

Update on Women, Peace and Security in Yemen 26 February 2024

The Informal Expert Group (IEG) of the Security Council on Women and Peace and Security discussed the situation in Yemen in March 2017 ([S/2017/627](#)), November 2017 ([S/2017/1040](#)), March 2019 ([S/2019/253](#)), and March 2021 ([S/2021/264](#)). This update summarizes relevant developments since the last IEG meeting.

Developments in the Security Council

The Security Council has adopted **seven resolutions** on Yemen since the last IEG meeting, extending the mandates of the sanctions regime and the UN Mission to support the Hudaydah Agreement (UNMHA), and reacting to recent developments in the Red Sea. **The only two with gender-related language were the two adopted in 2022.** Resolution 2643 renewing the mandate of UNMHA recognized the importance of engaging and consulting with “a diverse range of women’s organizations, to increase women’s participation in Agreement implementation and locally led peace initiatives.” Resolution 2624 renewing the sanctions regime listed the Houthis among sanctioned entities, and noted that the Houthis have “implemented a policy of sexual violence and repression against politically active and professional women.” The resolution included the following gender-related language:

Demanding the full, equal, and meaningful participation of women in the peace process, and the need for full implementation of Yemen’s Women, Peace, and Security National Action Plan in accordance with resolution [1325 \(2000\)](#), and recalling with satisfaction the 30 per cent minimum quota for women in the National Dialogue Conference,

Condemning sexual and gender-based violence, including sexual violence in conflict and torture, and particularly in detention facilities, and stressing the need for sufficient and appropriate protections for women and girls in refugee camps and elsewhere, including adequate provision of sex-separated facilities for women such as latrines, as well as for remedy and assistance for survivors of sexual violence in conflict as detailed in resolution [2467 \(2019\)](#),

Condemning in the strongest terms violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law, as well as human rights abuses, including those involving conflict-related sexual violence in Houthi-controlled areas, and the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict, including in schools, summer camps and mosques, as recorded in the Panel of Experts’ final report ([S/2022/50](#)),

3. Emphasises that there is no military solution to the current conflict and that the only viable path forward is dialogue and reconciliation among the multiple and varied parties including but not limited to the Government of Yemen and the Houthis, Yemen’s major political and regional parties, and women, youth and civil society;

12. Reaffirms that sexual violence in armed conflict, or violations against children in armed conflict such as the recruitment or use of children in armed conflict in violation of international law, could constitute an act, as specified in paragraph 18 (c) of resolution [2140 \(2014\)](#), and therefore a sanctionable act of engaging in or providing support for acts that threaten the peace, security or stability of Yemen, as described in paragraph 17 of that resolution;

Among the many press statements adopted by the Security Council on Yemen, the one adopted in April 2022 (SC/14861) to welcome the truce and the peaceful transfer of powers to the Presidential Leadership Council and their participation in UN-led talks, “underscored the importance of a minimum 30 percent participation by women in line with the Outcomes of the National Dialogue Conference and recalled by resolution 2624 (2022)”. Shortly after, the Ambassadors of Ireland, Mexico, and the United Kingdom, as co-chairs of the IEG that year and penholder on women, peace and security, sent a letter to both the Government of Yemen (GoY) and the Houthis to remind them of the Security Council’s decisions on women’s participation in peace negotiations, including in Yemen.

