

AGDA Insight

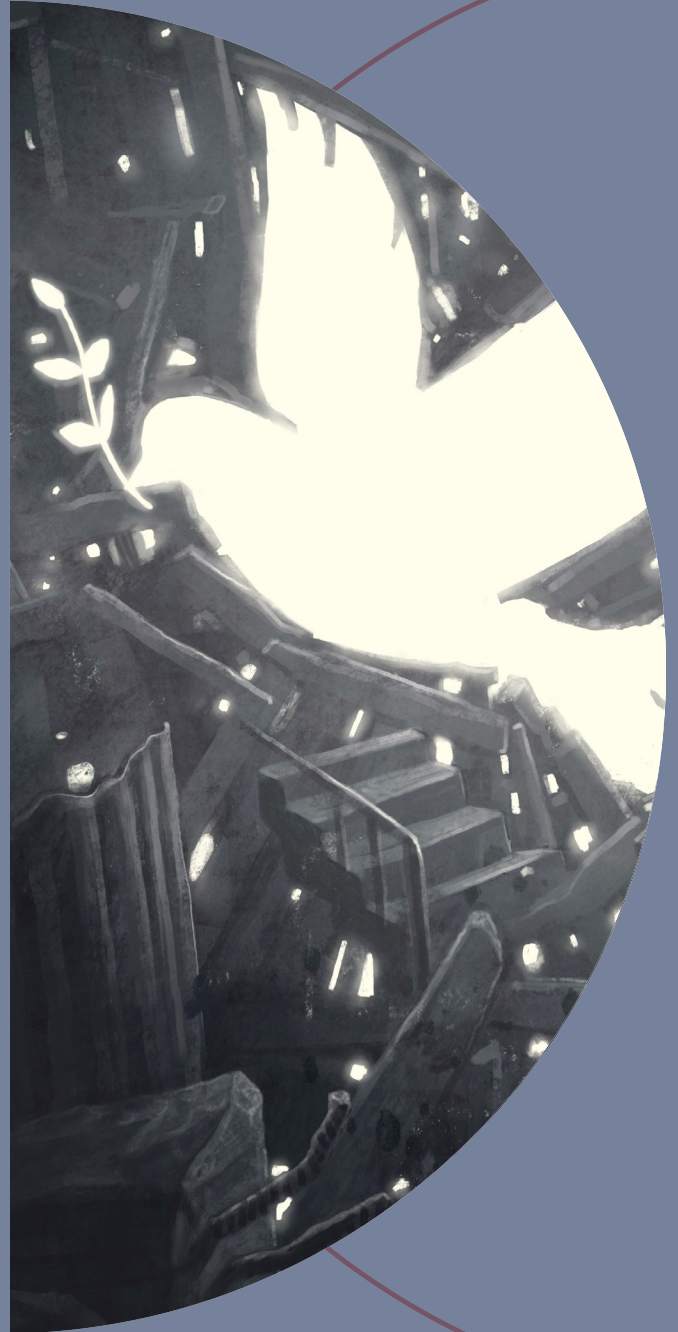
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Gendering Ceasefires in the MENA Region: The Cases of Gaza and Lebanon

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Summary:

- Around the world, ceasefires have gained relevance as a conflict management tool in a changing peacemaking landscape marked by increasing levels of armed conflict, greater multipolarity – both in general and more specifically in terms of mediation actors – and a decline in comprehensive peace processes and agreements led by the United Nations (UN).
- This trend is particularly apparent in the wider Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, where ceasefire agreements are especially relevant and important. Because of the prevalence of conflict and the significant economic and human costs and the devastating humanitarian crises that ensue, conflict management tools are particularly urgent. For the countries of the Arab Gulf that have become active mediators, such as the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Oman, utilising ceasefire agreements and understanding their gendered implications is particularly relevant.
- While ceasefire negotiation and implementation processes have sidelined women, and ceasefire agreements are often gender blind, there are various rationales – both normative and practical – for gendering ceasefires,

including women's fundamental right to shape their personal as well as their country's future; their moderation, peacemaking and peacebuilding expertise and skills, which can enable effective ceasefires; and the unique way in which they are affected by armed conflicts, especially in matters related to conflict-related sexual violence.

