



Center for Gender
Equality Studies
University of Duhok

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Towards Effective Participation: Analytical Study on the Reality of Women's Leadership and the WPS Agenda in the Kurdistan Region: A Youth-Led Consultation Study at the University of Duhok

An analytical study produced under the project
**"Voices for Peace: Amplifying Young People's Leadership in
the WPS Agenda"**

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About

In alignment with the convictions of the Center for Gender Equality Studies (GES) at Duhok University (UOD) in collaboration with the Better World Organization for Community Development (BWOCD) and with support from Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) through Women for Women International (WfWI), and within the framework of the qualitative project "Voices for Peace: Amplifying Young People's Leadership from Duhok in the WPS Agenda," This project was developed efforts are directed towards raising awareness and engagement in the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, equip young people, especially young women and youth from displacement-affected and minority communities with knowledge and advocacy skills, and creates platforms for them to contribute to dialogue and community engagement. and to amplify youth-informed messages that can support implementation of the Kurdistan Region WPS Action Plan (KAP) and UNSCR 1325.





Executive Summary

Women's participation in public and political life is one of the cornerstones of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda and is influential in societal transformation and essential for sustainable peace, particularly in post-conflict or conflict-affected societies, specifically in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Young people are an important segment in reshaping the discourse on women's leadership, peacebuilding, and strengthening community ownership of WPS commitments.

Accordingly, this study seeks to analyze the perceptions of students at the University of Duhok regarding women's participation, the challenges they face, and mechanisms for their empowerment, and the need to involve women as genuine actors in peace processes, relying on an objective analysis based on discussion questions prepared by academic professors specializing in peace and gender equality studies at the Center for Gender Equality Studies -University of Duhok through intensive consultations and focus groups with university students from various academic disciplines. peer-facilitated by trained youth from the project, with supervision from CGES consultants and the BW OCD project staff to ensure ethical practice, inclusion, and quality facilitation, The research revealed three interrelated categories of obstacles -social and cultural norms, economic constraints, and political marginalization- that systematically exclude women from peace processes and governance structures.

Despite limited official awareness of international frameworks such as UN Security Council Resolution 1325, participants demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of gender equality principles and the challenges to women's participation. The findings suggest that meaningful progress requires a simultaneous transformation of economic structures, social norms, and political institutions, supported by comprehensive policy interventions and cultural change initiatives.

Significance of the Study:

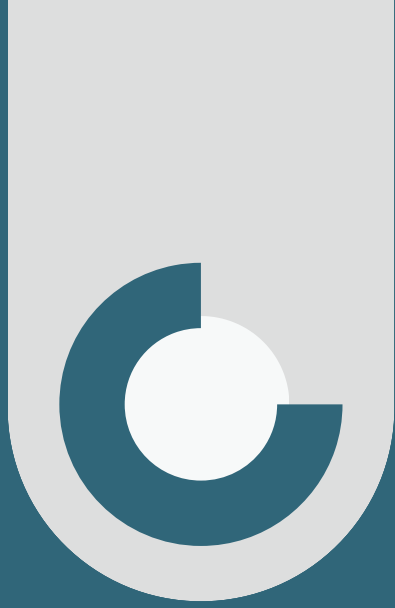
This study is significant for the following reasons:

- 1 Supporting policies related to women's empowerment and peacebuilding.
- 2 Highlighting the voices of young people in Duhok province, specifically University of Duhok students, as partners in the WPS agenda.
- 3 Providing decision-makers, relevant stakeholders and the Ministry of Higher Education with field results to inform programming and policy.
- 4 Women's participation is not limited to formal political representation, but extends to:
 - A Participation in decision-making within the family and community.
 - B Participation in civic and volunteer work.
 - C The role of women in peacebuilding and community mediation.



Objective

This study aims to analyze the perceptions of male and female students at the University of Duhok regarding women's participation in leadership, peacebuilding, and political participation within the framework of the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda.



Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative approach through focus groups comprising approximately 150 male and female students, host community, Refugees, and IDPs, with the aim of exploring the cultural, economic, and political challenges faced by women, the role of education and training in empowering them, and evaluating the women's quota system.

The study relied on an objective analysis of the content of student discussions, through:

- 1 A sample of over 150 male and female students from the University of Duhok participated in the study.
- 2 Participation from different colleges and departments.
- 3 Balanced representation of both genders.
- 4 Diversity in academic disciplines.
- 5 Organization of discussions on topics directly related to the study questions.

Safeguarding and Ethics:

Participants were informed of the purpose of the consultations and how anonymized insights may be used in project outputs.

