

Scoping Study

Masculinities, Violence, and Peace

Dr. Leandra Bias & Yasmine Janah

With contributions from swisspeace colleagues:
Sahar Ammar, Anna Antonios, and Emma Baumhofer

November 2022

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Original edition in English. A French translation is available.

Publisher:

swisspeace is a practice and research institute dedicated to advancing effective peacebuilding. Partnerships with local and international actors are at the core of our work. Together, we combine expertise and creativity to reduce violence and promote peace in contexts affected by conflicts.

swisspeace
Kasernenhof 8
4058 Basel
Switzerland
www.swisspeace.ch
info@swisspeace.ch

Suggested citation:

Bias, L., Janah, Y. (2022) *Scoping Study: Masculinities, Violence, and Peace*.
Basel: swisspeace. Available at: <https://www.swisspeace.ch/publications/reports/scoping-study-masculinities-violence-and-peace>.

Executive summary

This scoping study explores the relationships between masculinities, violence, and peace. It is oriented to contribute to France's efforts towards effective conflict prevention and peacebuilding in accordance with feminist principles. It aims at supporting France's adoption of the new Prevention, Resilience and Sustainable Peace Strategy 2023-2027 and in line with the objectives of the third National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) and the Feminist Diplomacy.

The authors draw attention to the evidence that gender analysis is essential for collecting early warning information on the potential eruption or recurrence of violence. However, what currently prevails is an interpretation whereby gender is largely understood and used as a synonym for women. While the connections between men, masculinities, violence prevention, and peacebuilding are multiple and crucial, international, and national security practices often struggle to engage with masculinities. The study provides an assessment of efforts, approaches, and initiatives undertaken to integrate masculinities in peacebuilding policy and practice. The study explores Tunisia and Lebanon as two illustrative case studies and builds on a series of discussions and over 30 interviews with key representatives of civil society organisations, Lebanese and Tunisian governmental bodies, the French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs and French external action operators.

The study shows that there is large consensus across diplomats, policymakers and advocates that working on masculinities yields significant potential to redirect gender sensitivity to a more transformative approach to violence prevention, fragility, and peacebuilding. Simultaneously, the authors discern important gaps that are not sufficiently tackled yet and emphasise that translating potentials into practice will need to be weighed against certain risks, including, misinterpretation and co-optation. In its concluding section, the study suggests the following distinction: masculinities as a way of thinking and as a way of acting. This distinction serves to provide practical and evidence-based recommendations for potentials and risks associated with using masculinities in prevention strategies in particular, the WPS agenda and Feminist Foreign Policy more generally.

Acknowledgements

The authors extend their deepest gratitude to all partners and colleagues for their valuable contributions and support to this project. This publication would not have been possible without the vibrant actors, dedicated and inspiring individuals, who generously shared their experiences, stories, and knowledge. The authors would also like to thank in particular the Democratic Governance Mission of the Department for Sustainable Development at the French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, as well as the French Embassy in Switzerland and Liechtenstein for supporting, funding, and including the expertise of swisspeace in the dialogue for a gender-transformative approach to the strategy and practice of preventing fragility and violence. The cornerstone of this study is dedicated to the leadership and pivotal role of all those who fight relentlessly for gender equality, violence prevention, conflict transformation, and peace.

Principal authors and researchers:

Dr. Leandra Bias and **Yasmine Janah**, swisspeace

Thematical contributions:

Sahar Ammar, swisspeace

Anna Maria Antonios, swisspeace

Emma Baumhofer, swisspeace

Report design and layout:

Maria Vogelbacher, swisspeace

Special thanks to all the partners consulted and interviewed:

Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires Etrangères de la France, Ambassade de France en Suisse et au Liechtenstein, Ambassade de France au Liban, Ambassade de France en Tunisie, Agence Française de Développement, Expertise France, Ministry of the Woman, Family, Childhood, and the Elderly in Tunisia, National Commission for Lebanese Women (NCLW), Embassy of Switzerland to Tunisia and Libya, Embassy of Switzerland to Lebanon and Syria, ABAAD – Resource Center for Gender Equality, Association Tunisienne des Femmes Démocrates (ATFD), Arab Institute for Women (AiW) – Lebanese American University, Centre de Recherche, d'Etudes, de Documentation et d'Information sur la Femme (CREDIF), Centre de Recherche et de Formation sur la Femme Arabe – CAWTAR, DCAF – Centre pour la gouvernance du secteur de la sécurité, Fe-Male, Fifty-Fifty, Helem NGO هلم, HELVETAS Lebanon, HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation, HEKS/EPER – Bread for all, Initiative Mawjoudin pour l'Egalité, KAFA, KOFF – Swiss Platform for Peacebuilding, Marsa Sexual Health Center, swisspeace.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CSO	Civil Society Organisations
DAC-OECD	Development Assistance Committee
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration
DFP	Digital Foreign Policy
EU	European Union
FFP	Feminist Foreign Policy
FSOF	Fonds de Soutien aux Organisations Féministes
MEAE	French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
LGBTQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual, Agender
MENA	Middle East and North African region
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OCDE	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
P/CVE	Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism
PRPD	Strategy for Prevention, Resilience, and Sustainable Peace
SOGI	Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution
WPS	Women Peace and Security

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1 Policy context

1.1 GENDER, CONFLICT AND VIOLENCE PREVENTION

Since the adoption of the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 in 2000 which established the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda, **gender equality has been acknowledged as an integral and indivisible part of international security practices** as well as a key vehicle for achieving sustainable development goals.

Conflict and violence affect how gender(ed) relations, roles, and everyday situations are shaped. This is particularly true as shifts in traditional roles, expectations, and responsibilities occur in the face of violence. This requires considering not only situations of armed conflict but also addressing structural and cultural violence as part of the response to the dynamics of fragility. **Gender analysis is essential for collecting early warning information on the potential eruption or recurrence of violence.** Hence, a comprehensive understanding and an early monitoring of gender relations and roles is key to inform effective peacebuilding practice, policies, and strategies and strengthen conflict prevention.

In the French context, this manifests in France's Prevention, Resilience and Sustainable Peace Strategy (PRPD) 2018-2022, which acknowledges that durable peace can only be achieved if the fundamental causes of conflict, and in particular if gender inequalities are addressed¹. Therefore, the current prevention strategy refers to France's Second National Action Plan (2015-2018) for implementing UNSCR 1325, as well as its International Strategy for Equality between Women and Men². The latter explicitly stipulates that gender is not just a topic but a methodological approach to analyse, prevent, and transform situations of crises and conflict.