- The Insight draws on comparative evidence and new ideas to discuss several (potentially) effective strategies for ensuring women's meaningful participation throughout a ceasefire process. Gender quotas can strengthen women's influence over ceasefire negotiation and implementation processes, if combined with complementary measures that ensure women's protection from patriarchal backlash, promote intra-women coalition building, raise public awareness of women as relevant and legitimate peacemaking actors, and enhance women negotiators' access to childcare and transportation support. Concrete provisions that prioritise women in humanitarian relief interventions and prisoner exchanges; prohibit conflict-related SGBV and other non-military acts like abductions or torture; and include tangible commitments to women's meaningful participation in future peace talks can make ceasefire agreements more gender-sensitive. Women's inclusion in dedicated ceasefire monitoring and implementation bodies, technical and financial accompaniment for women-led data collection efforts, and targeted capacity strengthening initiatives to women monitors could enable an effective ceasefire implementation process that accounts for women's priorities, positions, and needs.
- The Insight finds that despite the widespread evidence of devastating impacts that the wars in Gaza and Lebanon have caused for women, the Lebanon and Gaza ceasefire agreements from 27 November 2024 and 15 January 2025, respectively, the preceding and subsequent (extension) negotiations, as well as the monitoring efforts were largely gender blind. Women being released first under the Israel-Hamas prisoner and detainee exchanges is the only exception to this overarching pattern, but the Gaza agreement largely failed to include women negotiators and did not include gender provisions beyond prioritising women and children in prisoner swaps. The Lebanon ceasefire was purely limited to military and security affairs and did not include any provision related to humanitarian or civilian matters. Women were also excluded from formal negotiation processes.²
- It recommends that to make ceasefires more comprehensive and lasting, including women in formal and informal negotiation processes, in addition to adding gender provisions in the texts of the agreements that address women's concerns, are key.
- It highlights for policymakers, mediators and civil society organisations (CSOs) various options for gendering ceasefire processes in the MENA region. These can be summarised under three overarching themes:
 - » Enabling women's meaningful representation in and influence over ceasefire negotiations.
 - » Ensuring that ceasefire agreement provisions take women's capacities, needs and priorities into consideration.
 - » Maximising women's influence over formal and informal ceasefire monitoring and implementation activities.