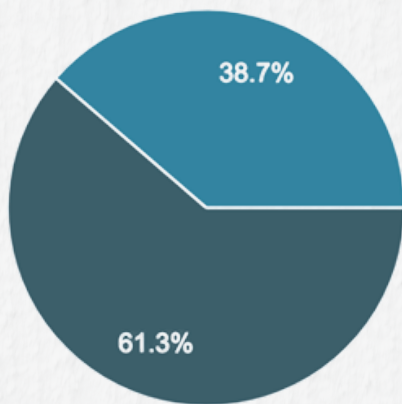


Figure 1: Gender of Participants

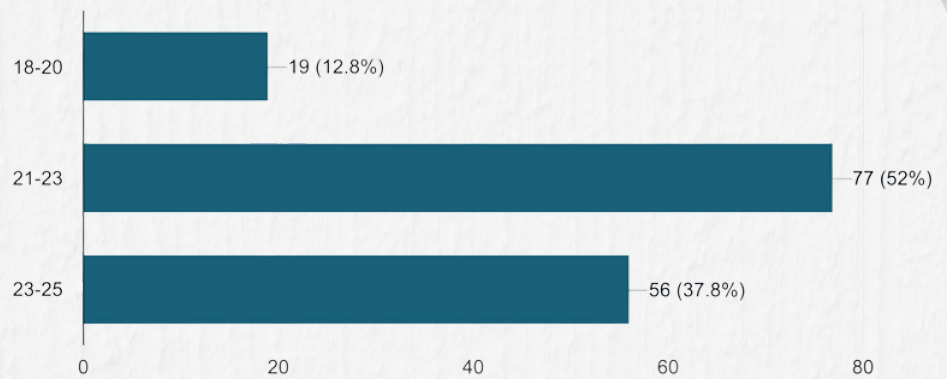


Figure 2: Age of Participants

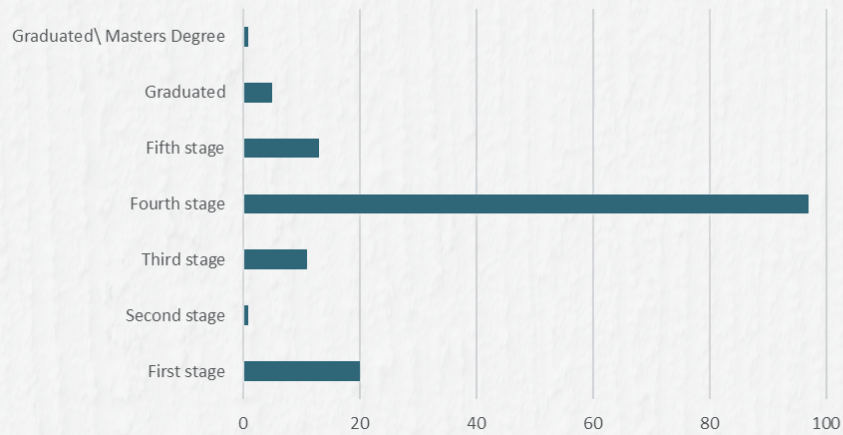


Figure 3: Stage of Participants

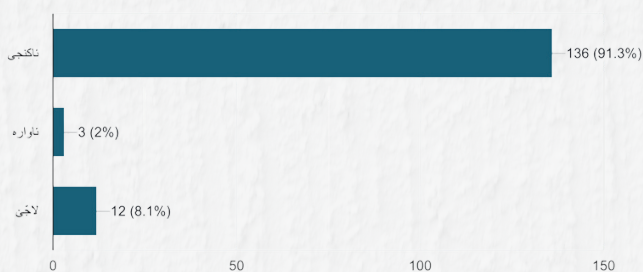


Figure 4: Residential of the participants

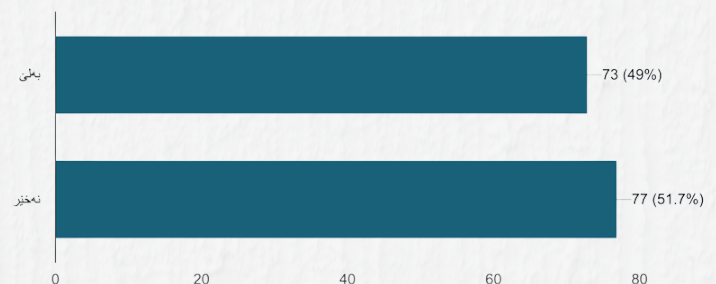


Figure 5: Formal-unformal of the subject for the participants

1. Study Context and Analytical Framework

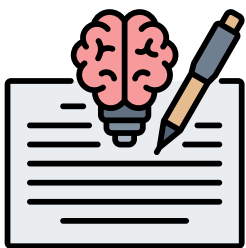


1.1 Kurdistan Region Gender Equality Landscape

The Kurdistan Region has made notable progress in women's rights compared to other parts of Iraq, including a 30% parliamentary quota for women, legal reforms addressing domestic violence, and increased female participation in education and public sector employment. However, significant gaps persist between formal legal equality and substantive participation in decision-making processes.

Women remain underrepresented in:

- 1 Executive leadership positions (ministerial appointments, governorate leadership).
- 2 Political party internal structures (executive committees, ideological councils).
- 3 Security sector institutions (police leadership, military command, intelligence agencies).
- 4 Judicial appointments (especially senior court positions).
- 5 Private sector leadership (corporate boards, business associations).



1.2 Theoretical Framework for Analysis

This study employs a multi-level analytical framework recognizing that barriers operate across:

Micro level:

- Individual Level: Personal attitudes, confidence, skills, and internalized gender norms.
- Household Level: Family expectations, domestic responsibilities, and economic dependencies.

Miso level:

- Institutional Level: Party structures, electoral systems, legal frameworks, and policy environments.
- Structural Level: Economic systems, educational institutions, media landscapes, and state-society relations.

