



Photo: Magenta

VIRTUAL SYMPOSIUM SUMMARY REPORT

# LIBYA: WOMEN *at the* FOREFRONT

8<sup>th</sup> - 11<sup>th</sup> of March 2021



VIRTUAL SYMPOSIUM SUMMARY REPORT

# LIBYA: WOMEN *at the* FOREFRONT

8<sup>th</sup> - 11<sup>th</sup> of March 2021

Canada 



## ABOUT THIS REPORT

This publication summarizes the panel discussions, entry remarks, and recommendations produced during the International Women's Week celebration from the 8th until the 11th of March 2021 in Libya.

This report has been produced with the support of the Embassy of Canada in Libya and the Delegation of the European Union to Libya. It captures the views, challenges, and recommendations of more than 60 Libyan women and keynote speakers on 5 different thematic areas: Women at the Forefront of Leadership and Peacebuilding, Women at the Forefront of Covid-19 Response and Humanitarian Actions, Women at the Forefront of Enhancing Security and Human Rights, Women at the Forefront of Media and Youth Empowerment, and Women at the Forefront of Economic Empowerment and Resilience.

The views expressed in this publication are those of the panellists and speakers during the event and do not necessarily represent the views of UN Women, the United Nations or any of its affiliated organizations.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

**Report lead:** Chiara Ayad

**Design:** Angham Abdelmageed

© UN Women 2021

All rights reserved



The celebration of the International Women's Week in Libya was organized with the support of:



Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs



From the People of Japan



Kingdom of the Netherlands



EMBASSY OF DENMARK  
Libya



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>DAY 1: WOMEN AT THE FOREFRONT OF LEADERSHIP &amp; PEACEBUILDING</b>	<b>3</b>
Panel 1: Women in Decision-making Positions	5
Panel 2: Views from Women in the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum	6
Panel 3: Women Leadership in Local Peacebuilding	7
<b>DAY 2: WOMEN AT THE FOREFRONT OF COVID-19 RESPONSE AND HUMANITARIAN ACTION</b>	<b>9</b>
Panel 1: Humanitarian actors from the field	11
Panel 2: Humanitarian actors & the COVID-19 response	13
Panel 3: Responding to Gender Based-Violence in Libya	14
<b>DAY 3: WOMEN AT THE FOREFRONT OF ENHANCING SECURITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Women at the Forefront of Enhancing Security and Human Rights</b>	<b>19</b>
Panel 1: Women and the Law	19
Panel 2: Women and Security	21
<b>Women at the Forefront of Media and Youth Empowerment</b>	<b>23</b>
Panel 1: Women journalists at the forefront of media	23
Panel 2: Young women activists at the forefront of peace and security	25
<b>DAY 4: WOMEN AT THE FOREFRONT OF ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT AND RESILIENCE</b>	<b>27</b>
Panel 1: Women in Business and Start-ups	29
Panel 2: Organizations working on Women's Economic Empowerment	31
<b>CONCLUSION &amp; FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>ANNEXE 1: PANEL RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	<b>35</b>
Libyan Authorities	35
Libyan Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)	38
General	39



Photo: Mohmaed Tawfiq Elgassier



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

After 10 years of turmoil, prospects for the resolution of the Libyan conflict seem increasingly promising. Following the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum (LPDF) and the formation of the Libyan interim unity government, observers including Libyan women across the country are cautiously planning towards a gender sensitive pathway to stabilization, recovery, political unity, social reconciliation, and economic prosperity. Years of conflict have had a considerable impact on Libyan women, young women, youth, migrants, refugees, IDPs and children. Political leaders must now set a new national agenda that addresses and reconciles these differences. In this process, stakeholders must leverage and realize the force that Libyan women represent, the benefits of their meaningful inclusion towards sustaining long-term peace, and the overall gains that the country seeks to make if gender equality and women's empowerment is prioritized both during and after the transitional period.

In this context, UN Women and partners, organized a four day virtual symposium that marked International Women's Week and celebrated the historical achievements and critical roles that Libyan women played at the forefront of peacebuilding, local and national decision-making, humanitarian action and COVID-19 response, entrepreneurship and business leadership, media and journalism and the security and legal sectors. The report summarizes the exchanges and presents key takeaways from 12 panel discussions that engaged over 350 participants, including ambassadors, heads of agencies and 60 Libyan women, women on their experiences, challenges they encountered in their work and recommendations moving forward. UN Women facilitated the sessions but all the observations this report summarises are those of Libyan women participants. The report concludes with final recommendations for the international community, Libyan Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and national Libyan authorities.



Photo: Magenta







**Day 1**

## **Women at the forefront of leadership and Peacebuilding**

Photo: Libya Alwashish



The progress that Libyan women made in advocating for their rights and taking up central leadership positions should be celebrated. Women have the right to have their seats at the table, they need to be actively engaged in all spheres of life. Women's qualitative contributions to the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum (LPDF), their leading local peacebuilding and humanitarian roles are achievements that must be recognised and built on. The upcoming electoral process is an opportunity for advocates of gender equality, both women and men, that must be taken advantage of to ensure women's equal and effective participation as a steppingstone into Libya's future. Introductory remarks were given by Begona Lasagabaster (UN Women Representative for Libya and Tunisia, Dr. Emad Al Sayeh (Head of the High National Electoral Commission (HNEC), Georgette Gagnon (Assistant Secretary-General-Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Libya), Jose Antonio Sabadell (Head of the EU Delegation to Libya, and Hilary Childs-Adams (Canadian Ambassador to Libya).

#### KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THE OPENING REMARKS INCLUDE:

- The COVID-19 pandemic unveiled both the centrality of Libyan women's participation and the disproportionate burden that they carry as pre-existing gendered inequalities were amplified by the pandemic. On top of these pre-existing barriers, the pandemic led to the emergence of new barriers that inhibited women's effective participation, such as increased domestic violence, unpaid care duty, unemployment, and poverty. Nonetheless, Libyan women had leading roles in COVID-19 response as healthcare workers and community organizers.
- Libya is at a turning point and Libyan women have the potential to shape an equal future and assist in COVID-19 recovery. Their participation and leadership must be supported.

- Women's participation in the electoral process as candidates, voters or election observers is vital as it brings them closer to decision-making roles. A key setback since 2011 is related to the Nationality Law that hinders Libyan women married to foreign men from participating in political life due to difficulties in obtaining a national identity number. The upcoming December elections should be regarded as an opportunity to reform discriminatory legislation to further enhance women's political participation.
- Solidarity among women leaders is necessary for them to sustain a critical mass during the electoral process and ensure their contributions after the December elections.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The diverse perspectives of women and girls must be integrated into the formulation and implementation of all national policies and in COVID-19 recovery programmes;
- Commitments to normative frameworks that safeguard and uphold women's rights such as United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325, The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and action to advance women's equal participation must be strengthened;
- Sexual and Gender Based-Violence (SGBV), harassment and discrimination women face must be addressed to activate their roles in all spheres. Protective measures should be reinforced, all forms of SGBV should be condemned and perpetrators brought to account;
- Inclusion efforts should be cross-generational and encourage vertical and horizontal solidarity among women leaders.

## PANEL 1: WOMEN IN DECISION-MAKING POSITIONS

As decision-makers, women have proven essential and effective in voicing civil society needs and experiences across Libyan institutions. In this session, panellists reflected on the value CSOs play in strengthening women's access to HNEC decision making positions, through nominations and awareness campaigns. They also noted that legal gaps remain unaddressed and should be prioritized to strengthen women's inclusion in governance structures. This session was moderated by Ameena Alrasheed, Senior Gender Advisor (UNSMIL). The speakers were, Ekram Bash Imen, Former Libyan Tourist Minister, Abeir Imnenina, Academic and Former Head of Civil Society Commission, Lamia Abousedra, Former Deputy Minister of Information, and Rabab Halab, Member of HNEC.

### KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THE DISCUSSION INCLUDE:

- Since 2011, most Libyan women leaders and activists allied with and represented civil society voices. Their interaction with youth and other marginalized segments increased over the years. Due to these efforts, women were more likely to be nominated for decision-making positions by CSOs and networks rather than by leaderships of political parties.
- A conducive and supportive environment for women's leadership must be built for women to reach leadership and decision-making positions. A culture of the rule of law, equal citizenship, widespread and egalitarian education, and awareness campaigns are necessary to create such an environment. Furthermore, women must be made aware of their rights and duties as citizens, on an equal footing to men, to incentivize women to claim their rights.