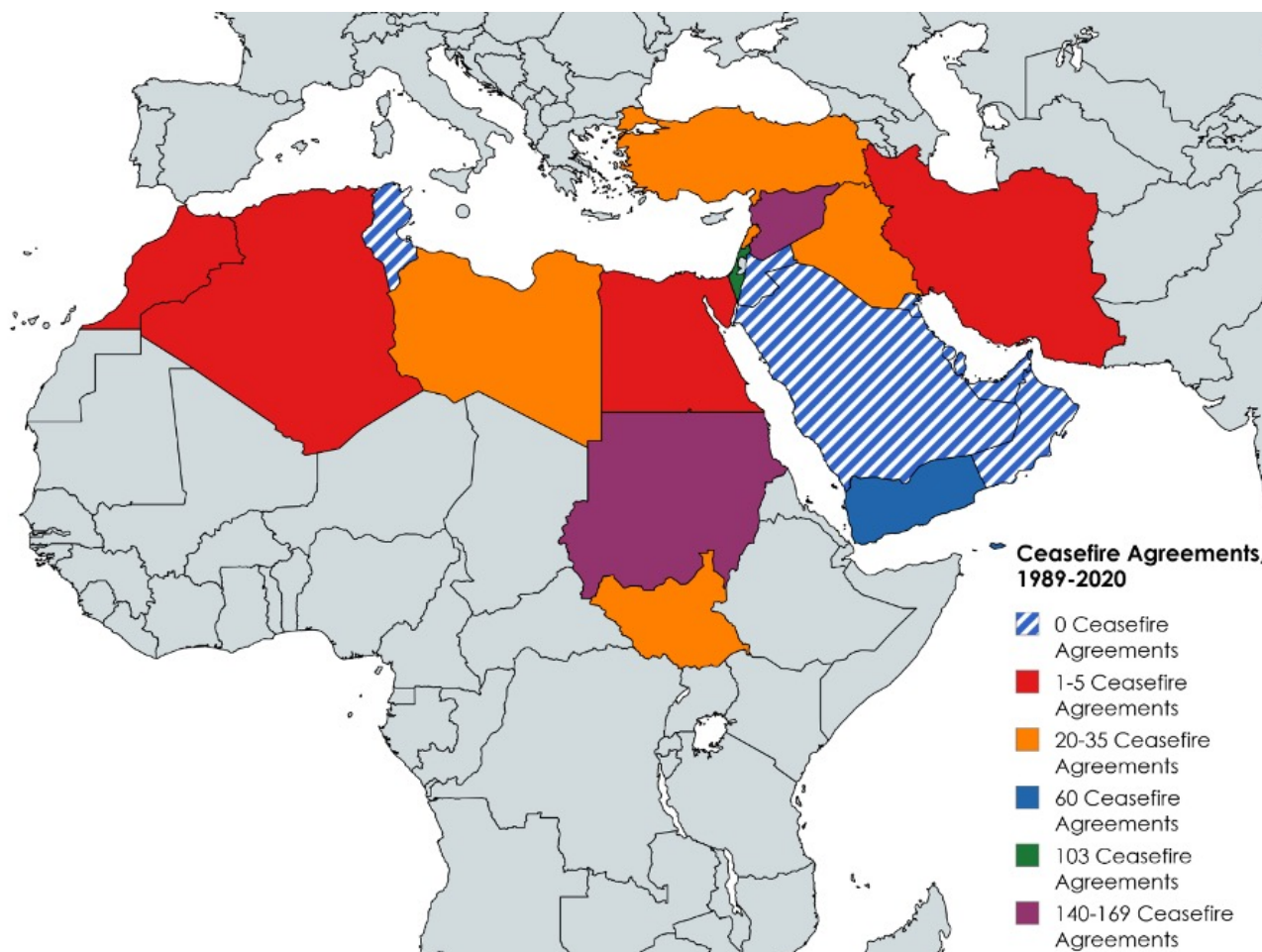
The Issue

A changing geopolitical context marked by increasing levels of armed conflict, greater multipolarity – both in general and more specifically in terms of mediation actors – and a decline in comprehensive peace processes and agreements led by the UN, raise questions about how to contain armed conflict and promote lasting peace and stability. The absence of functional comprehensive peace processes has turned ceasefires into a key pillar of contemporary peacemaking.³

Ceasefires are particularly relevant for the MENA region for several reasons. First, the region hosts active mediators like the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Oman. Second, armed conflict remains prevalent across the region. The significant conflict-induced economic and human costs⁴ make effective conflict management strategies particularly urgent. Third, ceasefires have gained relevance in regional conflict management efforts over the past 15 years.

Indeed, comparative data indicates that 339 (or 55 percent) of the 617 ceasefire agreements concluded in the MENA region between 1989 and 2020 materialised after 2011.⁵ Figure 1 presents the geographic variation in the number of ceasefire agreements across the region from 1989 to 2020 and shows the importance of ceasefires as a conflict management tool in the MENA region.

Figure 1: Ceasefire agreements across the MENA region, 1989-2020



Source: Self-created map based on raw data provided by Clayton et al. (2023). See endnote 3. Figure 1 was created with mapchart.net, see: <https://www.mapchart.net/index.html>.

Ceasefire negotiations and agreements in the MENA region and beyond have rarely mentioned or involved women. This is even though women's security situation and protection needs are worthy of special attention in ceasefire agreements. For instance, a broad definition of protection that addresses various forms of sexual violence and covers women's psychosocial needs can enhance women's well-being following the signing of a ceasefire agreement.⁶ At the same time, deliberate efforts to avoid presenting women as a vulnerable group can mitigate persistent stereotypes depicting women as weak and helpless victims,⁷ which could help with peacebuilding efforts.

This Insight highlights the importance of gendering ceasefire processes⁸ and reviews original ceasefire agreements from the wider MENA region⁹ and beyond to explore entry points for gendering the November 2024 ceasefire agreement between Israel and Lebanon as well as the January 2025 ceasefire agreement between Israel and Hamas. While both ceasefires were broken at the time of this writing, any subsequent negotiation and future agreements could make use of the recommendations offered in this Insight to ensure that peace efforts do not leave women behind.

Ceasefires and gender: A brief review from research and practice

A universal standard definition of a “ceasefire” is yet to emerge among policymakers, practitioners, and researchers.¹⁰ This Insight defines ceasefires as a unilateral or reciprocal, negotiated agreement to suspend hostilities.

Ceasefires are diverse. They can be unilateral, bilateral or multilateral, can involve domestic or international mediators, if any, and may be concluded in writing or orally. Ceasefires can also serve multiple purposes, sometimes in parallel.¹¹ Conflict parties have declared ceasefires to advance a peace process, facilitate humanitarian aid delivery or evacuations, implement vaccination campaigns, and observe cultural holidays, but also to replenish their military resources.¹²

There are multiple rationales for ensuring women’s meaningful participation and visibility throughout a ceasefire process and for ensuring ceasefire processes are gender responsive.¹³

- Drawing on women’s mediation, emergency relief, protection skills, capacity, and expertise; their in-depth knowledge about the context, and their physical access to remote conflict-affected areas can enable more effective and lasting ceasefires.
- Ensuring that conflict parties acknowledge and address sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in a ceasefire process.
- Broadening the thematic scope of ceasefire processes beyond military issues, which can strengthen popular perceptions of ownership in the process.
- Increasing public awareness of a ceasefire process and thereby exerting pressure on conflict parties to settle their incompatibilities through dialogue.
- Setting the highest possible standard for women’s inclusion for the entire peace process, which can pave the way towards transforming women’s position in society.
- Acknowledging and delivering on women’s right to shape decision-making processes that has direct consequences for them and the future of their country.