In sum, in France and beyond, there is official recognition that **understanding and tackling dynamics of gender inequality is primordial to prevent conflict and violence, in particular gender-based violence (GBV), as well as to create resilient communities.**

1.2 FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY

"Strengthening gender equality in situations of fragility is considered essential to achieving global commitments to sustainable peace"³

French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs,
Prevention strategy 2018-2022

The high-level recognition of gender-transformative approaches as inevitable for sustainable peace and development is further embedded in a context where feminist foreign policy (FFP) is gaining traction. This has made gender more relevant but also more urgent as states with a FFP are expected to demonstrate particularly competent understanding and implementation of gender-sensitivity. A recent illustration of this would be the German Foreign Ministry which came under pressure to show in the middle of the Ukraine war how a FFP would make a difference, which has led to several position papers and consultations in which swisspeace was also involved.

France adopted the FFP on the International Day for Gender Equality and Women's Rights in March 2019. After Sweden (2014)⁴ and Canada (2017), it was the third country to orient its foreign policy according to feminist principles. Other countries have followed since, notably Mexico (2020), Luxembourg (2019), Spain (2021), Libya (2021)⁵, and most recently Germany (2021).

Driven by civil society, the former French Minister of Foreign Affairs, and former Secretary of State for Equality between Women and Men, jointly published an op-ed outlining France's Feminist Diplomacy and financial commitment to implement these efforts⁶. This announcement came at a time when France also held the G7 presidency and established the Generation Equality Forum as a tribute to France's commitment to partner with feminist civil society around the anniversary of over 25 years since the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing⁷.

France has adopted its Third International Strategy for the Equality between Women and Men (2018-2022), a steering tool designated to

The rising anti-feminist backlash: Consult the swisspeace policy paper for the Swiss Development and Cooperation Agency: Bias, L., Filep, E. and Grossenbacher, A. (2022): 'Gender and Rising Authoritarianism: Implications for Women's Political Empowerment and Participation'.

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Street art representing Lebanon's feminist and women's movement, Beirut, June 2022.

coordinate France's Feminist Diplomacy. The Feminist Diplomacy framework follows a pragmatic and evolutionary approach, which allows the definition to develop in practice. It was introduced against the background of the presidential engagement to make the 'equality between women and men' a priority of Emmanuel Macron's first 5-year presidential term. Feminist Diplomacy has so far been mainly mobilised to defend women's and girls' rights, especially on the multilateral level, in a context of rising anti-feminist backlash, in particular with regards to women's sexual and reproductive health and rights. Nevertheless, the High Council for Equality between Women and Men concludes that it would be important for Feminist Diplomacy to extend to all fields of foreign policy, including the key areas of defence, international security and trade⁸.

As such, the new Third National Action Plan Women, Peace and Security (WPS)⁹ does not explicitly mention Feminist Diplomacy. However, it is within the framework of Feminist Diplomacy that France has made the implementation of the WPS agenda and gender equality a major priority. This is further strengthened by the comprehensive set of national and international policy texts, on

which national French policymakers rely to mainstream gender, and which anchor gender-transformative approach across French foreign policy. According to our interlocutors, the policy texts of reference for pursuing strategic orientations in their work comprise not only international human rights law instruments, European and national action plans, but also strategies of French government and operators. Our interlocutors specifically referred to the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW); COP gender action plans; EU GAP III; France's international strategy on gender equality; and the AFD gender commitment, which in its non-normative scope acts as a significant operational guideline.

The revision of France's International Strategy for the Equality between Women and Men, which ends in December 2022, and the adoption of a new strategy in 2023 could contribute to the adoption of a comprehensive strategic framework with clear guiding principles¹⁰ adding to the Orientation and Programming Law on Solidarity Development and the Fight against Global Inequalities¹¹ adopted in 2021.

2 Masculinities: the missing policy gap

2.1 STUDY OBJECTIVE AND ADDRESSEES

Despite the growing awareness of the importance of gender for effective prevention and peacebuilding, references to men and **masculinities remain largely absent** in all the mentioned policies. This is particularly striking as two WPS follow-up resolutions explicitly mention men and boys.¹² While some international organisations, multilateral political agencies, and civil society organisations (CSOs), that have traditionally been concerned with violence prevention, stabilisation, and development, have expanded the WPS framework in working explicitly with men and boys as a key pillar in their policy objective and programming, this has not yet resulted in a developed policy¹³.

And yet what currently prevails is an interpretation whereby gender is largely understood and used as a synonym for women. There is a discrepancy between what the International Strategy for Equality between Women and Men stipulates – namely that gender is an analytical tool to understand power asymmetries that lead to violence and hence better treat them preemptively¹⁴ – and how this is translated into the actual policies, let alone practice.

This scoping study aims at narrowing this gap by exploring the **relationships between masculinities, violence, and peace**. It fulfils three goals:

1. To grow policymakers' awareness for the meaning of the concept of masculinities and its relevance for gender-transformative violence prevention and sustainable peace;
2. To identify and examine what initiatives the French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs and main developmental agencies are already undertaking in this field but perhaps not conceptualizing as working with/on masculinities;
3. To provide an overview of and evidence-based recommendations for both the potentials and risks associated with integrating masculinities in prevention strategy in particular, and in WPS and feminist diplomacy more generally.

The direct addressee of this scoping study is the Democratic Governance Mission within the Department of Sustainable Development of the French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs (MEAE) since they are revisiting their Prevention, Resilience and Sustainable Peace Strategy.

The findings also speak to the French Third NAP 1325 and the actors present in conflict and crisis zones which translate policy into practice, in particular the French Embassies and their partners as well as the French Development Agency and Expertise France. Beyond that, the scoping study yields interesting results for all countries and civil society representatives interested in WPS and FFP.

2.2 METHODOLOGY AND CASE SELECTION

The study's findings and recommendations stem from extensive desk research, over 30 qualitative interviews (see Annexe 1 for a full list of participants) as well as a small comparative case study. Between April and July 2022, we conducted semi-structured interviews with interlocutors from the MEAE, Expertise France, and the French Development Agency. In early June 2022 we furthermore did a one-week mission each to Lebanon and Tunisia to talk with more than 20 stakeholders from civil society, the French Embassies, and governmental institutions in qualitative interviews.

From a conceptual point of view, we wanted to ensure that we investigate the role of masculinities and possibilities to work on them in two contexts that are different yet fall into the spectre of peacebuilding. Lebanon finds itself between active conflict with the Israeli government and several layers of post-conflict contexts. It is furthermore host country to different refugee communities. Tunisia on the other hand, is on the democratization-authoritarianism spectrum and is struggling to resolve the political and economic crisis, and therefore part of what is commonly called a context of fragility in international peacebuilding and cooperation¹⁵. As such, the two cases stand for a broad range of different settings in which efforts to promote peace and sustainable development happen (for more details please refer to the contextual background chapter).

To increase the study's validity, we selected as diverse as possible interview participants during our field-research. We spoke with members of civil society who have been actively engaged for many years or just joined the civil space recently. We interviewed feminists who were pro and against sex work. We gathered the viewpoints of activists who leaned towards working with men, others who



Understanding that gender is not synonymous with women, but an analytical tool to understand power asymmetries, is critical for a gender-sensitive approach to truly transformative violence and conflict prevention. Street art, Beirut, June 2022.

specialise in supporting the LGBTQ+ communities and yet others who strictly prefer to work with women only. Among our interviewees are also non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that specialise in supporting refugee communities. Finally, to the best of our ability we also included the perspective of governmental structures, speaking with the National Commission for Lebanese Women in Lebanon and the Ministry of the Woman, Family, Childhood, and the Elderly in Tunisia.