- Women have demonstrated their knowledge of and close link to civil society, their needs, and perceptions. Women leaders can facilitate socio-political change by engaging with and supporting civil society constituencies. Civil society can also assist women in decision-making positions in legislative development by working with the legislative and executive branches where essential legal frameworks are lacking.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Legislation pertaining to women's rights and participation must be clearly written with limited room for ambiguity or interpretation. Certain discriminatory laws must be reformed such as the Nationality Law that stigmatizes and hinders the participation of Libyan women married to foreign men, while others provide protective legislative frameworks but suffer from shortcomings in implementation. To address this, CSOs can support by playing an observatory and supervisory role.
- CSOs work must be strengthened so that they can play a key role in raising awareness on the importance of women's political participation and in addressing discriminatory mind-sets and cultural practices. Legislation is needed to organize CSOs work which would enhance women's increased participation. The HNEC, for example found that rural women were unaware of the importance of women's political participation and therefore disinterested in the electoral process. CSOs can support in strengthening their knowledge of and desire to participate through political academies and trainings.

## PANEL 2: VIEWS FROM WOMEN IN THE LIBYAN POLITICAL DIALOGUE FORUM

Women had undoubtedly critical roles in ensuring the integrity and accountability of the LPDF process and outcomes. As LPDF participants, speakers reflected upon their experiences, not solely through occupying seats, but also through tangibly influencing the LPDF agenda, the issues addressed in the dialogue and mainstreaming human rights and transparency principles. Their representation at in the LPDF (16/74 -21%) was considered a milestone achievement. However, they noted that 18% representation in the newly-appointed Government of National Unity is a worrying decrease. This indicates that champions of equality have a long way ahead towards women's meaningful political inclusion. This session was moderated by Khadija Alboaisi, Gender Advisor (UNDP), with introductory remarks given by Gerardo Noto, UNDP Resident Representative. Speakers were women who participated in the LPDF, including Zahra Langhi (Member of the Legal Committee at the LPDF and cofounder of the Libyan Women's Platform for Peace (LWPP), Ilham Saoudi (Lawyers for Justice in Libya organization), Rabea Aburas (House of Representative, Tripoli) Majda Fallah (High State Council and COVID-19 Committee Member, and Azza Alsayed (The League of Arab States.)

### KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THE DISCUSSION INCLUDE:

- As opposed to common conservative patriarchal perceptions that the women's rights movement is based on foreign agendas, Libyan women stressed that women's inclusion is in fact inspired by the long Libyan tradition and history of women's active participation in all fields.
- Women participants of the LPDF played active roles and made key demands and declarations that sought to ensure women's meaningful inclusion. They demanded a minimum of 30% representation in the new Government of National Unity. It was disappointing to note that the number of candidates for the prime minister position in the presidential council

was low, but participants urged the interim government to commit to strengthening inclusion. Women participating in the LPDF also issued a declaration that addressed the importance of women's participation in the transitional period.

- There is a dominant focus on representation while more reflection is needed on what form of participation is needed and what inclusion means in practice in peacebuilding and political processes. Advocating for a seat at the table is insufficient as women must also focus on what they substantively bring to the table. During the dialogue, women raised issues related to the rule of law, good governance and transparency that contributed to the roadmap. Women also brought community voices and demands to the LPDF, and presented proposals related to women and youth. It was important for women that community needs were on the dialogue's agenda.
- Despite intimidation, threats, and assassinations that women participants faced, they proactively engaged in documenting voter fraud and were among the first to discover and follow up on this issue. Thus, they contributed to preventive procedures to counter corruption and promote transparency in the dialogue mechanism. Women participants also relied on their legal knowledge and expertise to push for human rights sensitivity in the LPDF outcomes. Women leaders also noted with concern that eligibility for participation in the transitional period solely considered political dimensions while discarding legal ones.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Quotas should be used to achieve appropriate representation. A minimum of 30% quotas must be applied across executive, legislative, and judicial institutions. Libyan Members of Parliament (MPs) must call on authorities to increase women's quantitative and qualitative inclusion.
- The culture of citizenship and vertical trust between citizens and decision-makers must be strengthened.

## PANEL 3: WOMEN LEADERSHIP IN LOCAL PEACEBUILDING

At the local level, women were central in bringing the issue of displacement to the forefront. They demonstrated an understanding of local grievances, layers of social marginalization, and operated in often challenging contexts while building social cohesion and serving their communities. This session was moderated by Salmin Assad Eljawhari, Women's Political Participation Analyst at UN Women Libya, and included speakers with leadership experience in local governance and peacebuilding. The speakers were Haniya Abu Khrees (Elected Municipal Councilor in Sirte), Nadia Bouserwil (Elected Women in Municipalities Representative), Laila Badda (Libyan Women Network for Peacebuilding), Hameeda Al Zabou (Peacebuilding Initiative in the South) and Fairouz Enaas (Secretary General and Vice President of the National Front Party).

### KEY TAKEAWAYS ARISING FROM THE DISCUSSION INCLUDE:

→ Southern Libyan women leaders in local governance elevated the cause of marginalized displaced women and the importance of return. In areas where entire communities were displaced after 2015, such as Murzuq, local women peacebuilders called upon decision makers to uphold their rights and ensure their safe return. Elderly women also played an important role in combating hate speech in certain areas as they are respected as community elders.

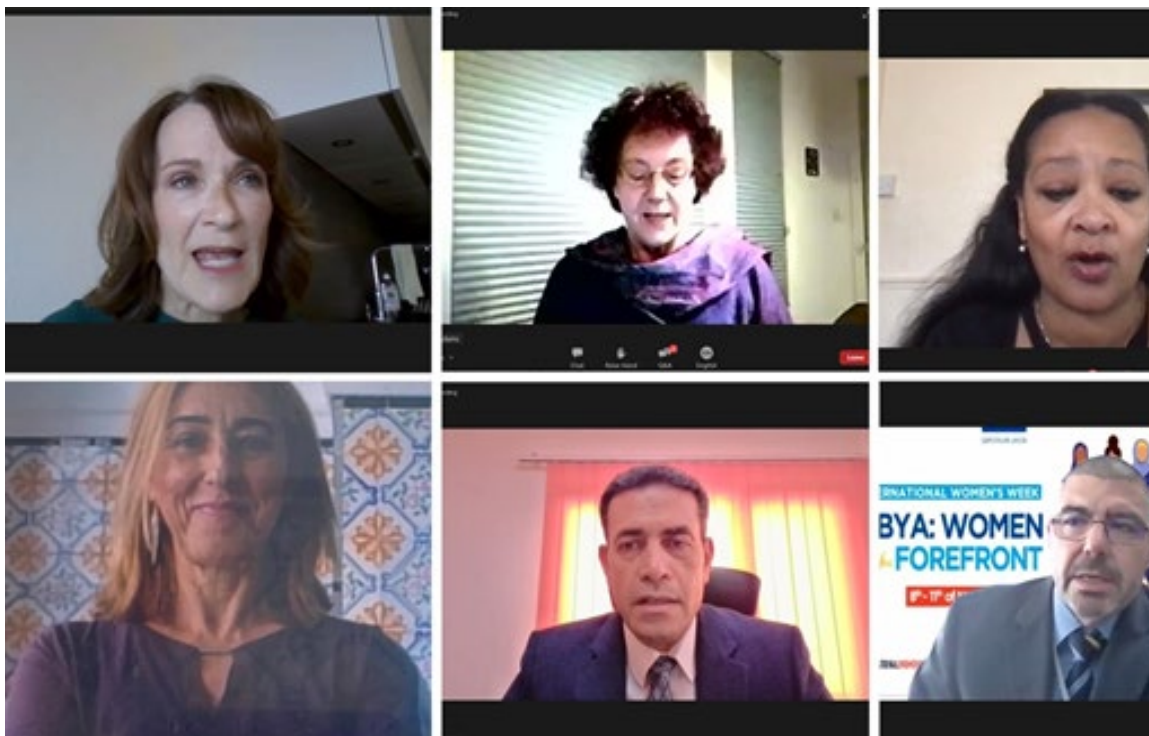
- It is important to understand the specificities of Libya's diverse south and refrain from dismissing certain structures such as the tribal structure as destructive to women's leadership from the outset. In Sirte, local women leaders gained communal trust and leveraged tribal leaders to enhance their participation at the local level. In a post ISIS context where extremism was still rife, women made use of tribal leaders to mediate between various stakeholders. Thus, in certain instances, the tribal social fabric was used in women's favour.
- Women's campaigning and advocacy has been central in achieving women's representation in high level talks. The campaign "You are missing the full picture" led by Libyan CSOs during the Palermo talks called on the parties to include women in the political talks on both sides of the negotiation table.
- Women elected municipal councillors are facing violence because they are in politics.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- CSOs should play a central role in monitoring the implementation of laws and policies;
- Women's capacity needs to be built on specific legal frameworks that exist in the fields they work in. For example, local women leaders praised efforts that sensitized them on Law 59 on local administration in Libya;
- Legislation to protect women against political violence should be developed.