Ceasefire negotiations

Ceasefire processes encompass three phases: negotiations, an agreement and agreement implementation efforts. The extent to which ceasefires incorporate women and their perspectives naturally varies. International mediators and conflict parties tend to depict ceasefire negotiations and agreements as being primarily focused on military and security issues. In combination with the prevalent essentialist view of women as mothers and providers of humanitarian relief, this has led to conflict parties and mediators regarding ceasefire processes as a men’s affair.¹⁴

As such, ceasefire negotiation processes have largely excluded women.¹⁵ Only five percent of 199 ceasefire agreements concluded between 1989 and 2018 involved women as signatories.¹⁶ Ceasefire agreements in CAR in 2014, DRC in 2020, and South Sudan in 2016, 2017 and 2022 constitute exceptions in this regard.¹⁷

Difficulties in collecting the requisite financial resources for women’s transportation and capacity strengthening initiatives have further constrained women’s participation in ceasefire negotiations. Insufficient assistance with their care duties while actively engaging in ceasefire processes has compounded the issues cited above.¹⁸

Ceasefire agreements

Comparative evidence shows that ceasefire agreements usually sideline gender concerns. Only 29 (or 11 percent) of 267 ceasefire agreements concluded between 1990 and 2016 include provisions on women or gender, and only 14 (or 12 percent) out of 115 ceasefire or ceasefire-related agreements between 2016 and 2024 included (a) gender provision(s).¹⁹ Ceasefire agreements are therefore largely gender-blind in absolute and relative terms.

If they are included in ceasefire agreements at all, gender provisions usually lack precision and ignore women's intersectional identities.²⁰ Sexual violence is the most common theme ceasefire agreements with gender provisions cover.²¹ While acts of SGBV are occasionally declared as "prohibited acts", no ceasefire agreement recognises sexual violence as a ceasefire violation. Accountability for sexual violence during ceasefire implementation is thus low.

Ceasefire monitoring and implementation

Challenges to effective and inclusive ceasefire monitoring and implementation abound in many conflict-affected contexts – imprecise monitoring and implementation provisions in rushed ceasefire agreements; a deteriorating security situation and weak protection of (civilian) monitors, particularly women; conflict parties' low commitment to honour a ceasefire agreement; weak sanctions for non-compliance with ceasefire provisions; and an overly ambitious implementation timeline are particularly acute issues.²²

Comparative evidence indicates that the inclusion of women and civil society more broadly can enable effective ceasefire and peace agreement implementation processes.²³ However, while the recent decline in Western and UN leadership in ceasefire implementation may generate new opportunities for civilians to shape ceasefire monitoring,²⁴ available case study research concludes that past monitoring and implementation processes have marginalised civil society and women.²⁵

Strategies for ensuring women's involvement and influence

A review of previous ceasefire processes enables the identification of strategies for enhancing women's meaningful participation in ceasefire negotiations and implementation. It also highlights entry points for gendering ceasefire agreements.

Negotiations

There are various entry points for enhancing women's direct, meaningful participation in ceasefire negotiations.²⁶

- Establishing a gender quota for ceasefire mediation and negotiation teams.
- Creating positive incentives for conflict parties to include women, e.g., creating additional seats around the negotiation table that must be taken by women.
- Establishing gender commissions like the gender sub-commission in the 2012–2016 peace process between the Colombian government and the FARC.²⁷
- Including gender expertise on the mediation team.
- Covering the transportation costs of women negotiators and mediators and arranging childcare while they engage in the ceasefire process.

Comparative evidence indicates that women's mere presence at the negotiating table does not necessarily guarantee them influence over the process.²⁸ Complementing quotas with targeted protection measures and coalition building support is therefore key to counter various manifestations of patriarchal backlash against women's participation, including intimidation and deliberate exclusion of women negotiators from decision-making spaces.

Public-awareness-raising campaigns that highlight women's relevance and legitimacy as key stakeholders in ceasefire processes can also increase public pressure and buy-in for women's meaningful participation in ceasefire negotiations. Revising common perceptions of ceasefires being a technical undertaking that primarily concerns military actors could be a first step in this regard.

Reconciliation work can also enhance women's visibility as relevant actors in ceasefire processes. This applies particularly to socio-political contexts dominated by patriarchy. In Libya, women members of the National Movement (al-harakat al-wataniyya) set up peace tents where affiliates of both conflict parties could gather to mourn. This initiative enjoyed far-reaching legitimacy, gave women visibility, and paved the way towards their participation in ceasefire negotiations.²⁹

Gender experts can also seek to target individual negotiation delegates from the outside, reminding them of women's priorities and demands throughout the negotiations. Gender-editing draft ceasefire agreements provides another entry point for women and gender experts to shape the outcome of a ceasefire negotiation process without being directly represented therein.³⁰

Agreements

Including normative principles like respect for humanitarian laws, anti-discrimination and gender equality in agreements' preamble increases the potential for ceasefires to catalyse gender-transformative change.³¹ Moreover, women are affected by armed conflict in specific ways. Any evacuation plan or humanitarian corridor would therefore ideally prioritise women and children and take women's specific needs into consideration, e.g., childcare, access to food, maternity health, and protection from SGBV during the evacuation. The al-Zabadani, Kifraya, and al-Fuaa truce established in Syria in 2014 is a case in point. Any evacuation process would ideally also consider all women identity groups equally.³²