The mandate of the **2140 Sanctions Committee** includes sexual violence in armed conflict as a listing criterion, but the mandate of the Panel of Experts does not explicitly require gender expertise and to integrate gender in its reporting and investigation. The reports of the Panel of Experts, which consists of five experts, currently including two women, are full of examples of human rights violations against women and girls, including the situation of women and girls in detention and campaigns of defamation against women human rights defenders and activists, including in the diaspora. Two of the most recent listings (Houthi official Sultan Saleh Aida Aida Zabin, accused of targeting politically active women, listed in February 2021, and the Houthis as a group, listed in 2022) both had references to gender issues. Some informants contacted by the Panel of Experts claimed that pressure from tribal leaders after one of their reports helped secure the release of some women from detention. In the past three years, the Panel of Experts has recommended that the Sanctions Committee hold a dedicated discussion on the challenges faced by female detainees in Yemen, the establishment of a fund for sexual violence survivors, and for the Security Council to call on the unconditional release of women prisoners, the lifting of the *mahram* requirement (which restricts the movement of women and girls to the approval and/or escort of a male relative), to facilitate access to humanitarian assistance, including life-saving reproductive health and protection services, and to consider further listings of officials involved in a campaign of repression of politically active women.

The Security Council has invited seven Yemeni women to brief the Security Council since March 2021.¹ Several of them called for a minimum of 30 percent of women’s participation in all diplomatic tracks as a matter of urgency. Others criticized international partners for not taking more decisive action against the growing restrictions disproportionately affecting women’s rights and focusing narrowly on movement restrictions affecting women working on humanitarian relief rather than on broader policies intended to reshape the whole of society and could result in erasing women from public life altogether. In one of these briefings, a young Yemeni peacebuilder, Ola Al-Aghbari, travelled for eight hours through dangerous mountain paths to join the Security Council via videoconference and tell her story. Her city of Taiz, the third largest city in Yemen, has been a flashpoint in the conflict since 2015, resulting in great impediments to freedom of movement. She recounted that several water tanks in the city had been captured by an armed group, forcing women and girls to travel long distances on unsafe roads to fetch water and exposing them to violence and sniper fire. Against the opposition of local religious leaders, who openly criticized her efforts, Al-Aghbari led a mediation initiative that convinced the military commanders to hand over several water reservoirs and allow for the restoration of water access to tens of thousands of people after seven years of deprivation.

Women’s participation in peace negotiations and public life

¹ These were Ms. Najiba al Naggar in May 2021, Ms. Entesar Al-Qadhi in September 2021, Ms. Maysaa Shuja al-Deen in October 2021, Ms. Ola Al-Aghbari in January 2022, Ms. Azal Al-Salafi in June 2022, Ms. Yasmeen Al-Eryani in May 2023, and Ms. Amat al-Salam Abdullah Abdo Al-Hajj in August 2023.

There are other stories like Al-Aghbari's. In recent years, Yemeni women have been praised for their role activating local truce committees to mediate water and land resource issues, facilitating humanitarian access for international aid efforts, risking their lives to rescue families trapped by the conflict, successfully negotiating the release of detainees, challenging gender norms, and leading hundreds of initiatives to provide their communities with essential services, from food and education to supporting the reintegration of child soldiers.

Prior to the onset of the Yemeni conflict in 2015, women actively participated in the national dialogue and played significant roles in peacebuilding and decision-making. Notably, women were at the forefront of the 2011 protests and were given nearly a 30 percent quota within the delegations of the National Dialogue Conference (March 2013 to January 2014). This inclusive dialogue allowed women to influence the agenda and outcomes, with seven out of nine working groups supporting a 30 percent women's quota in legislative, executive, and judicial authorities in the new government.

Unfortunately, women have been **largely excluded from subsequent peace efforts since then**. The absence of women's representation is also evident within Yemen's political and governance structures, with women holding just 4.1 percent of decision-making positions as of 2019. In December 2020, the new cabinet formed by the Government of Yemen consisted of 24 ministers, none of whom were women for the first time in two decades.

On 7 April 2022, shortly after the UN-brokered truce was announced, GoY President Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi stepped down and handed his powers to the Presidential Council (PLC), headed by President Rashed al Alimi. While the cabinet still does not include women, the committees established to support the PLC on reconciliation, economic, and legal issues include a number of prominent women members, and several women have been appointed to important positions in the judiciary, including the Supreme Judiciary and the High Court. The government's delegation to negotiate with the Houthis now includes two women.