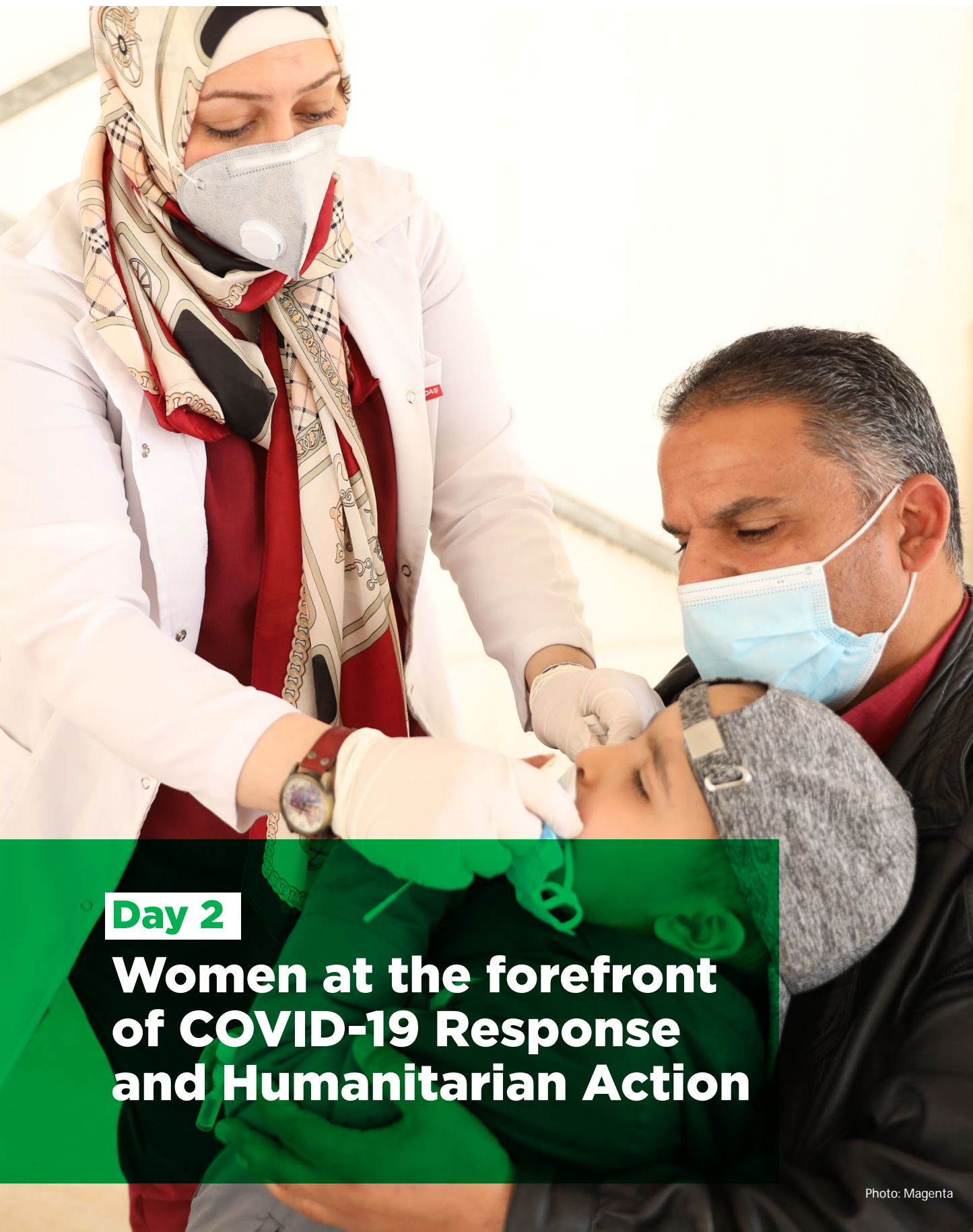


## PANEL 1: WOMEN IN DECISION-MAKING POSITIONS



## PANEL 2: VIEWS FROM WOMEN IN THE LIBYAN POLITICAL DIALOGUE FORUM





**Day 2**

## **Women at the forefront of COVID-19 Response and Humanitarian Action**

Photo: Magenta



The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in Libya, in the context of continued conflict, political division and insecurity exacerbated gender inequalities and worsened socio-economic conditions for all Libyans. Women took on critical and often lifesaving roles providing essential medical, psycho-social and livelihood support to vulnerable communities across the country. Through trainings, health awareness campaigns and vital services programs, they demonstrated their understanding of local community needs and filled the gap in national service provisions. Their contributions highlighted the importance of including women in humanitarian programming and policymaking. The sessions were facilitated by Moustafa Awad, Programme Analyst for Gender in Humanitarian Action and Women's Economic Empowerment at UN Women. Introductory remarks were given by Begona Lasagabaster (UN Women Representative for Libya and Tunisia), Nicholas Hopton (British Ambassador to Libya), Julie Pruzan Jørgensen (Danish Ambassador to Libya) and Jorge Martinez (Health Cluster Coordinator at the World Health Organization).

#### KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THE OPENING REMARKS INCLUDE:

- ➔ Libyan women continue to operate in an increasingly challenging context while experiencing multifaceted injustices and heightened rates of violence including Sexual Gender Based-Violence (SGBV), but they have shown a great degree of agency and demonstrated their capacities in responding to national and local needs in their efforts to combat the pandemic.
- ➔ Engaging women in development, humanitarian and crisis-response planning reinforces community partnerships and increases the effectiveness and inclusiveness of programmes.



Photo: Abdullah Salem Marei

## PANEL 1: HUMANITARIAN ACTORS FROM THE FIELD

Libyan women have been at the forefront of humanitarian action and the COVID-19 response. Their knowledge, expertise, community-driven will to serve local needs and uplift conditions of marginalized communities enabled them to develop creative digital solutions that empowered local communities with essential knowledge and services. Speakers shared their experiences leading humanitarian work in the field and reflected upon challenges that they faced. The panel was moderated by Muna Sarsak (Head of OCHA's Sebha Sub-office). Speakers included Bushra Hodiri (Fezzan Libya Organization), Hala Misrati (Solidarity Organization), Aunur Hussein and Nourhan Eltshani (Libyan red Crescent), and Ghalia Saleh (Head of the Public Scout and Girl Movement.)

### KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THE DISCUSSION INCLUDE:

- The number of women health workers has increased over the years. In the field, they demonstrated qualities that enabled them to support emergency interventions in effective ways, but they also encountered numerous challenges that hindered their effective support. Some of the challenges mentioned by women healthcare and aid workers include a lack of resources and adequate funding and increased violence against healthcare workers as shown in a study conducted by the World Health Organization, and the Libyan Ministry of Health.
- Libyan women leaders of CSOs collaborated with local municipalities and assisted in conducting gender-sensitive needs assessments and developing gender-responsive solutions. In Sabha for example, the COVID-19 outbreak reduced women's mobility

and access to medical facilities due to social stigma and restrictions imposed by their male spouses. Women healthcare leaders responded by developing online healthcare services that would evaluate their medical conditions and advice on COVID-19. 63% of their beneficiaries were women that were able to seek digital healthcare. Other women led initiatives in the south include digital awareness campaigns and digital trainings.

- In the absence of a national policy on youth roles in prevention efforts, Libyan youth played a vital role in making use of social media networks for awareness raising on preventive measures and social distancing. It was emphasized that the skills and knowledge youth have of digital tools and social media must be leveraged.
- Women were also able to develop alternative and innovative solutions to address connectivity issues in their digital healthcare initiatives. Informative healthcare resources were made accessible without requiring an internet connection, trainings were recorded and shared with beneficiaries that couldn't connect. It was stated that the online modality of implementing the projects increased the opportunities for women's participation in the implemented projects across Libya. It was also stated that the participation of women increases to around 80 % while it used to be only 30% in face to face activities.



## RECOMMENDATIONS:

- ➔ More recognition needs to be given to the vital healthcare and humanitarian roles Libyan women played in the field, and to the particularity of women's experiences during the pandemic. As women were on the frontlines, they were also more exposed to the pandemic. An example was shared of a female pediatrician working at Sebha Medical Centre who passed away due to COVID-19 at the isolation centre in Sebha. It was also reported that she was seven months pregnant. Considering the restrictive preventive measures, such as lockdowns and social distancing, women experienced heightened domestic abuse and deteriorating mental health. Protection programmes must thus be designed with a gender lens to respond to gender specific needs;
- ➔ The government should leverage CSOs effective crisis-response contributions and legislate laws that organize and institutionalize the work of CSOs. Further, consultation mechanisms between CSOs and authorities at the local and national level must be strengthened, particularly in the essential field of healthcare. A legal framework protective of CSO engagement needs to be established to vitalize and strengthen civil initiatives and women's roles therein;
- ➔ International organizations and national institutions should support further specialization and expertise among healthcare cadres;
- ➔ Advocate for the role of the civil society organizations in Libya with the focus on the women's role in taking a leading position in these organizations.



