, rural women, women heading households and internally displaced women (IDPs) were not addressed in the NAP, even though they have different realities and needs.

**Exclusion of civil society from important decision-making spaces:** Because the ministries of Defense and of Interior are responsible for "ensuring women representation in various monitoring committees" (ceasefire, detainees, prisoners of war, and reconstruction), women participation is

limited to those from a military background, excluding civil society women and women peacebuilders.

**Absence of protection mechanism for Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs):** The goal “to enhance the protection of women from all forms of violence” doesn’t mention important consideration for the protection of WHRDs. This leaves women political leaders, women peacebuilders, or detained women without any mechanism to protect them.

#### **d) Elusive implementation strategy:**

**Absence of operational costs & implementation mechanism:** There is no mention of budgets or resource allocation to implement the NAP’s goals. There are no Monitoring and Evaluation mechanisms for accountability. There is also no implementation mechanism or coordination platforms between the government and civil society.

**Disregard for existing resources:** There is a clear disregard for existing resources and institutions. For example, putting the Ministry of Public Works in charge of “establishing shelters for victims of violence that are gender-sensitive” indicates a priority to build shelters from scratch instead of looking into supporting the Women Union which currently runs the only four shelters in Yemen. Additionally, in goals calling for monitoring women’s rights violations and abuses the NAP fails to mention the National Commission to Investigate Allegations of Violations of Human Rights (NCIAVHR), who are already documenting human rights violations in Yemen since 2012 and need to improve the process of documenting women’s rights issues. There is also no mention of the role of the Women National Committee.

**Heavy humanitarian focus without linkages to Humanitarian Plan:** Although 31% of the outcomes in the NAP have humanitarian focus, there was no clear linkages to the two billion humanitarian response plan led by the UN, which women led organisations are facing challenges to access its funding due to difficult application criteria.

## **4. Recommendations**

**The Peace Track Initiative urges the internationally recognised government to:**

- Revisit the NAP draft by holding inclusive consultations with women groups and integrate their priorities and needs in the plan.
- Carry out a comprehensive gender analysis to ensure the needs and priorities of intersectional women groups are addressed, as well as, that the violations and abuses that women are facing – including those raised in the Group of Eminent Experts report- such as detention, sexual violence and rape, women and girls’ recruitment are effectively addressed.
- Establish inter-linkages of the women, peace and security agenda with other Yemen’s commitments to women’s rights, such as CEDAW, Beijing Platform for Action and NDC Outcomes.
- Integrate Covid-19 response into the NAP, recognizing that the pandemic, along with the effects of the war is disproportionately affecting women and girls.

- Add more capacity-building objectives for security and military sectors to address discriminatory practices against women in the security sector. This can include training on women rights, on CEDAW, on gender-sensitive responses.
- There is a need for better leveraging of existing resources and reviving institutions including the Women National Committee.
- Outline specific commitments for justice and reparation and compensation for women affected by the war.
- Balance the practical everyday needs of women and girls (access to livelihood, water, food, education, healthcare) with the strategic interest of the NAP (advancing women's status).
- Move away from portraying women only as passive victims, by balancing the efforts of protecting women from the war with recognizing and encouraging their agency as changemakers.
- Outline tangible goals and clear indicators to measure progress over time and develop an implementation and accountability mechanism.
- Allocate funds and resources to operationalize the NAP, and clearly state the budget for each goal.
- Commit to equal representation of women in all decision-making spaces at all stages and all levels of the peace and political processes.

**The Peace Track Initiative urges the women-led civil society organisations to:**

- Continue to coordinate, strategize, and collaborate to advance women, peace, and security agenda.
- Collectively call for the revision of the NAP to improve its responsiveness to the current needs and priorities of women in Yemen.

**The Peace Track Initiative urges the donors to:**

- Provide technical and financial support to the government conditional to holding an inclusive process to revise and to implement in participatory manner the NAP.
- Allocate core and flexible funding for women led organizations to implement projects in line with the NAP.
- Ensure that allocating funds to COVID-19 does not affect allocations to issues related to gender justice.
- Support an inclusive and accountable peace process that ensures equal and meaningful participation of women.
- Commit to long-term and sustainable protection programmes for Yemeni women and girls including specific programmes for women human rights defenders and survivors of SGBV.
- Donors committing allocations for the UN Yemen Humanitarian Response Plan, should make sure their funding for activities within this plan also advance women, peace, and security agenda and interlinks with the Yemen NAP.

**The Peace track Initiative urges the Office of the Special Envoy to Yemen and Track II partners to:**

- Hold the government accountable to the outcomes of the NAP relevant to women's participation.
- Ensure that the government and national actors including political parties and movements accountable to commit to women's equal representation and request nominations of women when invitations to meetings are sent out to national parties.
- Ensure that shuttle diplomacy and back channel meetings include meetings with women.
- Consult regularly and transparently with women groups ensuring diverse and balanced representation.