Macro Level:

- Community Level: Social norms, cultural practices, tribal structures, and peer networks. Understanding women's political underrepresentation requires examining how these levels interact to create mutually reinforcing constraints.

2. Awareness Gap: International Frameworks and Local Knowledge.



2.1 Limited Familiarity with UNSCR 1325.

A striking finding across consultations was participants' unfamiliarity with UN Security Council Resolution 1325, which established the Women, Peace and Security agenda. Despite the Kurdistan Regional Government's formal commitments to implementing this framework, university students representing educated, politically aware youth demonstrated limited prior knowledge of:

1. The resolution's content and four pillars (Participation, Protection, Prevention, Relief and Recovery).
2. Its legal status as a binding UN Security Council resolution.
3. Kurdistan's National Action Plan for UNSCR 1325 implementation.
4. The resolution's relevance to Kurdistan Region's governance and peace-building.

This awareness gap reflects:

1. **Curriculum Deficiencies:** International human rights law is not comprehensively integrated into university curricula; it is either inadequately delivered or fails to be internalized as intuitive knowledge among students.
2. **Government Communication Failures:** Implementation occurs without public awareness campaigns.
3. **Civil Society Gaps:** Limited outreach to youth populations on gender equality frameworks.

2. Awareness Gap: International Frameworks and Local Knowledge.



2.2 Strong Conceptual Understanding Despite Formal Knowledge Gap

While unfamiliar with UNSCR 1325 specifically, participants possessed sophisticated understanding of related concepts:



Gender and Sex Distinction

Students clearly articulated that gender refers to socially constructed roles, behaviors, and expectations rather than biological characteristics. They recognized how cultural norms shape opportunities differently for men and women.



Quota Systems and Electoral Mechanisms

Participants demonstrated familiarity with Kurdistan's 30% parliamentary quota, understanding both its purpose (ensuring minimum women's representation) and limitations (tokenism, lack of real power).



Political Participation Principles

Strong consensus emerged that women should meaningfully engage in:

1. Legislative bodies and policy formulation.
2. Executive decision-making and public administration.
3. Judicial institutions and legal interpretation.
4. Security sector governance and peace processes.



Intersectionality

Recognition that gender intersects with class, ethnicity, religion, and geography to shape women's opportunities and constraints. This conceptual foundation enabled productive discussions once consultants and facilitators connected existing knowledge to UNSCR 1325's framework, demonstrating significant potential for awareness-raising initiatives.

3. Primary Barriers: Multi-Dimensional Analysis



3.1 Socio-Cultural Norms: The Dominant Constraint

Across all consultations, socio-cultural factors emerged as the most frequently cited and fundamental barrier to women's political participation. Participants consistently identified societal attitudes and traditional structures as the "biggest obstacle" limiting women's engagement in public affairs.

Cultural barriers were identified as the most significant challenge. Social norms and deeply rooted stereotypes strongly associate leadership with masculinity, while women are often confined to traditional roles. These challenges include:

3.1.1 Gender Stereotypes and Role Prescriptions

Deeply embedded cultural beliefs confine women to domestic spheres while defining politics as inherently masculine:

Domestic Sphere Assignment:

1. Women's primary identity and value derive from roles as wives, mothers, and household managers.
2. Career ambitions, especially political ones, conflict with feminine ideals.
3. Public visibility and authority-seeking behavior appear unfeminine or morally suspect.
4. Tribal customs and traditions: In some communities, tribal norms restrict women's participation in public life. In extreme cases, families do not allow women to continue their education.
5. Societal stereotypes: Society often reinforces limiting perceptions of women's abilities. In some instances, opposition from other women was described as one of the most harmful and serious challenges.
6. Conservative and small communities: Areas such as the province of Duhok were highlighted, where conservative social structures may limit women's visibility, public presence, and participation.



Political Competence Questioning:

Deeply embedded cultural beliefs confine women to domestic spheres while defining politics as inherently masculine:

1. Widespread assumptions that women lack intellectual capacity, emotional stability, and decision-making competence for leadership.
2. Politics and governance framed as requiring traits traditionally associated with male-dominated leadership norms (toughness, aggression, strategic thinking).
3. Women's policy positions dismissed as emotional, naive, or impractical.

Social Sanctions for Non-Conformity:

1. Women pursuing political careers face reputational damage, gossip, and moral questioning.
2. Families experience social pressure and potential stigma when daughters/wives engage publicly.
3. Community isolation and marriage market penalties create powerful disincentives.

These stereotypes manifest not only in explicit discrimination but also in subtle everyday interactions, institutional practices, and self-perceptions that cumulatively discourage women's political ambition.

3.1.2 Tribal Structures and Conservative Social Orders

The Kurdistan Region's partially tribal social organization perpetuates gender hierarchies through multiple mechanisms:

Patriarchal Authority Systems:

- 1 Tribal leadership councils (Majlis- Kuchic or Diwankhane) remain exclusively male domains.
- 2 Family and community decisions follow male authority patterns.
- 3 Honor codes emphasize male control over female family members' behavior and mobility.

Marriage and Family Practices:

- 1 Early marriage customs (despite legal age requirements) limit educational attainment.
- 2 Pressure for large families creates sustained domestic responsibilities.
- 3 Divorce stigma and custody practices reinforce women's economic dependency on marriage.
- 4 Family-related challenges: Many women lack sufficient support from their families, including their husbands.
- 5 Family Factors: Lack of family support limits women's participation. Women are expected to manage multiple domestic roles, and there is a persistent belief that a woman's primary responsibility is limited to childcare and household duties. Due to social norms, women are placed in traditional housewife roles, which reduces their participation.