The same applies to prisoner exchanges. Syria's Cessation of Hostilities agreement signed on 22 February 2016 and the 2014 al-Zabadani, Kifraya, and al-Fuaa truce stipulate that women shall be released first or account for most released individuals as part of the respective envisioned prisoner releases. Specific measures for facilitating women prisoners' reintegration into society can mitigate stigma and other hardships women might encounter after being released from prison.³³

Conflict-related SGBV would ideally be incorporated into a ceasefire agreement as a prohibited action. Ceasefire agreements in the DRC (1999), Sudan (2010 and 2013), Yemen (2016), Colombia (2023), and South Sudan (2014 and 2017) all regard sexual violence as a ceasefire violation. However, vague formulations as observed in the 2014 South Sudan CoH Agreement, which notes that parties "shall refrain from acts of rape," have struggled to contain SGBV.³⁴

Other non-military acts like abductions of civilians, arbitrary arrests, and torture, among others, could complement the list of prohibited acts, as seen in the 2008 ceasefire agreement between the Ugandan army and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), as well as Myanmar's 2015 nationwide ceasefire. Ceasefires would ideally provide some prospect of justice being delivered for any past and future violation of prohibited acts to enhance people's trust in a ceasefire.³⁵

Some ceasefire agreements sketch out the next steps towards sustainable peace. These steps can entail different mechanisms, including a peace conference (South Sudan 2017), a political dialogue between conflict parties (Ethiopia 2022) or the establishment of communities' forums for peace and reconciliation (South Sudan 2022).

Ensuring women's meaningful participation in any such roadmap towards peace can enable a gender-responsive (and potentially gender-transformative) peace process. The 2015 nationwide ceasefire in Myanmar highlights that the political dialogue process shall include a "reasonable number/ratio of women representatives."³⁶ While 'reasonable' is vague, this provision suggests that quotas provide an entry point for guaranteeing women's representation in peacemaking activities following a ceasefire.³⁷

Monitoring and implementation

The establishment of a dedicated monitoring and implementation body can enhance the ceasefire agreement's robustness. While most ceasefire agreements lack monitoring and/or verification mechanisms,³⁸ any formal monitoring body would ideally guarantee women's formal representation and influence. The 2014 South Sudanese Cessation of Hostilities (CoH) Agreement highlights the importance of ensuring women's actual participation in monitoring activities. While the agreement was gender-responsive on paper and formulated clear reporting requirements on cases of SGBV, the effective number of reports on cases of SGBV during the implementation phase only started to increase once a woman humanitarian advisor joined the men-dominated monitoring team.³⁹

Women-led advocacy campaigns can mitigate potential resistance by conflict parties to include women in ceasefire monitoring and implementation. For example, the Taskforce on the Engagement of Women in South Sudan (2014) successfully advocated for women to be included in the international and local monitoring committees.⁴⁰ Advocacy campaigns can also target women to inform them about the existence of a ceasefire agreement and highlight their relevance in the implementation process.

Technical and financial accompaniment for women's diverse, independent data collection efforts constitute another entry point for gendering ceasefire implementation.⁴¹ For example, establishing women contact points can encourage victims of SGBV to share their experience, which they are often reluctant to do when interacting with men.⁴² A women consultative forum that reflects women's intersectional identities could streamline women's informal monitoring activities.⁴³

Strong (women) politicians can facilitate the transfer between formal monitoring activities and women's informal consultative forums. For example, Graça Machel, the former Minister for Education and Culture of Mozambique, supported the Kenyan Women's Consultative Group in feeding their priorities and positions into the Kenya National Dialogue and Reconciliation process (2008-2013).⁴⁴

Several additional options for enhancing local ownership in monitoring and implementation initiatives more broadly may also enable women's meaningful participation.⁴⁵

- Offering targeted capacity-strengthening initiatives to women monitors to help them diversify their monitoring tools, expand their reporting and data collection skills, prepare them for interacting with armed actors, and use technological applications in the monitoring process wherever possible. In Iraq, technological innovations have enhanced civilian-led human rights monitoring efforts.
- Conducting frequent assessments of offline and online security risks that women involved in ceasefire implementation encounter to constantly evaluate and update enacted measures to protect monitors from intimidation and revenge attacks by conflict parties.
- Conducting training initiatives targeting security personnel and explaining how to effectively address women's security situation and needs.