However, it is important to emphasize that the time and scope of this study was limited from the start since it was conceptualised as a scoping study that should give impetus to a discussion and explore possibilities for further collaboration on the topic and in the MENA region. The study therefore **does not claim to make absolute statements on the case studies**. One week field research does not qualify for full scientific robustness. There are important limitations to the study, the two most important ones being that we could only cover the capitals in both countries and that there is an inherent power relation when researchers from the Global North are present against which we could do little in the small

amount of time available. The recommendations outlined here are then meant to be read in a general way regarding the concept of masculinities and addressed to the MEAE. They should not be interpreted as tailored to either Tunisia or Lebanon. This would necessitate additional thorough research.

3 Masculinities in theory

3.1 HEGEMONIC AND SUBORDINATE MASCULINITIES

Masculinities have been a part of academic debates since the 1970s and are an integral part of gender theory. However, the transition into policy and practice has been very slow¹⁶. The progress made in acknowledging the relevance of gender is coupled with a one-sided, superficial approach to gender that does not do justice to its original transformative meaning or objective.

Gender is not a topic but an analytical tool. Nor is it just a benign socialisation based on biological sex. Instead, gender connotes a system of power in the relational sense.

Gender does not just prescribe the roles people should enact depending on their assigned sex, but importantly the relations of dominance and subordination they should have between each other. Gender is powerful because it establishes hierarchies between worthy and less worthy beings and behaviours. It does so not just for individuals but institutions, states, and their relations between one another.

At the top of that hierarchical power structure is a specific form of masculinity which we term **hegemonic masculinity**. Whoever performs according to this hegemonic masculinity increases the likelihood to have access to the privileges associated with it: (possibility / promise of) access to resources, opportunities, and authority.

This definition and expression of masculinity has **hegemony over other masculinities, which are therefore deemed subordinate, as well as over all forms of femininity**. It has hegemony in the sense that a group manages to claim and maintain power through the tacit consent of others. In other words, hegemonic masculinity is the commonly accepted answer to the question why the domination of a particular kind of men and behaviour is justified¹⁷.

For this power constellation to work it needs necessary Others. The masculine hegemony can only exist in juxtaposition to **inferior Others**. After many years of advocacy and research it has by now become consensus that the masculine only exists in contrast to the feminine. The feminine is commonly connotated as dependent, irrational, weak, sensitive, insecure, incompetent, ignorant, inexperienced, but also caring, emotional, instinctive etc. The female is relegated to the

natural and as such a patriarchal dichotomy is established whereby women are attributed the role of the passive carer and reproducer while men who espouse hegemonic masculinity are the active, rational, competent, strong etc. subjects and producers.

However, this equally means that any man who exhibits supposedly feminine qualities or plays feminine roles does not fulfil the expectations associated with the hegemon and are therefore ascribed a subordinate masculinity and fall in the gendered hierarchy.

The gendered power structure works then on a scale and is fluid. There is a constant possibility of being relegated as a man. The ideal type of a man that is being promoted is exactly this: ideal and not statistically realistic, which is central to the concept. No man will ever be able to fulfil and live up to *all* the expectations at *all* times. This causes important pressure and insecurity and therefore a constant need for assertion and seeking confirmation of one's masculine status from peers.

Without the capacity to reflect about the brutality of this system for it also oppresses men by assigning them to a box and ripping them of the possibility to express humanity through feelings and "weaknesses", this becomes a likely setup for

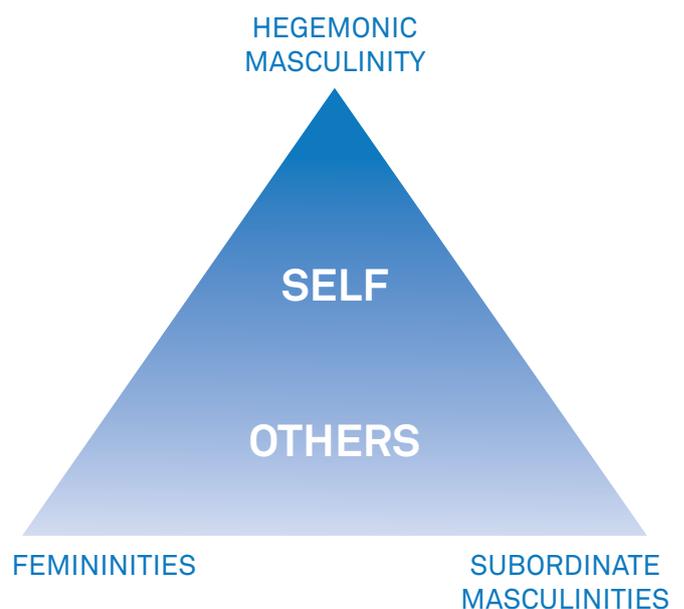
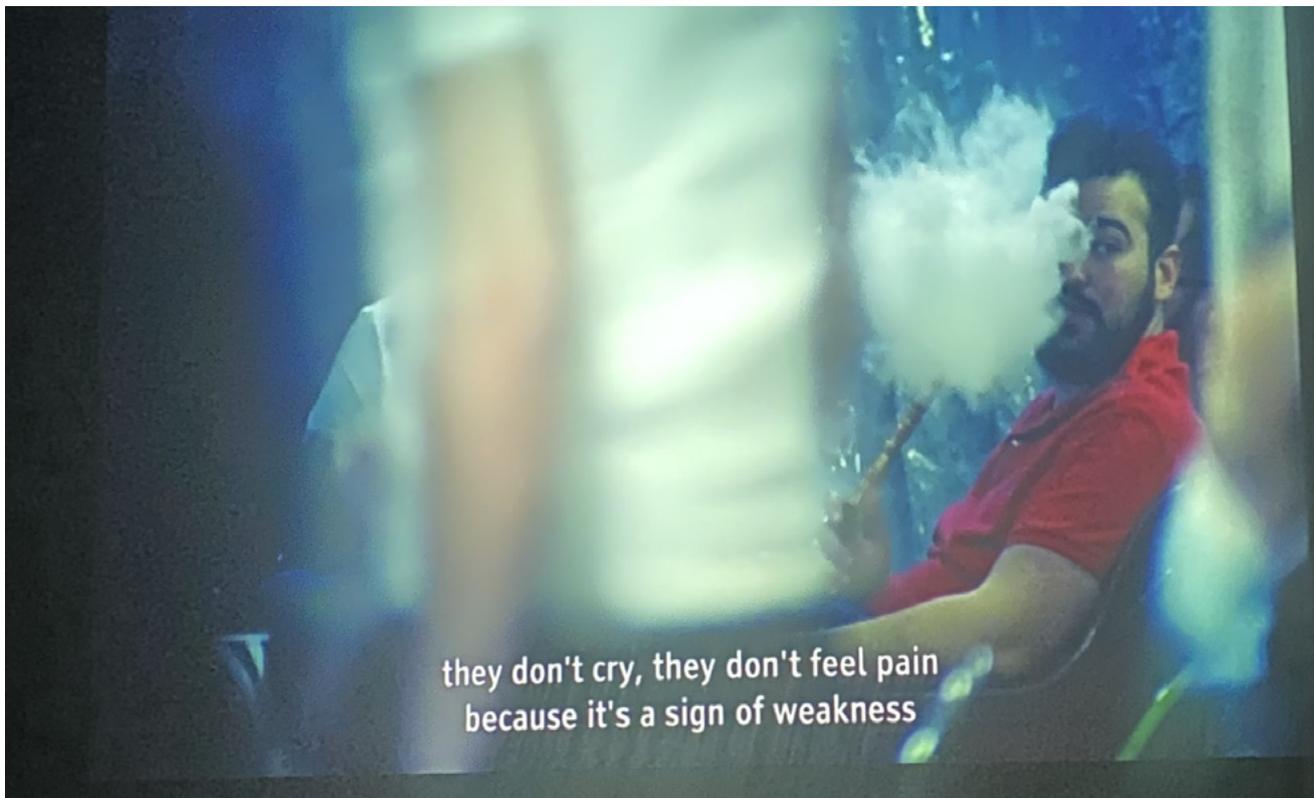