In response to the under-representation of women in the peace process, UN Women and OSESGY have established consultative platforms and mechanisms, most notably Tawafuq (Women's Pact for Peace and Security) and the Technical Advisory Group (TAG). These initiatives represented **indirect** efforts to promote inclusive participation in Track I negotiations and there have not been meetings with the Technical Advisory Group since 2022.

The Office of Special Envoy has been actively engaging with Yemeni civil society, youth, and diverse women constituencies, both within Yemen and abroad. More recently, as part of these efforts, OSESGY has been organizing a series of **consultations** titled "Building a Bottom-Up Vision of Inclusive Peace Process" in Amman, Aden, and Cairo. These meetings prioritize the participation and perspectives of local Yemeni actors, with a particular emphasis on women and youth, in shaping the political future of the country. The primary aim of these meetings is to ensure that gendered perspectives are integrated into both the substance and the design of the peace process.

UNMHA also engages with women leaders and women's organizations regularly to discuss means of promoting women's participation in the implementation of the Hudaydah Agreement, engage in mine action issues, and identify and implement quick impact projects.

Women's organizations warn of dwindling resources and support for peace interventions, as donors prioritize emergency relief efforts, and many fear that they will have to close soon. The funding gap is compounded by donors questioning the organizations' ability to operate in these conditions, including the movement restrictions for women without *mahram*. The Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund is supporting projects implemented by 17 women-led and women's rights civil society organizations in Yemen.

Yemen's first National Action Plan on women, peace and security is expected to end this year, and there are very preliminary conversations about next steps. The first national action plan not include an implementation plan, an accountability framework, or a budget, and Yemeni civil society has reported that its development was not sufficiently participatory and inclusive.

Violations of the human rights of women and girls

Since the Human Rights Council narrowly voted to end the mandate of the Group of Eminent Experts on Yemen in October 2021, there have been **no international investigations into human rights violations in Yemen**. However, the reports from the Panel of Experts supporting the sanctions committee, as well as the Secretary-General's reports on conflict-related sexual violence and on children and armed conflict, have highlighted many violations of the rights of women and girls, from attacks or harassment of women activists and human rights defenders, both in Yemen and the diaspora, to broader restrictions of women's rights, especially in Houthi-controlled territory.

One of the rights violations most highlighted in Council deliberations in recent years has been the increasing imposition of a ***mahram* requirement** for women to travel both within and outside of Houthi-controlled areas. This requirement is reportedly more strictly enforced in the Governorates of Amran, Hajjah, Hudaydah, and Sa'dah. Stricter enforcement of the mahram by the Houthis has hampered access of women and girls to basic healthcare services, including reproductive health. Anecdotally, these restrictions have also been observed in some conservative areas under government control, such as in Abyan and Lahij Governorates. This has further aggravated the impact of the humanitarian crisis and restricting humanitarian partners from reaching people in need, including women and girls. Women aid workers have become more and more restricted in their engagement across localities, forcing women to work only in one location and not travel, and many are leaving their jobs as a result. The requirements also impact the humanitarian community's ability to reach women and girls with humanitarian assistance, which relies on Yemeni women aid workers' participation. The United Nations does not pay for travel of *mahrams* for national women humanitarian staff in Yemen, and actively engages with the relevant authorities on the removal of these restrictions.

However, the entrenchment of the *mahram* requirement is part of a **broader trend of women's rights restrictions** in Houthi-controlled territory, alongside greater gender segregation in public spaces, including universities. For example, a circular issued by the Houthi-affiliated University Student Forum announced in July 2023 that male and female students of Sana'a University's Faculty of Mass Communication would attend classes during separate days of the week. In many localities, women have also been banned from other public spaces, such as cafes, restaurants, and workplaces. Shops selling women's clothing have been required to only sell long, black abayas to women. Gender-based violence programming is subjected to particular scrutiny in Houthi-controlled areas, in which **the use of terminology related to gender or rape is discouraged**. On February 6, 2024, a Houthi-run court sentenced 13 people to public execution on homosexuality charges. Three others were jailed on similar charges and 35 other individuals have been detained.