Gender analysis of ceasefire agreements in Lebanon and Gaza

The outbreak of the war in Gaza on 7 October 2023 marked another escalation of the protracted Israel-Palestinian conflict and sparked a Middle Eastern crisis. Following the surprise Hamas-led armed incursions into the Gaza envelope of Southern Israel, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) launched a fully-fledged military campaign against Gaza that continues at the time of writing. The IDF's invasion of Lebanon on 1 October 2024 – following a prolonged exchange of bombardments between Hezbollah and Israel, beginning with Hezbollah's launching of rockets and artillery at Israeli positions on 8 October 2023 following the Hamas-led attack on Israel – further diffused the escalation in Gaza into the wider region.

Israeli attacks on Palestinian civilian infrastructure have come at significant human and economic cost. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs estimates that the armed conflict in Gaza had claimed the lives of 67,348 individuals as of 1 October 2025, with Palestinians accounting for 66,148 of them.⁴⁶ Armed hostilities between the IDF and Hezbollah in Lebanon have left over 4,000 people dead.⁴⁷

The situation in Gaza and Lebanon was temporarily calmed following the signing of a ceasefire agreement between the Israeli and the Lebanese governments on 27 November 2024 and between Israel and Hamas on 15 January 2025, respectively. However, neither ceasefire lasted beyond March 2025 when the IDF fully resumed air strikes against Gaza and Southern Lebanon. IDF air strikes targeting Southern Lebanon had already brought the ceasefire to the brink of collapse in the preceding weeks⁴⁸ with ad-hoc strikes continuing well into June 2025. In both places, women were excluded from ceasefire negotiation processes despite being very affected by the devastating wars.

Lebanon

The ceasefire agreement between Israel and Lebanon builds on UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1701 from 2006. It includes Israel's commitment to withdraw entirely from Lebanese territory by 26 January 2025, parts of which it had occupied after 1 October 2024. In return, the Lebanese army commits to dismantling Hezbollah and other armed non-state groups operating in South Lebanon.

Most provisions in the ceasefire agreement flesh out military and security-related aspects with other thematic areas mentioned in passing, if at all. Lebanon and Israel commit to "[taking] steps to promote conditions for a permanent and comprehensive solution". However, the ceasefire agreement neither indicates concrete activities for how to do that nor elaborates on the six principles and elements for a permanent ceasefire and long-term solution of the armed conflict that Section 8 of UNSCR 1701 presents.

Humanitarian, civilian or any other economic or political provisions are also absent from the ceasefire agreement, whose final provision merely notes that it "[strives] to enable civilians on both sides of the Blue Line to return safely to their lands and homes."

The complete absence of 'women' and 'gender' in UNSCR 1701 and the ceasefire agreement text is striking. Both documents are gender blind and fail to acknowledge and address the unique ways in which women are affected by and could contribute to resolving the armed conflict in the region.

Formal monitoring and implementation efforts have also mostly sidelined women. The Lebanon agreement established a reformulated version of the Tripartite mechanism ("the Mechanism")⁴⁹, consisting of the IDF, UNIFIL, the Lebanese Armed Forces, the US (chair), and France as the key implementation actors.

Women have had no mandate to be formally involved in the reformulated Mechanism. Independent women-led monitoring initiatives also struggled to emerge in a context where inclusive ceasefire monitoring has not been a priority for Lebanese advocates of women's participation in peace and security.

Scarce data on women's involvement in ceasefire monitoring and implementation corroborates the conclusion that these processes remain men dominated. Lebanese women's ongoing humanitarian relief and basic service provision efforts in their communities have nevertheless paved the way for advancing stability and prosperity in the region, which is a long-term objective defined in the ceasefire agreement.

Gaza

The January 2025 ceasefire agreement between Israel and Hamas builds on and supplements a ceasefire proposal presented by then US president Joe Biden on 31 May 2024. It encompasses three stages of 42 days each. Stage 1 is considerably more detailed than stages 2 and 3, whose details are supposed to be negotiated as the implementation of stage 1 proceeds.

The May 2024 ceasefire proposal explicitly mentions 'women' five times throughout the text. 'Female/females' are mentioned four times. All provisions directly citing women or female/females concern the exchange of prisoners.⁵⁰ They provide that Israel and Hamas shall both ensure that women prisoners and detainees are exchanged first, along with children.⁵¹

Other thematic provisions covered by the three stages concern the incremental withdrawal of Israeli forces from the Gaza Strip, the return of internationally displaced people (IDPs), humanitarian aid delivery, and the long-term reconstruction of the Gaza Strip, among others. The ceasefire proposal guarantees Palestinian civilians' free movement throughout the Gaza Strip. However, none of the additional thematic provisions mentioned above address the specific situation, priorities, and needs of women.