Conservative Religious Interpretation:

- 1 Selective religious citations used to justify gender segregation and male authority.
- 2 Religious leaders often reinforce traditional gender roles rather than promoting egalitarian interpretations.
- 3 Women's public religious leadership (imam roles, religious scholarship) remains largely prohibited.

Tribal conservatism intersects with party politics, as political parties depend on tribal networks for electoral mobilization, creating incentives to accommodate rather than challenge traditional gender norms.

3.1.3 Community Resistance and Social Costs

Women who pursue political careers encounter multiple forms of resistance:

Patriarchal Authority Systems:

- 1 Political visibility subjects women to intense scrutiny of appearance, behavior, and personal life.
- 2 Allegations of impropriety require constant defensive positioning.
- 3 Family honor concerns create vulnerability to character assassination.

Violence and Intimidation:

- 1 Verbal harassment and psychological pressure.
- 2 Physical security threats against female politicians and their families.
- 3 Social isolation from community networks and family gatherings.

3.2 Economic Constraints:

Resource Inequality and Opportunity Costs

Economic barriers function both as direct obstacles to political participation and as reinforcing mechanisms for socio-cultural constraints.

Economic barriers involve limited financial independence and weak opportunities for economic empowerment, which restrict women's ability to engage effectively in public and leadership roles. The biggest obstacles arise from the lack of financial independence.

3.2.1 Opportunity Costs and Time Poverty

Political engagement requires significant time investments that create income sacrifices disproportionately affecting women:

Campaign Activity Time Demands:

- 1 Attending rallies, meeting constituents, coordinating volunteers.
- 2 Travel to rural areas and remote communities.
- 3 Networking events and coalition-building activities.

Educational Investment Costs:

- 1 Advanced degrees and professional certifications increasingly necessary for political credibility require tuition, time, and foregone earnings.
- 2 Women's educational investments often deprioritized when household resources are scarce.
- 3 Professional development opportunities (conferences, training programs) difficult to access due to family obligations.

This (triple burden) phenomenon productive work, reproductive work, and political participation creates unrealistic expectations unique to women.

3.2.2 Asset Poverty and Capital Access

Limited control over productive resources undermines women's political agency:

Land and Property Ownership:

Financial Services Access:

- 1 Banks and microfinance institutions exhibit gender bias, requiring male guarantors or collateral women cannot provide.
- 2 Women's businesses concentrated in low-capital, informal sectors with limited growth potential.
- 3 Credit denial perpetuates economic dependency on male family members.



Professional Network Exclusion:

- 1 Business associations, chambers of commerce, and professional guilds remain male dominated.
- 2 Informal networking spaces (business clubs, social venues) exclude women.
- 3 Relationship capital essential for political fundraising and coalition-building, concentrated in male networks.

3.2.3 Labor Market Segregation

Occupational segregation channels women into sectors offering limited pathways to political leadership:

Class Intersections:

- 1 Elite women with family wealth and connections can sometimes overcome economic barriers.
- 2 Middle and lower-class women face compounding disadvantages.
- 3 Economic inequality among women creates differential political opportunities.

3.3 Political Violence and Institutional Marginalization

3.3.1 Forms of Political Violence Against Women

Political violence emerged as a critical barrier across consultations, manifesting in diverse forms:

Verbal and Psychological Abuse:

1. Personal attacks on appearance, clothing, family background, and private relationships.
2. Sexualized insults and moral character assassination.
3. Trivialization of women's policy positions as emotional reactions rather than substantive arguments.
4. Questioning loyalty to ethnic/national causes based on gender.

Digital Violence:

1. Coordinated social media harassment campaigns.
2. Dissemination of fabricated scandals, doctored images, and false information.
3. Organized trolling, doxxing, and online stalking.
4. Use of digital platforms to amplify traditional forms of character assassination.

Systematic Exclusion:

1. Women denied access to informal decision-making spaces where real negotiations occur (late-night meetings, social clubs, unofficial gatherings).
2. Assignment to (soft) portfolios (women's affairs, social welfare, education) while men control (hard) ministries (finance, defense, interior, foreign affairs).
3. Speaking time limitations in parliamentary debates and party meetings.
4. Budget and resource allocation decisions made without women's input.

Physical Intimidation and Violence:

1. Direct threats of violence against female politicians and their families.
2. Vandalism of campaign offices, vehicles, and homes.

Political violence affects not only women politicians but also male allies supporting gender equality, creating disincentives for cross-gender coalition-building and progressive advocacy.

3.3.2 Quota System Limitations: Form Without Substance

Kurdistan's 30% parliamentary quota generated extensive critique regarding gap between formal representation and substantive power:

1

Tokenism and Symbolic Presence:

1. Women occupy quota seats but lack influence over party platforms, legislative priorities, and resource allocation.
2. Female parliamentarians serve as "façades" satisfying international donors and civil society critics without redistributing actual decision-making authority.

