

## What is it?

The Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda in the Middle East and Northern Africa (MENA) is prevalent among military and peacekeeping forces and requires deeper exploration to better understand its successes and implementation issues. NATO will continue to support its MENA partners in integrating the Gender Perspective.

## THE 'MENA PARADOX'

The 'MENA Paradox' refers to the fact that, while the gender gap in education is closing, if not reversing, female workforce participation remains low and stagnant in MENA countries. This paradox has prompted various MENA armed forces to consider increasing female recruitment for officer and non-commissioned officer positions.

**Female unemployment at 31.6% between the ages 15-24, compared to 18% for men**

## Gender Perspective in the Military Lessons from Jordan

Jordan has made concerted efforts to increase the number of women participating in its military services. This has resulted in increased operational effectiveness within its cultural context, particularly in counterterrorism, border security, military intelligence, peacekeeping missions, response to humanitarian crises and military policing. Increased female participation has also broadened diversity of thought, resulting in the adoption of fresh ideas, greater safety for all social groups, better policies and overall improved military legitimacy.

Women in the military continue to encounter significant cultural barriers in Jordan and, more broadly, MENA countries, both institutionally and in public opinion. Systemic National Action Plans must therefore coexist with self-reflection, modelling, meaningful participation, talent management, idea exchange and bottom-up societal transformation.

**“NATIONAL REPUTATION AND LEADERS CAN SUPPORT CULTURAL SHIFTS BY ACTING AS CHANGE AGENTS AND ROLE MODELS”**

*Major Laura Abbott (PhD candidate, John Hopkins University)*

**Significant progress has been made towards WPS in the MENA region, but obstacles remain. Integrating the Gender Perspective can help NATO better understand and respond to the MENA region's volatile strategic challenges.**

## Gender Perspective in Peacekeeping Lessons from Egypt

There has been a global crisis in trust that has contributed to the retreat of peacekeeping operations (PKOs). The Gender Perspective can help re-build trust as well as strengthen the accountability and legitimacy of PKOs in the MENA region. Given the gendered nature of the region's security challenges, including terrorism trends and forced displacement, the WPS should be at the centre of peace and security interventions.

The Cairo International Center for Conflict Resolution, Peacekeeping and Peacebuilding supports capacity building and integrates the Gender Perspective into peace and security programming. For example, in Egypt, they helped introduce gender modules in pre-deployment training and increased female participation in PKOs. This improved the inclusivity, cultural sensitivity, and sustainability of responses and operations.



**In 2022, CCCPA trained the first group of female Egyptian military contingents to be deployed in UN PKOs.**

## NATO's Partnership Tools and the Gender Perspective

While gender is often perceived as a non-military issue, NATO strives to incorporate the Gender Perspective in all relevant aspects of cooperation with its partners. This involves tailored partnership guidance frameworks that translate broad policy goals into more specific cooperation objectives. Several MENA partners have integrated the Gender Perspective into their partnership frameworks, and four MENA countries participated in nine gender-related events in 2022.