The Panel of Experts has also gathered numerous pieces of evidence of the use of **public defamation**, usually involving allegations of prostitution and the fabrication of sexually compromising video recordings, against Yemeni women, whether in the country, including in **detention**, and in the diaspora. Women currently or previously engaged in politics, civil society organizations or human rights activism also receive personal threats, including death threats and threats of a sexual nature, and threats against their family members. This type of violence, which includes online harassment through social media, has a severe negative impact on women. Some of the victims have included members of the General People's Congress, actress Intisar al-Hammadi and other three colleagues, accused of indecency and sent to jail in November

2021, human rights activist Fatima al-Arouli, sentenced to be executed after being detained, women leaders from the Baha'i community, detained alongside their colleagues in a raid in May 2023, and peace activist Noura Al-Jarwi, former government official and now subjected to public defamation by Houthi-affiliated media while living in the diaspora. One escapee from the Central Prison in Sana'a maintains that there were about 300 other women and girls there on trumped-up adultery and other "honour" related charges.

When women are released, they have to face the social stigma associated with their detention, as they are called prison graduates and assumed to have endured sexual violence, and excluded from community activities. They often have to return to their families in Houthi-controlled territory or live outside of it with no means to cover their daily expenses or their children's education.

Sexual violence is severely under-reported owing to stigma, harmful social norms related to honour, shame and victim-blaming, the fear of reprisals and limited humanitarian access, all of which also impede service delivery or human rights monitoring. Still, the United Nations has documented several cases of sexual violence in the context of detention, or for refusing to participate in the mandatory summer camps and cultural courses administered by the Houthis, as well as by trafficking gangs affiliated with the conflict parties, including against migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees. For example, in 2023 the Panel of Experts documented reports of sexual assault of women detained by their Houthis, including for their perceived affiliation with opposing parties, and against boys in detention facilities and police stations. These issues are further complicated by opposition against the term "gender," including around both LGBTQI+ and women's rights issues.

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) remains a deeply entrenched practice in Yemen, despite efforts to eradicate it. The prevalence of FGM in Yemen is among the highest in the world, with the majority of cases involving the most severe form of the practice.

Access to registration and documentation for asylum-seekers and refugees, including for women living with HIV or Hepatitis B or C remains very challenging in Houthi controlled areas in the North of Yemen, due to the requirement for blood testing and presenting a medical certificate on presence of communicable diseases. When the individuals are found to be **HIV+, or positive for Hepatitis B or C**, they face risks of arbitrary detention and forced removal to the South of Yemen, under the control of the government, and have to choose between seeking asylum and risk arbitrary detention and forced removal, or remaining without documentation and no access to health care and other essential for them services in the North of Yemen. The women asylum-seekers and refugees facing such situation remain highly vulnerable to discrimination, GBV, abuse and exploitation in the society and by authorities in the North.

Other humanitarian and socioeconomic issues affecting Yemeni women and girls

The protracted conflict, natural disasters, economic deterioration, water scarcity, continued food insecurity, disease outbreaks, and loss of safe access to basic services and sources of livelihood have further exacerbated risks, particularly for women and girls. Here are some relevant facts and figures:

- **Food security:** Over 8 million women and girls in Yemen are suffering from hunger and over 7 million and girls have no access to adequate water sources. The World Food Programme's recent announcement of a pause of the General Food Assistance programme in northern Yemen, after unsuccessful negotiations with the Houthis to shrink and better target programmes, will impact everyone. 1.3 million pregnant and breastfeeding women are already at crisis and emergency levels of food insecurity. An estimated 2.7 million women, as well as 5 million children under 5, will experience acute malnutrition in 2024.
- Nearly half of girls of primary school age are deprived of **education** and two out of three women in Yemen are illiterate.