2

Stereotype Reinforcement:

1. Quota mechanisms create perceptions that women require special assistance due to incompetence.
2. Media coverage emphasizes quota status rather than individual qualifications and achievements.
3. Male politicians dismiss women's interventions as products of artificial advantage rather than merit.

3

Absence of Support Infrastructure:

1. No accompanying investments in childcare, transportation, security, or political training.
2. Campaign finance regulations ignore women's resource disadvantages.
3. Party internal governance maintains male-dominated hierarchies despite quota compliance in public positions.

4

Limited Intersectional Representation:

1. Quota seats often filled by elite women with family political connections.
2. Rural women, ethnic minorities, and lower-income women remain underrepresented.
3. Quota compliance achieved through narrow social base rather than broad inclusion.

The quota system addresses symptoms (numerical underrepresentation) without treating causes (economic marginalization, cultural discrimination, political exclusion), resulting in formal equality without substantive empowerment.

4. Educational System

Contributions to Gender Inequality

Educational institutions simultaneously perpetuate gender stereotypes and represent potential transformation sites.

4.1 Curriculum Content and Representation



Historical Narratives:

1. Textbooks emphasize male political leaders, military commanders, intellectual figures, and national heroes.
2. Women's historical contributions marginalized or absent.
3. Exceptional women (Leyla Qasim, Margaret George) presented as anomalies rather than representatives of broader women's agency.



Literary and Cultural Canon:

1. Required reading lists feature predominantly male authors.
2. Female writers relegated to supplementary or optional materials.
3. Cultural production framed as primarily male domain.



Civics and Political Education:

1. Courses on political systems, institutions, and processes rarely address gender dynamics.
2. Women's underrepresentation not analyzed as governance challenge requiring reform.
3. Democratic citizenship education fails to emphasize women's equal political rights.



4.2 Pedagogical Practices and Classroom Dynamics

Teacher Gender Bias:

1. Educators hold gendered expectations about subject aptitudes (boys excel in math/science, girls in language/arts).
2. Differential encouragement patterns shape students' academic choices and career aspirations.
3. Academic guidance steers female students toward traditional feminine professions.

Leadership Opportunity Distribution:

1. Student government and leadership positions often male-dominated.
2. Public speaking and debate opportunities disproportionately given to male students.
3. Extracurricular activities (sports, politics) receive more support than traditional feminine activities.

4.3 Structural Barriers in Educational Access

Rural-Urban Disparities:

1. Limited secondary school availability in rural areas disproportionately affects girls.
2. Families resist sending daughters to distant schools due to safety concerns, social norms, and economic factors.
3. Transportation infrastructure deficits create gender-differentiated access.

Early Marriage Interruptions:

1. Cultural practices of adolescent marriage disrupt girls' education.
2. Minimal pathways for adult women to resume schooling after marriage.
3. Educational interruptions have lifelong earnings and opportunity consequences.

University Major Segregation:

Girls concentrate in humanities, education, and social sciences. And males dominate engineering, computer science, business administration, and political science. The major choices are reflect both personal preferences shaped by socialization and discriminatory counseling. Educational inequalities translate directly into political underrepresentation by limiting women's professional credentials, public speaking experience, analytical skills, and elite network access essential for political careers

4.4 The role of education and training in empowering women politically

4.4.1 Role of Education and Training:

Participation is one of the fundamental pillars of Security Council Resolution 1325, which emphasizes ensuring women's full and effective participation at all levels of decision-making and peacebuilding. In the context of the reality of women in Duhok Governorate, this reflects a central problem in the implementation of Security Council Resolution 1325, namely the existence of an advanced educational base that is matched by limited political participation.

This reality confirms that education and training are not merely enabling tools, but rather the essential executive mechanism for participation, provided that they are supported by political will, an institutional environment, and training programs tailored to the local context. The students agreed that education and training are the cornerstone of empowerment through: and the empowerment and strengthening by building legal and political awareness. Developing leadership and communication skills. And boosting self-confidence and intellectual independence

4.4.2. Preparation of training programs:

- 1- The pivotal role of students as the largest segment of society with energy and representing society as role models.
- 2- Following the example of living models of leadership.
- 3- Encouraging reading to raise the competence of young people

The students pointed out that education alone is not enough unless it is accompanied by practical training programs and real opportunities for participation within institutions. This is for several reasons, including:

- 1- Empowering them legally, politically and familiarizing them with electoral systems and governance.
- 2- Building leadership, decision-making, and negotiation skills, as well as the ability to work within political institutions. These skills play an important role in changing the stereotype of women as unqualified leaders.
- 3- Empowering women to express their opinions and reducing their fear of social stigma or political exclusion.
- 4- Changing societal stereotypes about women's leadership and defining leadership as a competence rather than a masculine trait.
- 5- Transforming participation from formal to active.

Education is an enabling tool, but it needs a supportive environment and institutional policies to ensure that knowledge is translated into actual practice.

5. Internalized Barriers and Agency Within Constraints

Consultations identified women's own attitudes and behaviors as contributing factors while carefully contextualizing these within broader structural constraints.

5.1 Confidence Gaps and Self-Limiting Beliefs

Imposter Syndrome:

1. Systematic underestimation of female competence throughout childhood creates lasting self-doubt.
2. Perfectionism delays political engagement until feeling completely prepared.