Women are even less visible in the agreement from 15 January 2025. None of the five provisions on prisoner exchanges in the agreement mention women explicitly. However, the agreement mentions a "list of 33 [Israeli detainees]" to be released during stage 1 of the agreement, which, according to newspaper coverage, included 10 women, one baby, one child, and 21 men over the age of 50 or with serious medical conditions.⁵²

In combination with Israel's government belief that Hamas did not hold any Israeli women in captivity other than the 10 mentioned on the list of 33,⁵³ it follows that the written provisions on prisoner and detainee exchanges in the Gaza agreement were as gender sensitive as the May 2024 ceasefire proposal, at least regarding Israeli detainees. The Gaza agreement does not specify the gender of Palestinian prisoners Israel committed to releasing under stage 1 of the agreement.

Section 5a on the Rafah Border Crossing is the only part of the Gaza agreement to explicitly mention women. It includes an Israeli commitment that the crossing "will be ready for the transfer of civilians and for the wounded after the release of all women (civilian and soldiers)". This created an indirect incentive for Hamas to release Israeli women detainees first.

The absence of any other gender-specific provision indicates that women entered the Gaza agreement as a subject of prisoner exchanges with very limited agency. Women lacked any mandate under the agreement to shape the implementation of prisoner exchange, humanitarian, and military provisions. Women prisoners and detainees therefore depended on Israel's and Hamas' compliance with the agreement for their release.

The implementation of the Gaza agreement's prisoner and detainee exchange provisions can be construed as being gender responsive. The first two rounds of prisoner/detainee swaps between Israel and Hamas in January 2025 saw the release of all Israeli women who had been in Hamas captivity since October 2023. Israel also released Palestinian women and teenage prisoners first.⁵⁴

While the Gaza agreement prioritises women in prisoner and detainee exchanges, any potential successor agreement would ideally also mention women under several of its other provisions, namely the return of displaced civilian population and freedom of movement, humanitarian relief, monitoring and implementation, follow-up negotiations, and reconstruction.

When it comes to monitoring, women's involvement in monitoring and implementing the Gaza agreement was indirect. Importantly, women-led grassroots activism and advocacy to alleviate the dire humanitarian situation in Gaza contributed to achieving the humanitarian and protection-related objectives enshrined in the Gaza agreement. Women and children were the main beneficiaries of women-led emergency relief and protection initiatives. It follows that humanitarian relief interventions were more gender-responsive than the corresponding thematic provisions in the ceasefire agreement.

Palestinian women's informal emergency relief efforts have also enhanced the prospects of a gender-inclusive ceasefire monitoring and implementation process in the following ways.

Women-led informal emergency relief initiatives strengthen women's economic, legal, health, and security position. The resulting tangible relief women feel in their everyday struggle for their families' and communities' survival can provide an opportunity to think about how they want to strengthen their involvement in ceasefire monitoring and implementation.⁵⁵

- Designing and implementing their emergency relief and protection initiatives has further enhanced Palestinian women's management, reporting, and financial as well as technical skills. Those skills are directly relevant to ceasefire monitoring and enable Palestinian women to position themselves as capable ceasefire implementation actors moving forward.
- Existing women-led humanitarian relief and protection initiatives provide a potentially strong foundation for women to strengthen their coalition and discuss and advocate for their meaningful participation in future ceasefire processes.

Future ceasefire agreements in Gaza, Lebanon and the wider MENA region would ideally be explicit about women being primary beneficiaries of humanitarian relief interventions. Maximising and specifying the quantity of various forms of humanitarian aid that will be delivered can ensure domestic and international monitors to hold conflict parties accountable. A clear provision to establish gender-sensitive healthcare facilities could also enhance women's well-being following the establishment of a ceasefire.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, ceasefires have gained increasing prominence as a conflict management tool in the MENA region and beyond amid a changing peacemaking landscape. Women have encountered systematic patterns of exclusion and marginalisation throughout ceasefire processes in various conflict-affected regions around the world. Gender-blind ceasefire agreements are common. The ceasefire agreements between Israel and Lebanon from 27 November 2024 and Israel and Hamas from 15 January 2025, respectively, are no exception in this regard.

Policymakers, mediators, and other stakeholders from the MENA region, especially in the Gulf countries, can work to ensure that ceasefire processes are more gender responsive at the negotiations and monitoring phases, in addition to adding provisions that take women's capacities, needs and priorities into consideration and recognising women's influence over formal and informal processes.

Negotiations

Women's complete absence from ceasefire negotiations in Lebanon and Gaza indicates the need to advocate for women's meaningful participation from the outset in various ways.

- » Adopting a gender quota for ceasefire negotiations could enable women's meaningful representation in ceasefire negotiations, if complemented by other measures.
- » Appointing mediators who have gender expertise themselves or access to it and are committed to enabling women's meaningful participation could amplify women's voices and concerns.
- » Promoting a broader understanding of ceasefires than just a technical military agreement to highlight women's relevance and legitimacy as ceasefire negotiators to the public and conflict parties by mediators, policymakers and the media could pave the way to more meaningful participation.
- » Developing and implementing tangible measures to protect women negotiators from online and offline harassment, intimidation and attacks.
- » Covering women negotiators' transportation costs and ensure that they have access to childcare and maternity health services. These forms of assistance would enable women negotiators to fully concentrate on the negotiation process.⁵⁶
- » Government ministries and CSOs could also organise training sessions on gender issues for women and men members of negotiation parties and mediation teams strengthen women's perspectives in ceasefire negotiation processes.⁵⁷

Agreements

Policymakers and mediators should consider incorporating the points listed below in ongoing and future ceasefire processes in the wider MENA region which were absent in the Lebanon and Gaza agreements.