- An estimated 11.9 million women and girls need **life-saving reproductive health and protection services** (6.36 million in need of GBV services and 5.5 million in need of reproductive health services). Access to comprehensive **gender-based violence** (GBV) services remain scarce: less than 5 per cent of health facilities provide clinical management of rape or GBV, and 90 percent of rural areas lack GBV services. The GBV Area of Responsibility (AoR) was one of the least funded clusters in 2023, receiving only 21 percent of its funding request for GBV prevention and response. GBV partners saw a 30 percent increase in demand for GBV services in 2023, and the GBV AoR
- Negative coping mechanisms are on the rise, including child marriage, child labour and school drop-outs. It is estimated that over 30 per cent of girls in Yemen are married before the age of 18, a number which is likely much higher. According to a GBVIMS analysis conducted by UNFPA between 2020-23, there was a gradual increase in psychological abuse (from 28 percent in 2020 to 37 percent in 2023), and denial of resources (from 21 percent in 2020 to 45 percent in 2023) reported by GBV services.
- Public services for gender-based violence survivors such as shelter for those requiring protection, psychosocial support and emergency cash support for basic protection are almost non-existent. The only providers of services to GBV survivors are humanitarian actors, with UNFPA leading 60 percent of the GBV programming in Yemen.
- Women of childbearing age, particularly pregnant and breastfeeding women, have limited or no access to **reproductive health services**, including antenatal care, safe delivery, postnatal care, family planning and emergency obstetric and new-born care. Poor coverage, lack of specialized staff, inadequacy of essential medical supplies and a lack of female doctors, particularly at primary health care facility level, affect three-quarters of rural women's access to maternal health services. As a consequence, one woman dies every two hours for preventable causes. Fewer than half of births are assisted by skilled medical personnel, and only 1 in 5 of the health facilities that remain provide maternal and child health services. Already limited reproductive health and postnatal care further declined by 35 and 22 per cent, respectively in the first half of 2023.
- The situation has been compounded by significant reductions to incentives for healthcare workers, which has seen a withdrawal of qualified healthcare workers, including critical women staff, from remote and frontline areas. In Amran, Hajjah, and Sa'dah governorates, some sexual and reproductive healthcare activities, especially those focused on family planning and contraception, have been banned altogether and are not available. humanitarian actors have extreme difficulties in procuring and distributing RH kit 3, and health workers cannot attend trainings on clinical management of rape.
- **Additional and intersecting vulnerabilities:** Female-headed households, women and girls with disabilities, displaced women and girls, migrants (especially from the Horn of Africa), and marginalized communities like the Muhamasheen are amongst the most vulnerable in Yemen.
- Just under one third of **internally displaced** households are headed by women or girls. Displaced women are less likely than men to have property documents in their name, less likely to be decision-makers in their household, and they are often expected to inherit less than their male counterparts. Displaced Muhamasheen women and girls also face additional hardships in accessing basic services as they often experience discrimination and exclusion from aid.
- **Migrants, refugees and asylum seekers** in Yemen are at risk of human trafficking, extortion, detention, forced or unpaid labor, and sexual violence.
- The needs of women and girls with **disabilities** are also often overlooked, including due to a lack of comprehensive and disaggregated disability data especially in the north of Yemen. Women and girls with disabilities face even greater challenges in accessing fundamental services like healthcare and education and greater risks of adopting negative coping mechanisms.
- In 2024, an estimated 9 per cent of the total displaced population lack access to **civil documentation**, rendering them vulnerable due to limited or no access to humanitarian assistance, public services and other fundamental rights including freedom of movement, employment opportunities and property rights. Women, in particular, may face heightened challenges when it

comes to accessing their rightful inheritance, property ownership, and child custody. Lack of civil documentation prevents family reunification, compromises freedom of movement, and limits access to essential services.