Risk Aversion:

1. Socialized to prioritize security and family stability over personal ambition.
2. Political careers' uncertainties (election losses, public criticism, time demands) appear more threatening.
3. Lower tolerance for failure compared to male counterparts.

Ambition Expression:

1. Cultural norms discourage women from openly expressing political ambitions.
2. Modesty expectations conflict with self-promotion necessary for political advancement.

5.2 Limited Solidarity Among Women

Voting Behavior Patterns:

Women voters do not automatically support female candidates.

Competitive Rather Than Collaborative Dynamics:

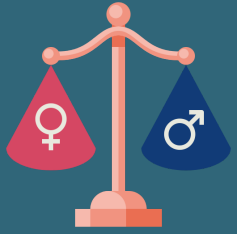
1. Scarcity of leadership positions creates zero-sum competition among women.
2. Insufficient mentorship and support between senior and junior women.

Horizontal violence and criticism among women rather than solidarity

Generational Divides:

1. Older women sometimes enforce traditional norms on younger generations.
2. Intergenerational tensions over appropriate women's roles and behaviors.

5.3 Family Responsibility Prioritization



Internalized Gender Role Expectations:

1. Women prioritize family caregiving over personal ambition even when external support exists.
2. Internal conflict about (abandoning) family duties inhibits political engagement.
3. Guilt and social judgment when family responsibilities appear compromised.



Work-Family Balance Pressures:

1. Women expected to excel in both professional and domestic spheres.
2. (Having it all) rhetoric obscures structural inequalities requiring individual women to solve systemic problems.

5.4 Critical Contextualization

Participants explicitly rejected simplistic "blaming women" narratives. Women's attitudes and behaviors develop through lifelong exposure to gender stereotypes, discrimination, and limited role models not from inherent deficiencies.

Key recognition: addressing internalized barriers requires simultaneous transformation of external structures. Individual confidence-building programs prove ineffective without reducing political violence, economic inequality, and cultural stigma. Women's (choices) occur within constrained opportunity structures shaped by patriarchal systems



6. Comprehensive Recommendations: Multi-Level Interventions

Participants articulated sophisticated, comprehensive frameworks addressing economic, social, legal, and political dimensions simultaneously.

6.1 Education Access and Quality:

- Universal quality education regardless of gender, geography, or family income.
- Targeted scholarships for women in law, political science, public administration, international relations.
- Political leadership academies providing training in campaign management, public speaking, policy analysis, legislative process.

Skills Development:

- Vocational training in high-wage sectors (technology, engineering, advanced manufacturing).
- Political literacy curricula in university general education.

6.1.2 Asset Access and Economic Independence

Property Rights Enforcement:

1. Legal aid services helping women claim inheritance rights.
2. Property titling programs ensuring women's names on documents.

Financial Inclusion:

1. Women-targeted microfinance with favorable terms.
2. Business development grants.
3. Political campaign finance subsidies reducing cost barriers to candidacy.



6.1.3 Labor Market Interventions

Anti-Discrimination Enforcement:

1. Mandatory pay audits and transparency requirements.
2. Penalties for gender wage discrimination.
3. Protection against pregnancy discrimination and sexual harassment.

Formal Sector Expansion:

1. Incentives for private sector women's employment.
2. Corporate leadership quotas (boards, senior management).
3. Public procurement preferences for women-owned businesses.



6.1.4 Social Protection Infrastructure

Care Economy Investments:

1. Universal childcare provision.
2. Paid parental leave (maternity and paternity).
3. Elder care services.
4. School feeding programs and after-school care.



6.2 Social and Cultural Transformation

6.2.1 Legal Reforms

Family Law Modernization:

1. Enforce minimum marriage age of 18 without exceptions.
2. Prohibit polygamy and unilateral male divorce.
3. Ensure equal custody rights and child support.

Anti-Violence Legislation:

- Comprehensive domestic violence law with protection orders and shelters.
- Criminalization of honor-based violence.
- Prohibition of political violence against women candidates.

6.2.2 Community Mobilization

Religious and Tribal Leader Engagement:

1. Dialogue forums reinterpreting religious texts through gender equality lens.
2. Public commitments from influential leaders.
3. Integration of gender equality messages in community gatherings.

Educational Curriculum Reform:

1. Gender-responsive textbook revisions.
2. Mandatory gender studies in teacher training.
3. Civic education emphasizing women's political rights.

Media Campaigns:

1. Television, radio, social media challenging stereotypes.
2. Positive portrayal of women leaders.
3. Male champions publicly advocating gender equality.

6.2.3 Male Engagement as Allies

Critical male roles:

1. **Public advocacy by male political leaders.**
2. **Household negotiation supporting daughters' and wives' careers.**
3. **Party reform demanding internal democracy and women's inclusion.**

6.3 Political and Institutional Reforms

Party Internal Quotas:

- 1 Real women's representation in executive committees.
- 2 Zebra lists alternating male/female candidates.
- 3 Reserved winnable seats not just token positions.



Capacity-Building:

- 1 Pre-candidacy training in campaign strategy, fundraising, media relations.
- 2 Mentorship pairing experienced politicians with aspiring women leaders.
- 3 Compensation for training participation.

Campaign Finance Reform:

- 1 Public election financing.
- 2 Contribution limits preventing plutocratic domination.