Figure 1: Hegemonic masculinity and the gendered power structure. Source: Leandra Bias (2020): 'Introduction and Theoretical Groundwork, Masculinities, Marginalization and Militarism', swisspeace course.



Film screening at the festival “Echos Féministes” (Asdaa Nisaouia), organised by Aswat Nissa (Women’s Voice), the French Embassy in Tunisia and the Institut Français de Tunisie, Tunis, June 2022.

violence¹⁸. Men are more prone to self-harm, suicide, and drug abuse but also to use violence against those deemed subordinate: women and “lesser” men. As a result, men who are read as belonging to a minority, be it sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI), ethnic, religious, or social class are often a specific target of male violence as a means to assert superiority (also termed competing masculinities). Violence furthermore acts as a channel to express the aggrieved entitlement men can experience when access to the privileges, they were told would be bestowed onto them, is barred¹⁹.

Recognising masculinities as multiple and the power hierarchy between them which creates competition is then important:

- to fully understand how gender works, how to prevent forms of violence we traditionally forget but which drive fragility and conflict
- to acknowledge that men are vulnerable to violence both as perpetrators and victims and that different external qualifiers such as sexual orientation, class or religion crucially inform the level of vulnerability.

Here too, however, it is important to understand

that contextualisation is key. **Masculinities are multiple but which one is deemed superior will vary across context, time, spaces, and situations.** This relates to what feminists call the continuum of violence²⁰:

- Temporal continuum: violence before, during, after conflict, in peace time
- Spatial continuum: violence in public, semi-public, private spaces
- Geographical continuum: village, city, refugee camp, resettlement, even LGBTQ+ or women friendly spaces
- Perpetrator continuum: security forces, armed groups, civilians incl. neighbours, peers, family members, others in the LGBTQ+ / feminist community

→ In all these settings different definitions of masculinity will prevail thus creating different forms of vulnerability that can change several times even within one day.

Are you interested in exploring masculinities in your work? We offer a training course on masculinities in conflict prevention and peacebuilding. [Click or scan QR code](#)



To integrate masculinities is then to understand that:

1. Both, all forms of femininity as well as subordinate masculinities, are necessary for hegemonic masculinity to exist and thus a gender unequal society to function.
2. The gendered power structure works on a scale and is fluid and hence causes insecurities for men and vulnerabilities to resort to violence to assert their superior position which the system tells them they are entitled to.

3.2 MILITARISED AND INVISIBLE MASCULINITIES

Across the globe, state militaries are predominantly male by a wide margin. Where women are admitted to the military they are most often excluded from higher ranks and active combat positions. The same is also true for most military-style organisations such as paramilitaries, guerrilla groups, militia, village guards, private security companies etc. This is the result of societies where the use of force is still often explicitly linked to real manhood.

Militarised institutions are settings in which violent behavior of men is not just tolerated, but actively fostered, ritualised, and celebrated as heroism, which solidifies the expectations associated with hegemonic masculinity, in particular toughness, assertiveness, and the role of the protector. In this dynamic a shift occurs whereby men are no longer just meant to defend the female family members and children but the entire feminised nation.

However, more often than not, it is **not the privileged men who are recruited, but men from lower social status** who find themselves sacrificing for the nation. There is then no direct equation between militarism and hegemonic masculinity. Instead, ideas of hegemonic masculinity are used to attract men as a way to progress in the gendered power structure and to justify their exploitation.

Men thus often **face contradictory notions of masculinity** in fragile and conflict-affected situations. For instance, contexts of fragility reveal that men and boys are unable to enact the ideal role of the livelihood provider or the protector for the family and community. This can be both an incentive for some men and boys to enrol in

militarised institutions, and for others to flee²¹. These dominant forms of masculinities prevalent in the given fragile or peacebuilding contexts can be precisely used by paramilitary, military institutions, or non-state armed groups for recruitment purposes²².

Militarised masculinity encourages public violence against the officially proclaimed enemies, which in the logic of competing masculinities crucially also entails subordinating men of the other group. Subjugation happens in different ways. It happens discursively, by describing other men as particularly aggressive, barbarian or also cowards, but at any rate like lacking some key masculine trait. This forms the basis on which physical violence against them can be perpetrated since they have been dehumanised.

However, settings of armed conflict or crises also leads to what we call **thwarted masculinities and side-violence**. The enormous social, economic, and political shifts that occur during armed conflict, displacement or in times of fragility often reduce men's agency to fulfil the expectations associated with hegemonic masculinity. This happens when unemployment rises, armed groups or international agencies take over decision making, or when men suddenly experience the sheer risk of being targeted by virtue of being a man.²³

In times of conflict and crises it is indeed often women who step into roles previously held by men. This often leads to **"aggrieved entitlement"**: a perceived hurt and loss of a previously privileged position (or at least possibility to attain it) and therefore a feeling that their masculinity is thwarted. In turn this can trigger opposition by men to gender equality and programs of women's empowerment and can increase gender-based violence, in particular violence against women and girls, because this is one of the last spaces to assert some last part of their supposed superiority. This happens both in the domestic sphere but also against public and politically active women.²⁴

"In all war, on any side, there are men frightened and running, fighting reluctantly and eager to get home, or even courageously resisting their orders to kill"²⁵