Photo: Magenta

## PANEL 2: HUMANITARIAN ACTORS & THE COVID-19 RESPONSE

Libyan women were not only frontline aid and healthcare workers, but they also pioneered in scientific research, providing essential data on the pandemic, its socio-economic impact as well as medical knowledge and diagnosis infrastructure. Female migrant healthcare workers were particularly vulnerable, but they remained on the frontlines of the healthcare system operating in difficult working conditions without adequate Personal Protective Equipment (PPEs), and often unpaid work. More than 2000 Filipino nurses supported Libya's COVID-19 response and suffered disproportionate discrimination and harassment. Introductory remarks to this session were given by Elmer Cato, the Philippines Ambassador to Libya. Speakers were Fathiya Madani (Nataj Organization), Maryam Laswad (For You Libya Group), Maysoun Chemila (Monitoring Associate WFP), Benjamin Kini (lecturer and a practicing nurse from the migrants' community), Enass Hadeari (Breast Cancer and PCR Specialist), and Aesha Shabaat (Member of the Libyan Women Peacebuilding Network).

### KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THE DISCUSSION INCLUDE:

- The pandemic worsened vulnerabilities experienced by disadvantaged social segments such as migrant women, divorcee, widows and women with disabilities. Following the closure of schools, women had to take up home schooling. Libyan women also expressed that they were disproportionately impacted by the negative economic consequences of the pandemic.
- Women civil society leaders conducted studies to assess local community perceptions of the socio-economic impact of the pandemic and the impact pre-existing social norms had on prevention efforts. Their findings included that women had less access to healthcare,

women's capacity to work was limited and economic exploitation and psychological abuse increased. They reported that special protective measures such as the establishment of health and psychological support helplines or shelters from survivors of violence were not implemented by central authorities. In this context, a large majority of respondents believed that CSOs filled the gap in the COVID-19 response considering the lack of centralized crisis response policies and initiatives.

- Women played leading roles in monitoring and adapting protection and prevention measures. Women healthcare experts also mapped national equipment procurement needs and led trainings in Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) techniques. Leading women contributed to localizing the RT-PCR technique in Libya, increasing the number of COVID-19 diagnosis labs in Libya from 3 to 15 and the overall number of diagnosticians across Libya.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Sharing best practices for digital psychological support among CSOs, local and national authorities should be strengthened;
- Collaboration between CSOs and local media to raise awareness particularly with regards to women and youth needs should be increased;
- The new Government of National Unity should be supported in leading holistic, gender-sensitive, public policymaking;
- The new government of national unity should be encouraged to allocate budgets for scientific research and support the development of research centres;
- Volunteering among young women, building women's confidence and raising awareness about human rights should be encouraged.

## PANEL 3: RESPONDING TO GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN LIBYA

The COVID-19 pandemic increased the complexity of the Libyan crisis and the gendered experiences of the Libyan population. The pandemic worsened women's experiences of GBV both within their private spaces of confinement and in digital arenas. But women were also active actors in understanding and addressing GBV through several initiatives across Libya. The discussion highlighted legislative gaps and room for legal development and reform that can be vital in the country's fight against GBV. The session was moderated by Zineb Rejeb Khadhraoui (Programme Associate at UNFPA). Speakers included Inas Aribi (Haqi Organization), Hala Bugaighis (Researcher and Partners from the GBV Sub Sector Working Group), Omar Al Farouk, Ibtissam Gusbi, Fayza, Roqaya Grisa, and Rajaa Abu Rweis.

### KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THE DISCUSSION INCLUDE:

- Women led organizations played a key role in reaching out to women in displacement camps and spreading awareness on the pandemic and its impact on gendered social attitudes.
- Not only did the rates of SGBV increase during the pandemic, but access to justice and legal services became more challenging as courts were kept closed some time, thus increasing perpetrators' sense of impunity. A study by Haqi (My Right) organization found that 89% of women suffered from violence. The closure of public spaces and confinement increased online GBV and abuse, as perpetrators took advantage of the digital sphere.
- For effective SGBV response, root causes for structural violence must be identified and addressed. The patriarchal social fabric of Libyan society, the lack of protective legislation or frameworks that safeguard women's participation in public life, the precarious

security situation are all factors that contribute to GBV in Libya. Yet Libya still lacks a national GBV response plan.

- Women leaders shared experiences of success stories where income-generating activities were provided to women from lower socio-economic backgrounds that were disproportionately more vulnerable to abuse. Several received support through CSO initiatives and proceeded to pursue higher education and specializations.
- Despite the women's empowerment unit developing a comprehensive plan to support women during the pandemic, it was not approved by the Presidential Council and several consultative committees continued to be dominated by men and policymaking to be gender blind. It was stated that all women and male allies need to push for women as active participants in decision-making processes to ensure gender mainstreaming and gender-responsive policies.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Efforts to develop SGBV prevention and protection schemes and national and local strategies to confront SGBV should be intensified;
- Legislation to protect women from cyber abuse and cybercrime should be developed;
- Legislation to protect women against all forms of violence should be developed in line with international standards.



# LIBYA: WOMEN at the FOREFRONT

8<sup>th</sup> – 11<sup>th</sup> of March 2021

## PANEL 1: HUMANITARIAN ACTORS FROM THE FIELD



## PANEL 3: RESPONDING TO GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN LIBYA











**Day 3**

## **Women at the Forefront of Enhancing Security and Human Rights & Media and Youth Empowerment**

Photo: Magenta

Libyan women continue to be primary victims of insecurity, life-threatening attacks, hate speech and defamation. The spread of small arms and the proliferation of armed groups across the years increased social violence that spilled into households. Despite this, Libyan women championed human security by providing essential services to communities across Libya, facilitating local reconciliation and social cohesion. Their participation and experiences bring valuable insights to the security sector that render it more effective. Introductory remarks were delivered by Suki Nagra (OHCHR Representative) and Pekka Hukka, (Finnish Ambassador to Libya).

#### KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THE OPENING REMARKS INCLUDE:

- The environment of impunity legitimizes violence against women human rights defenders and activists. This in turn hinders women's participation as a driver of change and must be addressed. Inadequate access to justice in a justice system that disadvantages them has been a key obstacle that Libyan women activists encounter. They also suffer a lack of protection and fear of reprisal. There has been some progress on this front as two new courts in Tripoli and Benghazi were set up to address cases of violence committed against women and children. However, in addition to improving women's legal rights and addressing structural discrimination, women's representation in the law enforcement system as judges and lawyers must improve and a protective environment for survivors of violence must be created.
- Women's active participation in the LPDF ensured the integration of justice principles such as human rights and gender equality. But to attain the security peace dividend of the political agreement and guide Libya into the transitional process, women must be meaningfully included in all security, transitional justice, legal and security programming such as disarmament and reintegration of fighters.



Photo: Bakr Naet



# WOMEN AT THE FOREFRONT OF ENHANCING SECURITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

## PANEL 1: WOMEN AND THE LAW

The legal frameworks that regulate social relations are vital for safeguarding rights, punishing perpetrators of crimes, and ensuring equal opportunities for all citizens. In this session, a panel of Libyan legal experts discussed the challenges that women face and reforms that can be implemented to better enshrine their legal rights. They addressed the multifaceted challenges that women face in various fields and stressed on the need for national legislation on VAW. The session was moderated by Khaled M Ahmed (Senior Rule of Law Office at UNSMIL). Speakers included Judge Asia El Sherif, Neven el Bah (Lawyer and Human Rights activist), Maram Alakrot, Nesreen Amer and Fatma Shenib (lawyer and member of the Legal aid network and of the Libyan Women Network for Peacebuilding).

### KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THE DISCUSSION INCLUDE:

- As Judges and lawyers, women are at the forefront of combating violence against women. The formation of new district courts that seek to address VAW are a welcomed step but require further development and operationalization. The courts lack functional reporting mechanisms and psychological support for survivors of VAW. Further, some legal texts require revisions and amendment. For example, spousal abuse against women is often ruled as a misdemeanour rather than a crime which provides leniency to the perpetrator and reduces the gravity of the crime. As Libyan judges are mandated by the Libyan code of procedures, they cannot address misdemeanours since they are not defined as crimes. It was also stated that women face social pressure to withdraw complaints and underreport abuse.
- Women legal experts pointed out discriminatory clauses in certain laws such as Law no.10, whereby if a husband abuses his wife but leaves no visible trace, and the wife leaves him, the husband has the legal right to file a complaint to the court to seek her return. Men are thus seen as guardians of women under certain provisions. Since most cases of GBV are committed by male relatives of women, it is essential to revise civil status laws and the Penal Code to ensure that male relatives do not have the legal upper hand. Investigation of crimes must also be formalized; it is a positive step that a decree will be issued to establish a special prosecutor's office that will investigate cases of VAW.
- There has been a deterioration in the legal environment since 2012, with the passing of a law allowing underaged girls to marry, and another preventing women to officiate marriage.
- Different experiences were presented portraying the lack of legislation on VAW resulting in serious gaps in protection mechanisms. The panel praised the ongoing efforts by several Libyan experts in cooperation with the UNSMIL, UN WOMEN and UNFPA to revise the current draft legislation and suggested that the draft legislation would also cover cyber-violence against women. Other UN organizations such as UNICEF suggested that the draft VAW legislation would be expanded to include violence against girls and boys.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

- CSOs should contribute to providing women the right security training, reinforcing legal protection for law enforcement officers, and engaging with law enforcement to ensure that women are not solely given secondary roles as guards but also leadership positions;
- Law enforcement officers should be given training on VAW and education campaigns must be enhanced to better target and include women;
- Strengthening the justice system in the protection of women's rights and survivors of GBV is paramount. However, efforts to develop preventive measures that address root causes of violence must be led in parallel. Activating the role of the judiciary can play a key preventive role in this regard;
- The pathway to a draft law on VAW supported by UN Women, OHCHR and UNFPA should be finalized. Legal experts should also be supported in submitting new proposals on the protection of women;
- The implementation of protective laws that ensure equal participation and rights for women must be monitored;
- Libya's national laws should be harmonized with the principles in the international conventions it has ratified;
- A comprehensive system consisting of protective and preventive measures must be put into place to combat VAW;
- Safe shelters for women survivors of violence must be set-up across Libya;
- Personal status code should be revised, and further studies should be conducted to address and understand root causes of VAW.