6.3.2 Institutional Accountability

Gender Responsive Budgeting:

- Mandatory gender impact assessments for public expenditure.
- Allocation targets for women's empowerment.
- Transparent monitoring and reporting.

Multi-Sectoral Coordination:

1. Inter-ministerial gender committees.
2. Regular parliamentary reporting.
3. Civil society participation in oversight.

6.3.3 Protection and Support

Security Provisions:

1. Enhanced police protection for threatened women politicians.
2. Rapid response to harassment and violence.
3. Meaningful prosecution and penalties.

Support Services:

1. Counseling for political violence trauma.
2. Legal aid for discrimination challenges.
3. Ombudsman investigating gender complaints.

6.4 Participatory Design Principles

Effective policies require women's direct involvement in design, implementation, and evaluation. Recommendations include:

1. Participatory budgeting enabling community direction.
2. Regular consultation with women's organizations and diverse constituencies.

7. Women's Quotas: Temporary or Permanent Solution

The Participants opinions were divided into two camps:

1- The first camp sees quotas as a necessary temporary solution to overcome the historical gap and improve the situation of women.

2- The second group fears that quotas will lead to tokenism.

7.1 Proposals for improvement:

1. Link quotas to competency criteria.
2. Provide training programs for elected women.
3. Ensure women's independence from party dominance.



7.2. Role Models: Demonstrating Women's Leadership Capacity

Participants identified female role models serving multiple functions:

1. Proof of Possibility:

Demonstrating women's competence for high office.

2. Navigation Strategies:

Illustrating how successful women negotiate obstacles.

3. Inspiration:

Motivating younger women's political ambitions.



4. Changing the Image of Women in Leadership, by:

- Highlighting successful female role models in the media and academic circles
- Integrating gender equality concepts into school curricula
- Promoting positive discourse about female leadership within families and educational institutions
- The importance of the role of the media, through programs and awareness campaigns.

7.3. Leaders Role Models



Leyla Qasim

Kurdish activist executed 1974, symbol of courage and resistance.



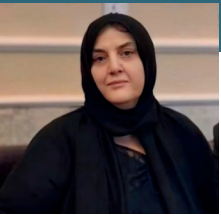
Mastura Ardalan

19th-century poet and intellectual, early advocate for women's education.



Khanzad Khatun

Historical leader demonstrating women's traditional authority.



Zarifstan

Chieftess of the Surjiya tribe and Sufi spiritual leader.



Angela Merkel

Former German Chancellor, executive leadership model.



Nadia Murad

Nobel Peace Prize laureate, Yazidi human rights activist.



Bayan Sami Abdul Rahman

The former Kurdistan Regional Government High Representative to the UK and the United States.



Zuha Hadid

Renowned architect, professional excellence example.

7.4 Personal Role Models

Significantly, many participants identified mothers as primary role models—educators, entrepreneurs, family leaders navigating complex responsibilities with competence and resilience. This recognition grounds gender equality advocacy in lived experience rather than abstract theory.

8. Strategic Priorities and Implementation Pathways

8.1 Immediate Actions (0-2 years)

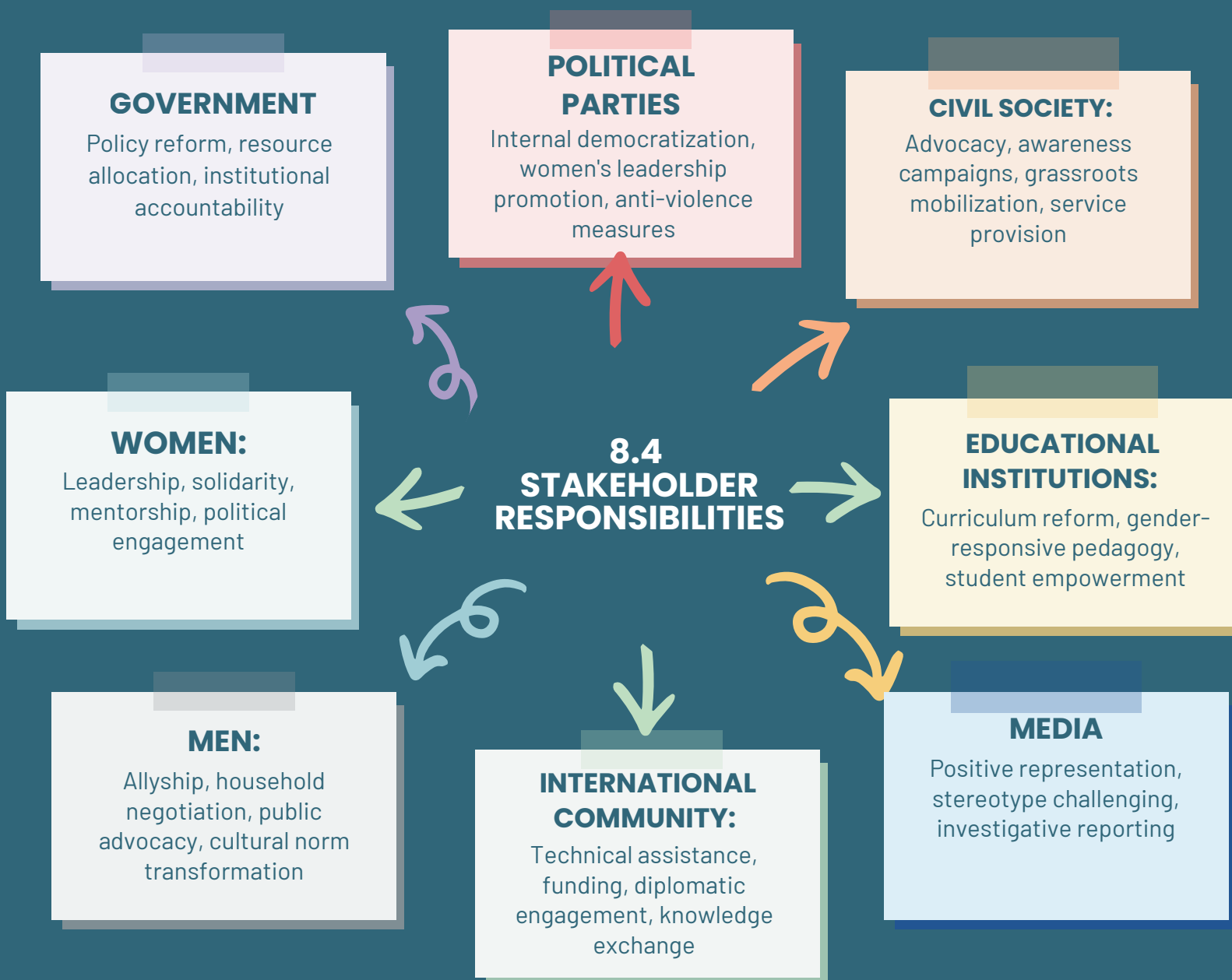
- Launch public awareness campaigns on women's political participation rights.
- Establish political leadership training programs.
- Strengthen legal protections against political violence.