Sara Ruddick, 1998

Importantly, in all conflict and crisis settings, there are always men who remain peaceful, whose primary concern is to protect their loved ones and who risk their life by refusing to join armed forces. These masculinities are the most invisible ones. Even when policymakers and practitioners work with masculinities, they tend to fall into the same patriarchal dichotomy of passive and active people, which translates into the **female victim and a male perpetrator divide**. There is usually a focus on **de-militarisation**. As a result, not enough visibility and attention is yet given to these non-conforming peaceful masculinities.²⁶

Consequently, not just **peaceful men become invisible but also women who do not conform to idealised roles, namely women who resort to violence**. 'Prevention/Countering Violent Extremism' (P/CVE) policies for instance still largely ignore that there are also female perpetrators who enact military practice and ideology. Women therefore often fall through the net of disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration programmes.²⁷

In short, breaking with the victim-perpetrator divide and acknowledging that masculinities are multiple is the way to a **gender-sensitive approach for violence and conflict prevention** that is truly transformative from a theoretical perspective. While as has been demonstrated, the connections between men, masculinities, violence prevention, and peacebuilding are multiple and crucial, international and national security practices often struggle to engage with masculinities. As the rest of the report shows **integrating masculinities in policy and practice yields both important potentials but also risks to be mindful of**.

4 Contextual background to case studies

This scoping study does not provide an exhaustive analysis of gender equality and peacebuilding in Lebanon and Tunisia. It rather explores the two contexts as illustrative cases to identify potentials and risks in using the concept of masculinities for conflict prevention in line with local civil society's priorities. The contextual relevance of Tunisia and Lebanon for this study lies also in the diverse political and religious nature – one set in a transition marked by a secular legal architecture and civil society actors, the latter in an ongoing conflict as well as different layers of post-conflict plus an enduring humanitarian crisis and informed by a religious-confessional political system. The differences in settings enable a strategic reflection process how to integrate masculinities in a gender-transformative approach to violence prevention and support peacebuilding.

The current regional context of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) is fuelled with the deepening of crisis at community, state, and regional levels, where women and girls are directly and indirectly exposed to different forms of violence and marginalisation and the impacts of the compounded crises. While Tunisia and Lebanon have respectively endorsed gender-sensitive policies and laws as a result of the continuing efforts by several civil and political actors including grassroots feminist organisations, significant gaps remain both in the legal body and implementation. It creates important obstacles to the protection of women's human rights and their participation in the political arena, in particular gender-based discrimination provisions.

4.1 **LEBANON**

Multifaceted crisis

After the long-lasting economic impact of the civil war, Lebanon is since 2019 going through one of the biggest socio-economic crises in its history²⁸. The political developments remain dire despite

the popular protests in October 2019. The stringent economic and financial collapse has placed more than 80% of the population in multidimensional poverty²⁹, facing critical structural vulnerabilities, including shortages of bread, electricity, water supply, fuel, medicine, and the extremely rapid depreciation of the Lebanese Lira, the local currency.

Additionally, the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic, coupled with the devastating explosion in the port of Beirut in August 2020 intensified the lack of security and weak infrastructure in the country, with women, girls, LGBTQ+ communities, refugees, migrant workers and other vulnerable communities severely affected. These multiple crises have sparked growing protests by citizens calling for greater government accountability, transparency and political reform. Feminist grassroots organisations have been at the centre stage of the local civil society and in the mass protests, including the landmark October Revolution in 2019. Leading the efforts, they mobilised for women's greater participation in the political realm, de-escalation of tensions, tangible improvements in gender equality, and sounded the alarm for systematic reforms.³⁰

Feminist organisations, the backbone

In response to the rapidly deteriorating situation, civil society and feminist organisations have continued to play a vital role in building resilience in vulnerable communities, particularly for hard-to-reach groups (migrants, refugees, elderly, women in rural areas, etc.). Initially focusing on advocacy and policy change to bring gender equality and social justice onto the formal agenda, they have turned to provide humanitarian assistance to fill the gaps in service provision, protection efforts and emergency response. Feminist CSOs' role and expertise have been a central contribution in addressing multifaceted impacts of the crisis, in building peace during the

Find out more about feminist CSOs' contributions to addressing the multifaceted impacts of the crisis in Lebanon by clicking on or scanning the QR-code:



ABAAD's report on the status of women with disabilities (2022)



Helem's policy brief on the queer community in crisis (2021)



Fe-Male's research study on period poverty (2021)



Street art reading "Where is freedom?", Beirut, June 2022.

October 2019 uprising³¹, and providing relief and reconstruction after the Beirut blast³². At the same time, the space for grassroots civil society organisations to promote peace and human rights within Lebanon has been shrinking. This is coupled with concerning constraints, in particular for women's rights groups and feminist movements to access international funding and aid support, as pointed out by most civil society organisations we interviewed.

Importantly, Regional and National Actions Plans on the Women, Peace, and Security agenda, the 2014 Law 293 on the protection of women and family members against domestic violence, as well as the Law 205 against sexual harassment which penalises sexual harassment in public, private and workplaces were adopted by the Lebanese government. These policy and legal strides indicate Lebanon's effort to institutionalise the protection of women from gender-based violence and its commitment to address gender inequalities as a root cause of violence. Despite progress, the ongoing sectarian system, the fifteen separate religious-based Personal Status Laws, and the penal code reinforce traditional gender norms and continue to codify

gender-based discrimination, making women, girls, and LGBTQ+ individuals extremely vulnerable to gender-based violence, structural barriers, and prejudices³³. For instance, as emphasised and denounced by all the governmental and civil society organisations interviewed, family matters such as marriage, divorce, citizenship, custody and care of children, land ownership and other inheritance laws benefit men over women in Lebanon and are administered by autonomous religious courts. In the absence of civil code covering these issues, the Personal Status Code informed by the sectarian system crystallises the status of women as not being equal to that of men³⁴.

Rising tensions

Recently, parliamentary elections were held on 15 May 2022, the first elections since the uprising in 2019. The results of these elections marked a rising fracture between the traditional political parties in power and the larger population. The traditional forces still in government, Hezbollah and its allies, lost their majority in the south of the country, and thus in parliament. Some of the 2019

protest groups, on the other hand, gained seats. Yet, a high abstention rate reflects both the growing departure of thousands of Lebanese from the country in recent months and voter demobilisation as a result of the government failing to respond to the citizens' concerns and the social, political, and sectarian tensions.

4.2 TUNISIA

Democratic transition in favour of women and civil participation

"Tunisian's political transition may be divided in three landmark stages: after the Independence in 1956, post-2011, and 25 July 2021."