- » Include gender equality, anti-discrimination and women's rights and capacity to shape ceasefire processes as key principles underlying the ceasefire agreement and make the implementation of those principles a key responsibility for all conflict parties.
- » Acknowledge the unique way in which women have been affected by but can also resolve an ongoing armed conflict as peacemakers and peacebuilders.
- » Ensure that ceasefire agreements acknowledge and incorporate the perspectives and situation of a plurality of women (from different demographic backgrounds and identity groups), including women combatants.
- » Curb hate speech against women in offline and online spaces.
- » Provide clear instructions for public notification/dissemination work around the ceasefire, particularly targeting women.

- » Define specific acts that count as ceasefire violations and formulate corresponding sanctions.
- » Include specific forms of sexual violence on any list of prohibited activities.
- » Acknowledge that perpetrators of acts of SGBV will be held accountable and victims will receive reparation, while ensuring conflict parties' continuous buy-in into the process.
- » Ensure that any evacuation plan included in a short-term ceasefire agreement provides for women and children being evacuated first.

Monitoring

Policymakers and mediators could use the following tools to ensure better monitoring.

- » Establishing a dedicated monitoring mechanism and guaranteeing women a minimum representation therein, including in decision-making processes.
- » Ensuring the representation of gender experts in monitoring and implementation bodies and incorporating women in the expert selection process.
- » Defining clear reporting responsibilities for conflict parties regarding women's situation on the ground, including frequent update reports on women's protection from all forms of SGBV.
- » Establishing a separate mechanism or platform for women to report any ceasefire violations and particularly attacks against women.
- » Appointing women as contact points in any monitoring mechanism and implementation body.
- » Ensuring women's representation in police forces, local committees or other actors involved in monitoring.
- » Giving women a mandate to contribute informally to ceasefire monitoring activities, e.g., as observers or witnesses of or experts accompanying the formal monitoring process.

Universities and diplomatic training academies, women-led CSOs, and decision-makers in state security forces could assist with implementing those provisions in various ways.

- » Creating dedicated platforms and mechanisms that are safe for women to report incidents of SGBV which can generate the gender-specific data required for a gender-responsive monitoring process.
- » Financial, political and technical support could also support women-led CSOs with establishing and maintaining informal consultative forums to collectively strategise their monitoring and implementation activities.⁵⁸
- » Mediators could maximise the influence of women-led consultative forums over the implementation process by ensuring a constant, two-way flow of information between them and formal monitoring bodies.
- » Mediators could also facilitate discussions between conflict parties, women and technology experts on how recent technological innovations could enhance both the monitoring process and women's participation therein.⁵⁹ Exchanges with experts would ideally place strong emphasis on mitigating any potential security risks for women monitors employing technological tools.

Endnotes

1. Inclusive Peace is a Swiss-based 'think and do tank' undertaking comparative research on peace and political transition processes, and providing tailored and discrete support to stakeholders who are themselves engaged or seeking to influence such processes.
2. This Insight was drafted before the Gaza ceasefire took effect in October 2025.
3. Clayton, G. (2025). Pause for Thought. Contemporary Ceasefire Politics. Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue. Background Paper, pp. 4 and 8. <https://hdcentre.org/insights/pause-for-thought-contemporary-ceasefire-politics/> [last accessed: 28 April 2025].
4. The Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) counts at least nine active state-based armed conflicts across the region for every year since 2011. According to UCDP, state-based armed conflicts involve at least two parties whose use of armed force in their fight over territory or access to government results in at least 25 battle-related deaths in a year. One of the two conflict parties must be the government of the state. See Davies, S. et al. (2024). Organised Violence 1989–2023, and the Prevalence of Organised Crime Groups. *Journal of Peace Research* 61(4), pp. 673–693; Gleditsch, N.P. et al. (2002). Armed Conflict 1946–2001. A New Dataset. *Journal of Peace Research* 39(5), pp. 615–637. UCDP estimates also hold that 517,485 people died in armed conflict across the wider MENA region between 2011 and 2023. See Sundberg, R. and Melander, E. (2013). Introducing the UCDP Georeferenced Event Dataset. *Journal of Peace Research* 50(4), pp. 523–532.
5. Clayton et al. (2023). Introducing the ETH/PRIO Civil Conflict Ceasefire Dataset. *Journal of Conflict Reduction* 67(7–8), pp. 1430–1451.
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