8.2 Medium-Term Reforms (2-5 years)

- Implement party internal quota systems.
- Reform educational curriculum and teacher training.
- Create women's economic empowerment funds.

8.3 Long-Term Transformation (5-10 years)

- 1 Achieve cultural shift in gender norms and expectations.
- 2 Reach parity in political representation at all levels.
- 3 Integrate gender equality across policy domains.
- 4 Establish regional leadership in women's political participation.



Youth Messages

1. Legal equality alone is not enough – we need real transformation in power and resources to achieve women's effective participation in decision-making.

2. Political violence against women is not just physical – verbal abuse and systematic marginalization prevent women from full participation.

3. Our mothers are our role models – women who have shown strength and leadership in managing families and overcoming complex challenges.

4. We cannot achieve lasting peace when half of society is excluded from peace-making processes and governance structures.

5. Economic participation is fundamental – without financial independence, women cannot participate politically freely.

6. Transformation requires changing male attitudes and behaviors, not just empowering women.

7. Education must include political literacy and gender equality.

8. We need leadership training academies that prepare youth, especially young women, for effective political participation.

9. The awareness gap about UNSCR 1325 reflects failure in government communication and limited civil society outreach.

10. We need comprehensive interventions simultaneously – economic reforms, cultural transformation, and institutional accountability must happen together.

11. Reforms must go beyond quotas – we need internal party quotas, campaign finance reform, and real protection from political violence.

12. Participatory design is fundamental – women must lead the design, implementation, and evaluation of gender equality initiatives, not just be beneficiaries.

13. Integrating the WPS agenda into university curricula

14. Developing and implementing progressive/advanced leadership projects for both women and men.

15. Supporting student initiatives related to peace and equality

16. Strengthening partnerships between universities and decision-makers

17. Developing quotas from a numerical tool to an enabling pathway

Conclusions:

Women's political underrepresentation in the Kurdistan Region results from interconnected economic, social, and political barriers requiring simultaneous multi-level interventions. Effective gender equality strategies must address: Structural Transformation: Economic systems, educational institutions, legal frameworks. **Cultural Change:** Beliefs, attitudes, social norms, traditional practices. **Individual Empowerment:** Skills, confidence, networks, resources. **Collective Action:** cross-stakeholder collaboration and sustained commitment. The path forward demands political will, adequate resources, and long-term dedication. Yet the sophisticated analysis and constructive vision demonstrated by youth in KRI provides grounds for optimism that meaningful progress toward gender equality in peace and security governance is achievable.

Success requires moving beyond symbolic gestures (quotas without power, laws without enforcement, rhetoric without resources) toward substantive redistribution of political authority, economic opportunities, and social recognition. Only through comprehensive transformation can the Kurdistan Region fulfill its aspirations for inclusive, democratic governance that harnesses all citizens' talents and contributions regardless of gender. And the results of the analysis indicate that students at the University of Duhok have a relatively advanced awareness of the importance of women's participation in leadership and peacebuilding, but that this awareness clashes with traditional cultural and social structures.

The study confirms that empowering women within the framework of the WPS agenda requires: three themes: the first one is cultural reform parallel to legal reform, and the second one is Engaging young people as allies for change, third is Investing in education and training as strategic tools for sustainable peace





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Equality Studies
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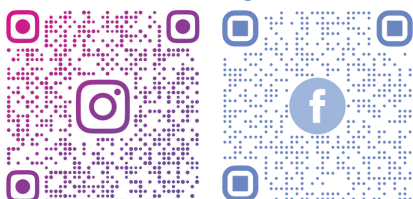
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