CAWTAR, Tunisia

In the wake of the independence in 1956, Tunisia introduced secular legal reforms including the Personal Status Code as a common ground for the government's political agenda towards secularisation, which stated the principle of equality, while retaining a religious reference³⁵. The early reformist stance unified laws to all citizens regardless of their religion, abolished polygamy, extended recognition to women's rights in issues related to the family, including abortion, marriage, the right to divorce and child custody. Following the 2010/2011 Tunisian Revolution and the endorsement of a new Constitution in 2014, Tunisia's democratic transition consolidated. The 2014 Constitution was the first in the MENA region to give all citizens, women and men, the right to be presidential candidates.³⁶ The article 46 of the constitution enshrined the equality between women and men in all domains, the obligation of the State to protect women's rights, to attain parity between women and men in elected assemblies, and to take all necessary measures in order to eradicate violence against women.³⁷

This happened thanks to significant progress in legal frameworks to advance gender equality and women's rights. The number and actions of women-led and feminist organisations multiplied. *"Tunisia plays an influential role in the region as a precursor and testing ground in favour of feminist spaces and gender equality"* (French diplomat at the Embassy, Tunisia). Strong unions and feminist movements continued to be in the forefront of mobilisation over the years, giving rise to reinvigorate feminist networks and a vibrant civil

society, both within the country and with a spill over effect in the region. Several major milestones for gender equality can be counted. In 2014, the government officially withdrew the majority of its reservations on CEDAW³⁸. For the first time, a law on preventing violence against women was adopted. Finally, the government under the leadership of the Ministry for Women, adopted a first National Action Plan for the implementation of the WPS agenda (2018-2022). Before the governmental and legislative elections in 2019, there were then signs of political will to ensure a rapid transition to the adoption of international gender equality protection standards. There is, however, still no substantial improvement for ordinary people's lives. The worsening economic situation compounded by the pandemic affects a large part of the population, in particular in rural areas, increasing already existing regional economic disparities³⁹. The human rights protection of migrants remains overlooked, leaving people in situation of migration extremely vulnerable to exploitation and abuse and contributes to increased fragility⁴⁰.

Political crisis and a new Constitution

Despite Tunisia's democratic transition process, growing instability led in 2013-2014 to a political crisis with severe polarisation and security crackdown. The political turmoil coupled with the Libyan crisis catalysed political fracture and paved the way for religious conservatism and the presence of fundamentalist actors. However, the robust civil society including trade unions put the emphasis on consensus and mediated the national dialogue⁴¹.

The 2019 elections marked a turning point in the political landscape. The division and fragmentation of the parliament, the absence of strong political coalitions, the stagnation of governance, and the rising inflation and state of unemployment contributed to a high level of citizen fatigue and distrust in the entire political system⁴². The 2019 elected president and the government have seized on the fragile terrain of crisis and political ineffectiveness of post-2011 political parties to stop the prerogatives of parliament and dissolved both the parliament and the High Judicial Council, top independent judicial body, over 2021-2022. Under the banner of public discontent, the president announced constitutional amendments

4 Contextual background to case studies

to be adopted or rejected in a referendum widely criticized for its lack of inclusiveness. On 25 July 2022, a yes was voted to adopt the new Tunisian Constitution centralising the presidential power. Yet, the constitutional referendum shows low turnout with 70% who did not participate in the vote, reflecting a divided country⁴³.

Although the Tunisian government reiterated its engagement for greater gender-sensitive policies, with women and the civil society at the centre of peacebuilding and security strategies⁴⁴, feminist civil society organisations and larger civil society representation fear severe backlash. The shrinking space of Tunisian civil society is alarming. Since the 2021 government appointment and the constitutional change in July 2022, no consultation processes have taken place with civil society actors. Furthermore, nationwide demonstrations and protests organised by secular organisations expressed concerns about the constitutional change, notably regarding potential risks to women's rights and the protection of minority rights and were subjected to severe crackdown by security forces⁴⁵.



The #EnaZeda movement (literally: "Me Too") is a movement against sexual harassment and sexual assault in Tunisia. Street art on the facade of the Institut Français de Tunisie, Tunis, June 2022.

5 Masculinities in practice

5.1 GENDER-SENSITIVE VIOLENCE PREVENTION IN A DIGITAL WORLD

Digital technology offers new ways for peacebuilders and policy makers to understand and analyse conflict dynamics. Digital peacebuilding includes the use of digital tools, interactions that occur in digital spaces, strategic communication, and new methods for data collection and analysis. Each of these aspects can be weaponised for conflict or leveraged for peace. Although technology brings possibilities for both positive and negative impact, it is not neutral. Rather, it should be understood as a part of and impacting conflict contexts because it is embedded into existing power structures, including gendered ones. Technology also has certain affordances that enable conflict.

Conflict and peace in digital spaces - challenges and opportunities

Examples of digital conflict and violence drivers include:

- the speed at which hate speech or mis- and disinformation can spread
- surveillance and digital repression or censorship
- algorithmic profiling and artificial intelligence bias
- political and identity polarisation
- doxing or deliberate targeting of individuals
- cyber attacks
- predatory profit models
- recruitment into extremist or exploitative groups

In these cases, technology rewards conflict and aggression, exacerbates existing inequalities, and reinforces hegemonic gendered roles.

On the other hand, digital spaces offer the possibility for expanded positive networks and emancipatory activism. They can provide safe spaces for self-expression, activist collaboration and mobilisation, and community building, especially for vulnerable and marginalised groups, and create an inclusive environment that invites participation from diverse members. Monitoring online dynamics can also be an indicator of de/escalating offline events and can therefore be leveraged as a tool for early warning and for conflict prevention in fragile settings.

The positive or negative outcomes of interacting in digital spaces are not only the result of the ways people use them but of the structures themselves, illustrating the point that technology is not neutral. From algorithm design to platform profit models to the male-dominated technology industry, digital spaces are inherently masculine and the presence of feminist organisations in these spaces is already transgressive. Understanding this framing is the first major step in enacting feminist policy in digital spaces.

Case studies – Lebanon and Tunisia

"Five years ago, we realised there's an issue of online security. So, this is now a new priority."

Fe-Male, Lebanon

In Lebanon and Tunisia, CSOs find digital spaces like social media and chatbots to be useful for reaching marginalised groups, like the LGBTQ+ communities, across urban and rural areas in the MENA region. This access offers CSOs an affordable way to conduct capacity building sessions and share gender-sensitive information and reporting. They also offer digital security trainings and guidelines to protect their communities from online violence.

"The greatest challenge on social media is the hateful and violence-inciting comments we receive on our advocacy campaigns. The levels of resistance and aggression is also located in the digital spaces."

KAFA, Lebanon

Local CSOs continually monitor and flag localised hate speech on social media and have built collaborative projects between activists and social media companies to enforce digital rights

Digital security training and guidelines offered by CSOs: Find more information on Fe-Male's "Feminist Cyber-Security Training Toolkit." [Click or scan QR code](#)



Monitoring of localised hate speech on social media by local CSOs: Find more information on Helem's "Arabic Queer Hate Speech Lexicon." [Click or scan QR code](#)



and protect vulnerable populations. For example, Helem NGO has amalgamated hate speech terms in multiple dialects of Arabic to mitigate online harm, together with activists from 17 different countries in the region .

Spurred by increasing online abuse and persecution of LGBTQ+ people through blackmail or forcefully outing users of the app Grindr, Tunisian and Lebanese CSOs offer both online and offline material to help marginalised individuals across the country to protect themselves in digital spaces.