Photo: Magenta

## PANEL 2: WOMEN AND SECURITY PANEL

UNSCR 1325 highlighted the importance of women's participation in peace and security processes, protection in armed conflicts, preventive and peacebuilding roles as well as the impact women's inclusion has on sustaining peace. Libyan women made strides in claiming their rightful leadership positions, effectively contributed to local peacebuilding, and to shaping key political outcomes such as the LPDF roadmap. Libya has a long history of women in law enforcement. However, discriminatory social norms and the lack of a 1325 NAP are among the challenges that must be addressed to ensure women's inclusion and effective contributions in the Security Sector Reform (SSR) process. Introductory remarks were given by Natalina Cea (Head of the EU Civilian Border and Security Sector Mission (EUBAM) to Libya). The panel was moderated by Ameena Al Rasheed (Senior Gender Advisor at UNSMIL). Speakers included Jaiza Shaiter, Rania Zid, Nesreen Amer and Khadija Alboaisi (Gender Advisor at UNDP).

### KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THE DISCUSSION INCLUDE:

→ Efforts to ensure women's representation across security sector institutions must be strengthened. Libya is one of the first countries that had female officer academies. The academies should reopen to effectively target and include women. In parallel, social awareness campaigns need to be led to address normative gendered misconceptions that women are not fit for the security sector. Women face a different set of challenges and have different experiences within the security sector, personal safety programs should therefore respond to gendered needs.

- Women's inclusion in the security sector is not solely rights based and a matter of principle, but it is to the advantage of all stakeholders and the effectiveness of the sector. Experience has shown that women better understand community needs, improve accessibility of law enforcement, and make security processes more accountable. EUBAM Libya is cooperating with the Ministries of Interior and Justice in gender mainstreaming across law enforcement agencies and is adopting a similar approach in support of Libyan border control and border management institutions.
- The Libyan Penal code lacks clear definitions and is often susceptible to interpretation. Efforts to support clarifying texts of security legislation will strengthen the efficiency of the sector and reduce violations.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Women's priorities and perspectives, in all their diversity, should be integrated into national strategies developed during Libya's transition. This includes reassessing schools' curriculums and ensuring reference to 1325, CEDAW and other laws and international conventions on women's rights. Dialogue and collaboration between rural and urban women must be strengthened. CSOs can play a leading role in facilitating this as they often manage to reach marginalized remote areas;
- States and Libyan CSOs should support Libya in developing and implementing its NAP 1325 with technical support and expertise. Women's peace-building networks and CSOs should develop channels of consultation with the Ministries of Justice and Interior to advise on the plan and mechanisms for implementation;



- Supporting women's reintegration into the police force is a key priority. A commission was set up to assess the number of returning women. The police schools that closed due to security reasons must be reopened, and comprehensive training and targeting of women should be pursued. Employment processes should aim at targeting women and including women in the employment commissions;
- The new Libyan government should make use of the media and CSOs to counter dominant and patriarchal discourses about women's roles in the security sector;
- Collaboration between social and security sectors should be strengthened. They should make use of the media and design awareness campaigns that counter traditional gender norms;
- In the security sector, employment processes should aim at targeting and including women in the employment commissions.



Photo: Magenta

# WOMEN AT THE FOREFRONT OF MEDIA AND YOUTH EMPOWERMENT

## PANEL 1: WOMEN JOURNALISTS AT THE FOREFRONT OF MEDIA

The role of the media is often seen as a double-edged sword. It can be used to spread misinformation and divisiveness or to fight negative social perceptions, stigmas and as an effective channel to reach citizens, especially at critical times such as during the pandemic. Since 2011, Libyan women journalists and social media activists had leading roles in covering reconciliation campaigns to promote peace, in fighting hate speech, raising awareness on civil rights and freedoms, combating misinformation, and disseminating information on COVID-19 and prevention. In this session, panellists stressed on the vital roles and responsibilities journalists have in addressing and reducing the discourse of hatred and cleavages in the transitional period. Introductory remarks were given by Abdel Fattah Jambi (Head of the National Committee for Youth and Sports), Asr Ahmed Toson (UNFPA) and Anna Blok Mazoyer (Swedish Ambassador to Libya). The session was moderated by Libya Idris (BBC Media Action journalist). Speakers included journalists such as Ghada Elsharef, Fatma Alomrani, Abdelmenem Aljhem, Lamis Elgheblawi and Wansa Albahloul.

### KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THE DISCUSSION INCLUDE:

- Libyan women journalists often address underlying social issues that are rarely covered and often side-lined by traditional media. These include reproductive health, harassment and disabilities that often challenge restrictive editorial lines. They also raise socially taboo issues such as the sexual abuse of young girls.
- Women leaders reflected that media can be used to repair or deepen social and political cleavages. At the start of the outbreak of conflict, several women journalists began avoiding covering political developments and shifted their focus to societal and gender issues. This enabled women to shed light on communal grievances and give voice to diverse marginalized groups and their experiences of the conflict.
- Women journalists experienced discrimination on the field as several remarked that they were paid less than their male peers and received less access to training opportunities.
- Social media is emerging as an alternative news media platform and efforts to equalize access and experiences on social media must be strengthened. Women disproportionately experience insecurity and hate speech on social media platforms, attacks on women are higher and the psychological effect of online bullying and harassment has burdened women activists and journalists.
- Libyan women leaders also advocate for medias to challenge gender stereotypes by encouraging non-normative images and stories of women that do not confine them to restrictive gender roles but showcase their accomplishments and leadership positions.
- Advocates for gender equality within Libyan media and journalism played an important role in showcasing the diversity of women's experiences, differences between Libya's regions and specificities of their needs and conditions. Women in the south for example struggled with dire service provision, limited finances and cash flow, and displacement, among other things. Young Libyan journalists



brought these issues to the public eye and provided spaces for these women to voice their grievances so that their struggles reach

decision-makers and are called upon to address them.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The journalistic code of conduct, journalistic integrity, and ethics should be consolidated. Monitoring and reporting mechanisms to prevent GBV within the media sector should be institutionalized;
- Protective laws to regulate the media sector and address abuses should be legislated. The legislature should also work with CSOs and the media sector to enact cybercrime legislation that regulates online content in a protective manner and protects Libyans from cyber-bullying and abuse;
- The large reach of media tools and channels should be leveraged as a resource that young Libyan journalists used to disseminate information on domestic violence during the pandemic. It was stated that some half a million viewers saw informative videos on combating VAW on a platform that was tailored to address domestic violence and the justifications given by perpetrators of violence. Such efforts should be encouraged and supported by national and international authorities;
- National and independent Libyan media should continue playing a role in challenging gender stereotypes and encouraging social acceptance of women's active roles.



Photo: Magenta



## PANEL 2: YOUNG WOMEN ACTIVISTS AT THE FOREFRONT OF PEACE AND SECURITY

Youth are important partners to Libya's transitional process and have unique experiences of inequality and conflict. In this session, panelists shared some of the findings of a UN Women and UNFPA joint policy brief titled "Deepening Stabilization in Libya: Overcoming Challenges to Young Women's Participation in Peace Building". They discussed the specificity of the barriers that young women face in the fields of security and peacebuilding, how women in decision making positions can support young women and the link between young women's economic empowerment and their leadership in fields of peace and security. The session was moderated by Soror Alakari, DW Akademie. Speakers included prominent peacebuilders such as Asma Khalifa, Mabrouka Abdullah, Marah Zamoul and Lubna Albashari.

### KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THE DISCUSSION INCLUDE:

→ There are structural barriers that prevent women, particularly young women, from accessing and gaining experience within the security sector. The lack of social acceptance was listed as the main challenge facing young women in the field of peace and security. Men are the sector's gatekeepers and women face higher barriers of entry. It was remarked that men often adopt a statist and militaristic approach while women introduce human security lenses to the sector. Several young Libyan women managed to access the sector through research and academia, but due to social barriers they required the support of male researchers to facilitate their fieldwork.