- Only 6 percent of Yemeni women have access to **paid employment**. According to UNDP and based on statistical modeling to analyze future scenarios, **women's empowerment** (measured as greater labor participation, lower fertility rates, increased women's representation in leadership, and access to education) **would save the most lives and result in the greatest GDP per capita gain** by 2050 when compared with other areas, such as economic development, investments in agriculture, governance quality, or human capabilities.
- Yemen is among the world's most vulnerable countries to **climate change**, and among the least prepared to mitigate or adapt to its impacts. Climate-related displacement is now the leading cause of new displacement across Yemen. To fetch water and firewood, for example, women and girls may have to walk for hours, often unaccompanied, under the burning sun, over treacherous land and in the midst of an active conflict.
- **Yemeni women's organizations**, despite the *mahram* requirement and other challenges, continue to play a **crucial role in ensuring humanitarian assistance** equitably reaches people in need. In 2022, 31 local women-led organizations were active in humanitarian clusters, working groups, and the Gender Network. These women-led organization were engaged in the 2023 Humanitarian Programme Cycle and actively contributed to humanitarian needs assessments. Currently, the Yemen Humanitarian Fund Advisory Board and the Humanitarian Country Team include the active membership of women-led organizations. WLOs are members of the Yemen Humanitarian Fund's Advisory Board and since June 2023, the Humanitarian Country Team has two WLOs members and one national NGO that focuses on disability.

Recommendations:²

In upcoming deliberations and decisions on Yemen, the Security Council should consider:

- Demanding women's full, equal, and meaningful participation in all stages of all diplomatic efforts to find peace, recalling the 30 percent quota agreed to in the National Dialogue Conference, and urging the UN and Member States facilitating talks to put in place enhanced and targeted measures to achieve this, including in intra-Yemeni talks and in the committees set up to implement the Hudaydah agreement, in line with the Secretary-General's commitment to advocating for and supporting an initial minimum target that one-third of participants in mediation and peace processes be women, while aiming for an increase towards parity in political and peace electoral processes.
- Encouraging the inclusive participation of women from diverse backgrounds in the implementation of the national action plan on women, peace and security.
- Requesting that provisions on the prevention and response to conflict-related sexual violence and gross violations of women's rights be included in any future truce, ceasefire, or peace agreement.
- Demanding that movement restrictions on women be lifted to facilitate humanitarian access throughout the country.
- Calling for the release of women detainees, and condemning reprisals against women for the promotion of human rights and political violence against women.
- Recalling the Secretary-General commitment, welcomed by the Council in resolution 2467 (OP 22), to ensure the availability of gender expertise in the Panel of Experts of the sanctions committee.
- Requesting the authorities to provide the UN with unrestricted access to detention facilities, and following-up on the Panel of Experts' recommendations to hold a dedicated meeting of the 2140 Sanctions Committee on the situation of women detainees and other women's rights violations, and

² These recommendations are prepared by UN Women as the secretariat of the Informal Expert Group, in consultation with other UN entities.

consider listing other individuals responsible for the policy of repression of politically active women.

- Calling for international partners to provide long-term, predictable and flexible funding to women-led and women's rights organizations in Yemen, and material support for the protection of women human right defenders.
- Supporting the deployment of gender advisers and women protection advisers and the work of the UN Country Team, including UN Women, to ensure that the UN has sufficient capacity to implement women, peace and security commitments.
- Recalling Member States' obligations under the Arms Trade Treaty and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, and calling on Member States to engage with women's groups and experts on their implementation of Treaty obligations.
- Emphasizing the urgent need for the provision of humanitarian assistance in Yemen to fully integrate gender considerations and prioritize the expertise and resources needed to meet the needs of women and girls and address the increased risks of sexual and gender-based violence, including among the internally displaced and refugee populations in Yemen, and including by working with women's groups.