"Gender equality advocacy campaigns are important and digital platforms serve as tools for feminist movements."

ABAAD, Lebanon

Digital spaces are increasingly a vehicle for mobilisation and advocacy. In Lebanon, ABAAD – Resource Centre for Gender Equality launched the #ShameonWho nation-wide campaign in 2018, that calls for the prosecution of all sexual assault cases and promotes a public opinion that supports all survivors of gender-based violence. Digital spaces offer innovative new possibilities for

conducting advocacy work⁴⁶, promoting women's meaningful political participation, and monitoring election periods⁴⁷. However, actors face connection issues and challenges with insecure platforms, like Zoom.

The Tunisian Ministry of Women and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs participated as leaders of the *Technology & Innovation for Gender Equality Action Coalition*⁴⁸. Building on a foundational understanding of the importance of the digital-gender nexus in fragile contexts, the coalition aims to reduce the gender digital divide, increase investments in feminist technology, increase the number of women working in technology and innovation, and increase accountability of countries and tech companies in addressing online GBV by 2026.

Opportunities at the crossroads of gender and digital

Digital provides tools, and more importantly, a lens, through which to better understand fragile contexts and prevent violence, including deepened and more conflict-sensitive analysis, violence monitoring and early warning, and depolarisation



"It's time to judge the rapist, not the victim!" ABAAD's campaign #ShameOnWho works to change social perceptions that stigmatize and shame female rape victims and call for severe penalties against rapists in Lebanon. Beirut, June 2022.

and dialogue, to name a few.

Peacebuilders and policymakers need to understand digital conflict drivers to adapt and enhance their intervention frameworks and conflict analysis. This means, evolving strategies beyond simply using digital tools for communication to include understanding how conflict is enacted and experienced by different groups online, the relationship between online and offline conflict, and how peacebuilding can happen in online spaces.

Along with gender, digital approaches need to be mainstreamed in policy work. Recognition of this fact is evident in that, as of the time of writing, France is the only country worldwide to have

implemented both a Digital Foreign Policy (DFP)⁴⁹ (since December 2017) and an FFP. The FFP includes several mentions of utilising digital tools, especially in including more women in communications and information sharing and empowering women for technical innovation, but it does not mention how technology environments impact men and women, both online and offline, nor how to use the intersection between gender and digital as a means for peacebuilding. Likewise, the next Strategy for Prevention, Resilience and Sustainable Peacebuilding (PRPD) should consider including online violence in its understanding of gender-based violence as a structural form of inequality and therefore an unalienable aspect of violence prevention and sustainable peace.

5.2 FEMINIST DIPLOMACY AS A MOBILIZING TOOL

"Thanks to the Feminist Diplomacy framework, we can support feminist civil society, finance their advocacy, and thus influence public policy, making gender equality a priority."

Fragility, Crisis and Conflict Division; Social Link Division, AFD

Even though both the High Council on Equality between Women and Men as well as feminist CSOs have uttered criticism⁵⁰ and highlighted that there is a need to better define and integrate feminist practices into the French framework for foreign policy, our interviews confirmed that Feminist Diplomacy acts as an important mobilizing tool. FFP detains a norm diffusion function across the policy architecture which allows different stakeholders to give validity to claims and work related to gender equality.

"The scope is now different and has increased in 2019 during the FFP adoption: an intensification of actions for gender equality, better integration of the gender approach in a cross-cutting way and a real will at a high level."

French diplomat, Department of Sustainable Development, MEAE

When there is a risk for feminist objectives to be disregarded or considered secondary, the existence of Feminist Diplomacy allows staff to underline that a gender-responsive approach is a transversal component and to advocate for a wider

scope of action at ministerial, multilateral, and programmatic levels. This happens in multilateral fora between France and the G7, G20, the UN, within French Agenda for Development, between Expertise France and the EU. In addition, the Feminist Diplomacy has a positive influence at a bilateral level, in particular between the French embassies and official representation of countries with a FFP (or inclined to adopt one).

Gathering the different **French interlocutors' insights, the core and common principles of a feminist foreign policy and gender equality** are:

- applying transformative and cross-cutting gender lens to all areas of foreign policy, from the perspective of embassies both internally (notably through participation and representation of women in the administration, including in the top management, as well as prevention and protection against GBV) and externally (for instance, in the design and implementation of programs and the support of CSOs or within the multilateral fora);
- **challenging the power structures and hierarchies** established by patriarchy (and militarisation), and the structural inequalities and injustice that stem from them;
- **questioning the root causes of conflict and violence** to alleviate conflict, including socio-economic, structural, cultural violence, and other forms of violence;
- involving consistent engagement with feminist and women-led civil society organisations,

- movements and networks in the policy-making domain, particularly in the co-design of peace and security policies and the implementation of the Women, Peace, and Security agenda;
- integrating systematically a **human-rights based approach to foreign policy**, in which human rights are explicitly prioritised, including sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Importantly, **CSOs and governmental bodies in Tunisia and Lebanon mentioned Feminist Diplomacy as a significant instrument**. It informs bilateral collaboration between French diplomats and the government and may influence the adoption of national gender equality policies and gender mainstreaming. They also mention that Feminist Diplomacy steers the financial support of local CSOs. A first important sign of this was the financial pledge to allocate 120mio euros to feminist and women-led movements and civil society organisations⁵¹. This translated i.e. into a call to strengthen "feminist CSOs in the implementation of the WPS agenda in crisis and conflict zones"; a call which is one of the first to explicitly mention "positive masculinity"⁵². Most recently, in October 2022, a 10mio call entitled "Women, Peace, and Security", co-led by FSOS and AFD's Minka Peace and Resilience Fund⁵³, was launched for projects with gender equality as a primary objective (DAC 2) which also explicitly includes the concept of masculinities.

As such, from all the different points of views, **Feminist Diplomacy** is seen as a norm diffuser that opens the avenue for a more ambitious, transformative interpretation of gender-sensitivity. This means there is generally a **favourable normative environment that allows to also investigate the role of masculinities for the prevention of violence and conflict**.

5.3 ENGAGING MEN VS. TRANSFORMING MASCULINITIES

"Engaging men is about including them in the discussion, debate and their participation in decision-making and its processes. Transforming masculinities is about raising awareness of certain toxic behaviour we normalize. One fits into the other."

Helem NGO, Lebanon

There are two dominant approaches when it comes to working with masculinities: 1. Engaging men and boys and 2. Transforming masculinities.

Engaging men and boys stems directly from the WPS Agenda and is therefore also commonly used by UN Women. In the context of conflict and fragility it refers to the **inclusion of men and boys as agents of change in the promotion of gender equality**⁵⁴. It is based on the belief that men act as both important allies and gatekeepers with whom some form of collaboration is, if not beneficial, then at least unavoidable. The collaboration can take the form of using them as speakers and official representatives in institutions for advocacy. A different strategy is to make sure men have been informed and at least tacitly endorse a women-focused programme to avoid strong opposition, from them and the wider community. Nevertheless, their sole presence in programs and advocacy efforts might not guarantee a change in social roles and norms in favour of equity and addressing fragilities in and after crisis. 'Engagement work' tends to overlook the understanding and analysis of masculinities as part of structures⁵⁵.