- Social expectations and barriers are higher for young women and so is the threshold for social acceptance. Not only do women need to perform, but they also need to prove to society that youth are capable actors.
- Increasing women economic independence opens doors for women to engage in all sectors and reduces the risk of exposure to violence.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The role of school curricula in reinforcing gender stereotypes must be assessed. In curricula, women are more often reminded of their duties than their rights. National curricula should be reformed in a way that promotes young women's participation thus enhancing their roles across all sectors;
- Affirmative action focusing on women's economic empowerment must be taken. Job opportunities should be distributed among women's networks and collaboration between CSOs and government entities on young women's economic empowerment should be increased;
- Young women must hold on to their ownership of and insistence to participate in and contribute to the fields of peace and security;
- Inputs must be actively solicited from youth, and their priorities must be integrated in the transitional process. Communication between young women and female MPs must be strengthened. During the elections, consultation sessions should be set up so that young women can share their experiences and perspectives with female MPs.

## WOMEN AT THE FOREFRONT OF ENHANCING SECURITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

### PANEL 1: WOMEN AND THE LAW



### PANEL 2: WOMEN AND SECURITY PANEL



## WOMEN AT THE FOREFRONT OF MEDIA AND YOUTH EMPOWERMENT

### PANEL 1: WOMEN JOURNALISTS AT THE FOREFRONT OF MEDIA



### PANEL 2: YOUNG WOMEN ACTIVISTS AT THE FOREFRONT OF PEACE & SECURITY





**Day 4**

## **Women at the Forefront of Economic empowerment and Resilience**

Photo: Magenta



As research indicates, policies and initiatives aimed at women's economic empowerment and increasing their formal contributions to the economy are vital for economic development and prosperity. An enabling context leveraging women's potential and formal contributions to the economy must be consolidated so that the economic dividends of Libya's post-conflict context can come to fruition. Introductory remarks were facilitated by Begona Lasagabaster, UN Women Libya Country Representative and given by Richard B Norland, United States of America Ambassador to Libya, Javier García-Larrache, Spanish Ambassador to Libya, Beatrice le Fraper du Hellen, French Ambassador to Libya and Gozde Avci, UNDP Deputy Resident Representative.

- ➔ An enabling protective environment combating violence against women and providing equal economic opportunities is essential to activate women's economic roles. First and foremost, women must be encouraged to speak up and be able to report violence through national helplines should they choose to.
- ➔ The discourse of women's empowerment is important, but more efforts should be invested to make it more specific. Material power, control over financial resources and wealth are an integral component to women gaining influence and feeling empowered. Further, it was argued that providing women with economic opportunities must be complemented by mainstreaming their perspectives in overall economic development.

#### KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THE OPENING REMARKS INCLUDE:

- ➔ Women's qualitative contributions to Libya's path of political transition cannot be ignored. Despite being outnumbered, the 17 women participating in the LPDF brought key issues to the forefront and were the engine that drove the process forward. Their meaningful contributions must also be secured in the economic sector by empowering women to play a decisive role in the Libyan economy. Such efforts are complementary to economic diversification goals.
- ➔ Through their development agencies, the USA, France, and Spain emphasized supporting women's entrepreneurship in Libya by providing access to financing and multiple programs such as digital training and educational exchange initiatives. To exemplify the spill-over effect women's economic empowerment could have on responding to national needs, it was noted that one of the USAID exchange program beneficiaries established the first autism centre in Tripoli and eventually provided trainings to 21 other trainers in cities outside of Tripoli.



Photo: Magenta

## PANEL 1: WOMEN IN BUSINESS AND START-UPS

Since 2011, in times of armed conflict and economic crisis, Libyan women excelled in developing coping mechanisms in support of their families and managed to break through the labor market with little support and high socio-economic barriers. Following the outbreak of the pandemic, several women entrepreneurs persevered and managed to sustain their livelihoods, their small and medium Enterprises (SMEs) and entered virtual competitions. They also adapted and took advantage of the opportunities that lay in digitalization and contributed to reducing unemployment rates. The panel was moderated by Hala Buighagis, a researcher. The speakers included Monia Attiga, Sara Alzowi, Huda Salim, Winsa Ahaderi (Stream Business Incubator Programme Officer), Enas Alameen (Co-Founder of Yaqot company), and Mariam Oshaibi (Robotics Entrepreneur).

### KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THE DISCUSSION INCLUDE:

- Technological advances, social media and digital tools are assets that help female entrepreneurs expand their reach to their target groups. Closing the digital gap, improving internet access, providing trainings on digital marketing and e-services is invaluable to boosting women's economic empowerment. Further, it was pointed out that digitalization provides new educational opportunities, allows for experience and knowledge sharing from a distance and saves costs.
- COVID-19 and the economic downfalls that accompanied it forced several women-led businesses to downsize and adapt to economic shocks. Nonetheless, it was impressive to note that regardless of challenges, some women led businesses managed to persist and keep their businesses open.
- It is vital to mainstream the leave no one behind principle in program design, implementation, and monitoring. Underprivileged rural women, women with disabilities other marginalized groups need to be prioritized and included in target groups. Further, international agencies can assist in ensuring channels of communication between the most vulnerable stakeholders and national authorities. UN Women indicated that the agency often acts as an intermediary to ensure that requests from women in remote areas are responded to by relevant authorities.
- In Sabha, women entrepreneurs remarked that young university students with enormous potential experienced a sense of disillusionment and disempowerment with regards to entering the labor market. In response to this, and aware of the neglect and marginalisation that southern communities experience, women sought to become role models and examples of success to empower youth. Women conducted extensive market research to identify gaps in production. For example, a woman in Sabha set up the Libyan south's first soap production business. Universities also have a key role to play in incentivizing youth and raising awareness on available opportunities and incubators.
- UNDP, UN Women, and other agencies stated that the lack of gender-disaggregated data on women's economic contributions is a serious impediment to developing effective women's empowerment interventions.
- The role of organizations in support of strengthening women's economic roles should be comprehensive in addressing the challenges women encounter. Support should not be restricted to financial support and trainings, but most importantly, it should include institutional development such as knowledge on company registration, upscaling, and legal dimensions of business development. It was mentioned that UN Women has programmes that provide small grants to raise institutional capacity. It was stated that building women's capacities and knowledge of business development and management prior to channelling financial support can increase the durability of their projects.



## RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Comprehensive nationwide strategies must be developed to support women and young girls entering the business sector in a sustainable manner. Gender should also be mainstreamed in fiscal policies and public financial management. Gender responsive budgeting should be adopted at both central and local government levels;
- Women's knowledge of the legal aspects of business development, such as company registration laws and the importance of registration for formal cooperation between businesses, should be strengthened;
- International and national organizations must go beyond supporting small-scale income generating activities for women to building their capacities in business leadership;
- Significant advocacy efforts should be led by national CSOs and international governments and organizations to sensitize the Libyan government and legislature on the value women's contributions have on the country's economic development. This will in turn incentivize the Libyan government to acknowledge their vital roles and take affirmative action;
- National institutions, such as the Central Bureau of Statistics, must be supported in providing gender-disaggregated data that can act as a baseline for evidence-based national and international efforts to support women's meaningful contributions to the Libyan economy. The research conducted by various actors should expand the focus from the labour market and include SMEs;
- A gender research centre that compiles all the knowledge and data on various themes including women's economic empowerment should be developed as a guidance and resource bank;
- The economy of care and its importance is often disregarded and requires more attention. The social reproductive model must be included in economic analysis and considered when shaping economic policies. This means that the additional reproductive burden women shoulder, in support of their families, the elderly and children must be considered. Men dominate the economic sphere since their access to formal paid work is easier but also because informal unpaid work, disproportionately conducted by women due to restrictive gender norms, is rarely considered and undervalued. Both paid and unpaid economic systems should be acknowledged and reconciled.



Photo: Magenta



## PANEL 2: ORGANIZATIONS WORKING ON WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

Not only is women's economic participation a fundamental right for Libyan women, it also has a wide-reaching socio-economic impact on Libyan society and social cohesion. Studies show that women's financial independence reduces VAW, boosts national GDP and reinvigorates local economies. The panel discussed the importance of shedding light on this impact, the progress they made as leaders in women's economic empowerment and the necessity to build on this progress so that women might effectively contribute to recovery and reconstruction efforts in Libya. The panel was moderated by Inaam Albasir, UN Women. Speakers included Intissar K.Rajbani, Rawya Elkekly, Fatima Abulsalam Alakari (Executive Manager of Takween), Fadwa Amer, Intesar Ejrew and Zahia Ali (Why Me CSO Representative), and Hanan El Fakhkhri (Deputy Head of Women Empowerment Unit).

### KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THE DISCUSSION INCLUDE:

- ➔ Economic empowerment paves the way for women's social and political empowerment and enables them to claim their rightful positions as independent decision-makers.
- ➔ Libyan women in the field of economic empowerment heavily relied on foreign support and funding and pointed out that support from local municipalities and senior officials was minimal.
- ➔ Libyan women were at the forefront of the emergence of the culture and movement of entrepreneurship in Libya since 2007. Lessons learned from years of experience in this field included the importance of underlining that economic prosperity cannot be reached without the full participation of women and that the private sector stands to gain considerably from

meaningful inclusion efforts.

- ➔ Libyan women have the will, skills, and capacities to activate and formalize their economic roles. Over a period of three years, 80% of beneficiaries of trainings in business development and digital marketing led by Takween for Economic and Social Development were female. Such figures reveal women's strong desire to engage in economic activities, but they have enormous untapped potential.
- ➔ Since 2014, largely due the hard-hitting economic impact of the war and financial crisis, it was noted that there is higher social acceptance for activating women's economic roles and a conviction in the benefits of women's economic empowerment.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- ➔ CSOs and international organizations should prioritize targeting the private sector in their advocacy efforts on women's economic empowerment. They should encourage the private sector to involve women as key business partners;
- ➔ The private sector should intensify its investment in women's economic empowerment and take advantage of the financial and social benefits that will result. The private sector can cooperate with both governmental and non-governmental agencies in this regard;
- ➔ Economic safety nets for women, awareness raising on legal rights in the workplace and capacity building on salary negotiation techniques must be strengthened for women to internalize their value and take financial risks. It was stated that in some instances, business owners often prefer to hire women over men because women are less likely to negotiate their salaries;
- ➔ National authorities should institutionalize the presence of business incubators in all local

municipalities;

- Rural women need to be provided with sustainable economic empowerment support that goes beyond the project incubation period as it was pointed out that they have excelled in developing small projects but struggled in scaling up phases of project growth. Long-term economic empowerment efforts are essential particularly in rural areas, as basic resources and infrastructure is lacking, and human resources must be capitalized on;
- Women led households should be prioritized in women's economic empowerment programming, particularly survivors of violence, as they are most vulnerable and lack vital resources, access to capital and official income generating activities. Other marginalized social segments such as non-Libyan female migrants must also be targeted in such efforts;
- Capacity building programs should be strengthened and include economic feasibility analysis and digital marketing for women;
- CSOs should elevate women's economic achievements by sharing success stories using digital platforms that will in turn inform and incentivize other women and young girls to participate and provide opportunities to network and connect. International organizations should support CSOs in their efforts to develop such platforms.



Photo: Magenta



# CONCLUSION & FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS:



Photo: Aisha Abdu salam

To conclude the symposium, a video produced by UN Women in partnership with Elkul channel was screened. It included a testimony by Fathiya Motamad, Head of the Civil Society Commission in Sirte, on the impact armed conflict had on VAW, impunity in addressing violations and the lack of legal safeguards that protect women and children in armed conflict as well as the role women's economic dependence has on exacerbating the challenges they face. Closing remarks were then given by Raisedon Zenenga, Assistant Secretary-General and Mission Coordinator at UNSMIL, Hilary Childs-Adams, Ambassador of Canada to Libya, Sandra Goffin, Head of Operations at the European Union Delegation to Libya. They praised participants for the rich, informative, and important recommendations that they produced over the past days and committed to continuing to facilitate such dialogues. They underlined that all the issues that were addressed, ranging from security, politics, justice, media, and the economy are interlinked. The discussions concluded that at the core of achieving gender equality and upholding women's

rights is addressing systemic discrimination and negative gender norms that have been gravely exacerbated by the pandemic and years of armed conflict. Collaboration between all actors should be strengthened to ensure the implementation of a protective social and legal framework and engage with gatekeepers on the real value of women's empowerment and leadership.

Representatives of the UN and diplomatic community committed to continuously soliciting women's diverse inputs, echoing their messages to national authorities, and encouraged Libyan women to capitalize on the historical achievement of the appointment of five women in ministerial positions. They stressed that all Libyan women should have their voices heard, continue to advocate for their rights, and hold both female and male ministers accountable. Finally, UN Women and partners were congratulated for organizing a timely symposium with discussions on pertinent issues that paint a brighter future for Libya and its path towards peace, stability, and gender equality.

→ All national and international stakeholders



must recognize the value of women's meaningful inclusion in all spheres of life, and take advantage of the window of opportunity that lays in Libya's transition to advance gender equality and the implementation of international commitments, and particularly the Women Peace and Security agenda. In this regard, Libya should be supported in its endeavour to develop and implement a 1325 NAP that addresses the four pillars of the WPS agenda.

- National and international governments must invest in women's organizations and equip them with the tools and mechanisms needed to actively partake in public policymaking and national planning processes. Youth perspectives and those of marginalized communities should also be regularly sought.
- National institutions, in partnership with CSOs, must improve the availability of gender disaggregated data.
- Financial investments to rebuild Libya must be agile and context sensitive. Gender budgeting and women's participation in economic activities across national and local institutions must be strengthened. The private sector should be engaged by both international actors and national CSOs on the importance and benefit of women's economic empowerment.
- Legislative reform is a key priority during and after the transitional period. Discriminatory laws must be reformed, new protective laws such as a law addressing SGBV and cyber

violence must be legislated and monitoring mechanisms for the implementation of laws safeguarding women's rights must be institutionalized.

- Concerted efforts must be taken by all actors to address systemic and structural barriers to gender equality in Libya. Women activists, journalists, peacebuilders, caretakers, and others must be empowered, along with their male allies, to address gender stereotypes, restrictive social norms and hate speech. Information and communication technologies and social media can be leveraged to counter VAW, address social misconceptions, and promote women's leadership.
- CSOs roles must be strengthened to lead trainings and needs-based capacity building providing women with essential skills and knowledge to reach leadership positions across all sectors.
- The gains made in the political track and with regards to inclusion in governing bodies should not be lost. In terms of representation, a minimum quota of 30% must be secured across state institutions in Libya. Their participation must be meaningful, and perspectives integrated into policy formulation and implementation. Women in leadership positions should establish consultation mechanisms with women's groups as well as youth.

# ANNEX 1: PANEL RECOMMENDATIONS



Photo: Mohmaed Tawfiq Elgassier

## LIBYAN AUTHORITIES:

- Legislation pertaining to women's rights and participation must be clearly written with limited room for ambiguity or interpretation. Certain discriminatory laws must be reformed such as the Nationality Law that stigmatises and hinders the participation of Libyan women married to foreign men, while others provide protective legislative frameworks but suffer from shortcomings in implementation. To address this, CSOs can support by playing an observatory and supervisory role;
- Legislation to protect women against political violence should be developed;
- Legislation to protect women from cyber abuse and cybercrime should be developed;
- Legislation to protect women against all forms of violence should be developed in line with international standards;
- Protective laws to regulate the media sector and address abuses should be legislated. The legislature should also work with CSOs and the media sector to enact cybercrime legislation that regulates online content in a protective manner and protects Libyans from cyber-bullying and abuse;
- The pathway to a draft law on VAW supported by UN Women, OHCHR and UNFPA should be finalized. Legal experts should also be supported in submitting new proposals on the protection of women;
- The implementation of protective laws that ensure equal participation and rights for women must be monitored;
- Libya's national laws should be harmonized with the principles in the international conventions it has ratified;
- Personal status code should be revised, and further studies should be conducted to address and understand root causes of VAW;

- Significant advocacy efforts should be led by national CSOs and international governments and organizations to sensitize the Libyan government and legislature on the value women's contributions have on the country's economic development. This will in turn incentivize the Libyan government to acknowledge their vital roles and take affirmative action;
- The government should leverage CSOs effective crisis-response contributions and legislate laws that organize and institutionalize the work of CSOs. Further, consultation mechanisms between CSOs and authorities at the local and national level must be strengthened, particularly in the essential field of healthcare. A legal framework protective of CSO engagement needs to be established to vitalize and strengthen civil initiatives and women's roles therein;
- Efforts to develop SGBV prevention and protection schemes and national and local strategies to confront SGBV should be intensified;
- Quotas should be used to achieve appropriate representation. A minimum of 30% quotas must be applied across executive, legislative, and judicial institutions. Libyan Members of Parliament (MPs) must call on the authorities to increase women's quantitative and qualitative inclusion;
- National authorities should institutionalize the presence of business incubators in all local municipalities;
- Inputs must be actively solicited from youth, and their priorities must be integrated in the transitional process. Communication between young women and female MPs must be strengthened. During the elections, consultation sessions should be set up so that young women can share their experiences and perspectives with female MPs;
- Comprehensive nationwide strategies must be developed to support women and young girls entering the business sector in a sustainable manner. Gender should also be mainstreamed in fiscal policies and public financial management. Gender responsive budgeting should be adopted at both central and local government levels;
- National and independent Libyan media should continue playing a role in challenging gender stereotypes and encouraging social acceptance of women's active roles;
- The role of school curricula in reinforcing gender stereotypes must be assessed, in educational curricula women are more often reminded of their duties than their rights. National curricula should be reformed in a way that promotes young women's participation thus enhancing their roles across all sectors;
- Affirmative action focusing on women's economic empowerment must be taken. Job opportunities should be distributed among women's networks and collaboration between CSOs and government entities on young women's economic empowerment should be increased;
- The new Libyan government should make use of the media and CSOs to counter dominant and patriarchal discourses about women's roles in the security sector;
- Collaboration between social and security sectors should be strengthened. They should make use of the media and design awareness campaigns that counter traditional gender norms;
- In the security sector, employment processes should aim at targeting women and including women in the employment commissions;
- Law enforcement officers should be given training on VAW and education campaigns must be enhanced to better target and include women;



- Strengthening the justice system in protection of women's rights and survivors of GBV is paramount. However, efforts to develop preventive measures that address root causes of violence must be led in parallel. Activating the role of the judiciary can play a key preventive role in this. For example, courts to address offences categorized as misdemeanours should be formed. Channels of communication between Women's CSOs, legal experts and the judiciary should be developed;
- A comprehensive system consisting of protective and preventive measures must be put into place to combat VAW;
- Safe shelters for women survivors of violence must be set-up across Libya;
- Women's priorities and perspectives, in all their diversity, should be integrated into national strategies developed during Libya's transition. This includes reassessing schools' curriculums and ensuring reference to 1325, CEDAW and other laws and international conventions on women's rights. Dialogue and collaboration between rural and urban women must be strengthened. CSOs can play a leading role in facilitating this as they often manage to reach marginalized remote areas;
- The new government of national unity should lead holistic, gender-sensitive, public policymaking;
- The new government of national unity should allocate budgets for scientific research and support the development of research centres;
- Supporting women's reintegration into the police force is a key priority. A commission was set up to assess the number of returning women. The police schools that closed due to security reasons must be reopened, and comprehensive training and targeting of women should be pursued. Employment processes should aim at targeting women and including women in the employment commissions;
- The large reach of media tools and channels should be leveraged as a resource that young Libyan journalists used to disseminate information on domestic violence during the pandemic. It was stated that some half a million viewers saw informative videos on combating VAW on a platform that was tailored to address domestic violence and the justifications given by perpetrators of violence. Such efforts should be encouraged and supported by national and international authorities;
- The diverse perspectives of women and girls must be integrated into the formulation and implementation of all national policies and in COVID-19 recovery programmes;
- Commitments to normative frameworks that safeguard and uphold women's rights such as United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325, The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and to action to advance women's equal participation must be strengthened;
- Sexual and Gender Based-Violence (SGBV), harassment and discrimination women face must be addressed to activate their roles in all spheres. Protective measures should be reinforced, all forms of SGBV should be condemned and perpetrators brought to account;
- Inclusion efforts should be cross-generational and encourage vertical and horizontal solidarity among women leaders.

## LIBYAN CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS (CSOS):

- Women's capacity needs to be built on specific legal frameworks that exist in the fields they work in. For example, local women leaders praised efforts that sensitized them on Law 59 on local administration in Libya;
- The culture of citizenship and vertical trust between citizens and decision makers must be strengthened;
- CSOs should play a central role in monitoring the implementation of laws and policies;
- CSOs work must be strengthened so that they can play a key role in raising awareness on the importance of women's political participation and in addressing discriminatory mind-sets and cultural practices. Legislation is needed to organize CSOs work which would enhance women's increased participation. The HNEC for example found that rural women were unaware and therefore disinterested in the electoral process. Here, CSOs can support in strengthening their knowledge of and desire to participate through political academies and trainings;
- Strengthening the exchange of best practices for digital psychological support between CSOs, local and national authorities;
- International and national organizations must go beyond supporting small-scale income generating activities for women to building their capacities in business leadership;
- Collaboration between CSOs and local media to raise awareness particularly with regards to women and youth needs should increase;
- Volunteerism among young women, building women's confidence, and raising awareness about human rights should be encouraged;
- CSOs should contribute to providing women the right security training, reinforcing legal protection for law enforcement officers, and engaging with law enforcement to ensure that women are not solely given secondary roles as guards but also leadership positions;
- The journalistic code of conduct, journalistic integrity, and ethics should be consolidated. Monitoring and reporting mechanisms to prevent SGBV within the media sector should be institutionalized;
- Young women must hold on to their ownership of and insistence to participate in and contribute to the fields of peace and security;
- Women's knowledge of the legal aspects of business development, such as company registration laws and the importance of registration for formal cooperation between businesses, should be strengthened;
- Capacity building programmes should be strengthened and include economic feasibility analysis and digital marketing for women;
- CSOs should elevate women's economic achievements by sharing success stories using digital platforms that will in turn inform and incentivize other women and young girls to participate and provide opportunities to network and connect. International organizations should support CSOs in their efforts to develop such platforms;
- Economic safety nets for women, awareness-raising on legal rights in the workplace and capacity building on salary negotiation techniques must be strengthened for women to internalize their value and take financial risks. It was stated that in some instances, business owners often prefer to hire women over men because women are less likely to negotiate their salaries.

**GENERAL:**

- CSOs and international organizations should prioritize targeting the private sector in their advocacy efforts on women's economic empowerment. They should encourage the private sector to involve women as key business partners;
- More recognition needs to be given to the vital healthcare and humanitarian roles Libyan women played in the field, and to the particularity of women's experiences during the pandemic. As women were on the frontlines, they were also more exposed to the pandemic. An example was shared of a female pediatrician working at Sebha Medical Centre who passed away due to COVID-19 at the isolation centre in Sebha. It was also reported that she was seven months pregnant. Considering the restrictive preventive measures, such as lockdowns and social distancing, women experienced heightened domestic abuse and deteriorating mental health. Protection programmes must thus be designed with a gender lens to respond to gender specific needs;
- Advocate for the role of the civil society organizations in Libya with the focus on the women's role in taking a leading position in these organizations;
- International organizations and national institutions should support further specialization and expertise among healthcare cadres;
- States and Libyan CSOs should support Libya in developing and implementing its NAP 1325 with technical support and expertise. Women's peace-building Networks and CSOs should develop channels of consultation with the Ministries of Justice and Interior to advise on the plan and mechanisms for implementation;
- National institutions, such as the central bureau of statistics, must be supported in providing gender disaggregated data that can act as a baseline for evidence-based national and international efforts to support women's meaningful contributions to the Libyan economy. The research conducted by various actors should expand focus from the labor market and include SMEs;
- A gender research centre that compiles all the knowledge and data on various themes including women's economic empowerment should be developed as a guidance and resource bank;
- The economy of care and its importance is often disregarded and requires more attention. The social reproductive model must be included in economic analysis and considered when shaping economic policies. This means that the additional reproductive burden women shoulder, in support of their families, the elderly and children must be considered. Men dominate the economic sphere since their access to formal paid work is easier but also because informal unpaid work, disproportionately conducted by women due to restrictive gender norms, is rarely considered and undervalued. Both paid and unpaid economic systems should be acknowledged and reconciled;
- Rural women need to be provided with sustainable economic empowerment support that goes beyond the project incubation period as it was pointed out that they have excelled in developing small projects but struggled in scaling up phases of project growth. Long-term economic empowerment efforts are essential particularly in rural areas, as basic resources and infrastructure is lacking, and human resources must be capitalized on;



- Women led households should be prioritized in women's economic empowerment programming, particularly survivors of violence, as they are most vulnerable and lack vital resources, access to capital and official income generating activities. Other marginalized social segments such as non-Libyan female migrants must also be targeted in such efforts;
- The private sector should intensify its investment in women's economic empowerment and take advantage of the financial and social benefits that will result. The private sector can cooperate with both governmental and non-governmental agencies in this regard.



Photo: Mohammed Elgassier



# LIBYA: WOMEN *at the* FOREFRONT

8<sup>th</sup> - 11<sup>th</sup> of March 2021







Photo: Bakr Naef



# LIBYA: WOMEN at the FOREFRONT

8<sup>th</sup> - 11<sup>th</sup> of March 2021



Photo: Magenta



UN Women is the UN Organization dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women. A global champion for women and girls, UN Women was established to accelerate progress on meeting their needs worldwide.

UN Women supports UN Member States as they set global standards for achieving gender equality, and works with governments and civil society to design laws, policies, programmes, and services needed to implement these standards. It stands behind women's equal participation in all aspects of life, focusing on five priority areas: increasing women's leadership and participation; ending violence against women; engaging women in all aspects of peace and security processes; enhancing women's economic empowerment; and making gender equality central to all national development planning and budgeting.

UN Women also coordinates and promotes the UN system's work in advancing gender equality..

## **UN Women Libya**

   [unwomenlibya](https://www.instagram.com/unwomenlibya)