'Transforming masculinities' has thus emerged as an alternative more far-reaching approach, which seeks to tackle root causes and impacts of conflict on women's and men's experiences, by **addressing social norms, values and structures that shape masculinities**. The French High Council on the Equality of Women and Men calls for a transformative approach as a necessary criterion of a feminist foreign policy and notes that it "cannot be limited to the adoption of corrective measures in favour of women but must focus on transforming power relations"⁵⁶. Transforming masculinities not only seeks to include men and boys, but also to primarily address the root causes of inequalities and violence, such as male stereotypes, expected roles, standards, and practices and interrogate the often-overlooked concomitant structures and relationships in which masculinities are produced and embedded.

In our study, we discern that both **official France as well as Tunisian and Lebanese CSOs already**

Le Fonds de Soutien aux Organisations
Féministes (FSOF) (2020-2023): An example
of how feminist diplomacy steers the
financial support of local CSOs.
[Click or scan QR code](#)



pursue these two approaches, albeit to different degrees and sometimes without using these terms. A first important conclusion is therefore that an increased awareness raising needs to take place so that policymakers, program officers and civil society representatives have a similar understanding.

While these two approaches reflect divergent angles of how men and masculinities relate as important factors in violence prevention and peacebuilding, **they are not mutually exclusive.** They share a common understanding that masculinities and men's roles are constructed by gendered social norms, beliefs, and structures.

Men's roles and their relevance

To better understand which of the two approaches was already pursued and which would make more sense depending on the objective, we asked our interlocutors to describe which roles they saw men take on and which ones they deemed the most important ones – both negatively and positively – for their work.

Generally, the expected roles and practices of men are guided by dominant traditional beliefs related to hegemonic masculinity and anchored in social structures, whether in the household, political parties, religious institutions, legislation, or governmental bodies.

"The civil war is very important to understand the question of masculinities. The actors of the war remained the actors of politics. It is tied to a false sense of protection. The political protection, protection of the weakest, of communities and of the family have therefore become attached to concepts of masculinity in Lebanon."

NCLW, Lebanon

In **Lebanon**, CSOs primarily connected masculinities to political power and religious leaders. Inherited from the civil war, military actors and security forces have become today's political decision-makers. Men make up the large majority of military, security, political leaders and structures, not because men have biologically and inherently militaristic quality and are naturally prone to violence, but **male socialisation is intimately related to militarism.**

"One of the men in the rural area we asked said: "How could I be a man without a gun?". Men are raised to respond to conflict with aggression because of patriarchal upbringing. Although criminalised, as a result of war and the still current circulation of weapons, it's easy to carry one. Men are taught that they should assert themselves with power over others."

KAFA, Lebanon

Interlocutors in Lebanon stressed that the context of a simultaneous ongoing frozen conflict and post-conflict settings creates an environment where many men view militarised masculinity as a viable path for a living and for asserting their identity through expressing hatred. This is even more so the case now that the country goes through a huge humanitarian and economic crisis.

"In Tunisia, there was a revolution for regional equality, but also for gender equality. For this to happen, we need access to resources: to land, property, credit, etc. Masculinity is in all this, it determines who gets money."

Association Tunisienne des Femmes Démocrates, Tunisia

CSO interviewees in Lebanon and Tunisia generally identified the gatekeeper as one of the most important roles men have and that is maintained as a significant practice for subjugating women's lives and bodies and reinforcing men's own power and control, including over resources.

"Men are the ones who vote for the laws and therefore the ones who hold the rights, that is why they are necessary as allies. Men have a role to play in not resisting gender equality."

NCLW, Lebanon

In the Lebanese political structure, gatekeepers can be embodied by different actors and male-dominated structures. A key enabler for male gatekeeping is without a doubt the personal status in the law: a legislation that rules marriage, divorce, land ownerships, and other social affairs and which is still the prerogative of the different confessions and ruled by religious leaders.

The hegemonic ideal of masculinity is built on the foundation of the Lebanese civil war, marked both by militarisation and the political-confessional-religious representation and disputes in the



Street art representation of the song "I see the dream," in which the artists call for everyone to stand together to "make tomorrow better than yesterday." Beirut, June 2022.

country. This reasserts the ideal man as a combatant and associates maleness with militarised masculinity. As a result, military engagement and the general use of force is a way to prove masculinity which perpetuates and normalizes different forms of violence. Patriarchal structures, with a particular focus on the military and security apparatus, make sure to both reward expressions of hegemonic but also sanction signs of subordinate masculinities. This is how men are "policed", to borrow Tapscott's term⁵⁷. Similarly, in Tunisia, men were also often cited as playing gatekeeping and spoiler roles.

Across France, Tunisia, and Lebanon, the CSOs Marsa Sexual Health Centre, Initiative Mawjoudin pour l'Egalité, and Helem NGO, but also AFD and Expertise France collectively note that while gay men, queer men, and trans men are an integral part of the spectrum of masculinities, they are largely relegated to subordinate masculinity. These men are read as failing the dominant practices and get sanctioned for not corresponding to the cis- and heteronormative terms.

Overall, we can conclude that **two of the key position men have, are that of the gatekeeper and that of the perpetrator of violence.** Masculinities

can then be interpreted as both a pledge to **engage men as allies but also to use it as an accountability mechanism with regards to gender-based violence.** These two interpretations, while both compatible with the theoretical framework of masculinities and gender theory, pan out quite differently in practice. It is therefore primordial to know and communicate which one is pursued and why so.

Existing practices and gaps

The interlocutors were asked to list projects and initiatives working with men. Based on the different responses, a **wide spectrum of understanding of masculinities** emerged and multiple possible avenues were highlighted.

Some participants did not know what masculinities referred to but were interested in the theory behind it. Upon explanation most of them indeed connected their engagement to either of the two dominant approaches, which suggests that a primary issue is awareness raising and training on masculinities and the role of men in violence and conflict prevention. Some did not see the need to introduce it as a new terminology because they

perceived it as already included in the notion of gender equality. Yet others argued they already worked, even if perhaps indirectly, on the influence of men and masculinities since working for gender equality meant per default to also consider men. This was particularly the case for those whose activity focuses on combatting violence against women and promoting women's political and economic empowerment.

"In our projects we try to take a transformative approach. We work to deconstruct power relations, the domination of men over women, the relationships between men, to show that this can be harmful to men, and that there are different forms of masculinities. The concept of masculinities offers us tools to reduce inequalities between women and men for women's rights."

Department of Strategy and Partnerships, Expertise France

PROJECTS BY FRENCH INTERLOCUTORS:

The MEAE, AFD, Expertise France, and French embassies already carry out activities that incorporate both approaches simultaneously, engaging men and boys and transforming masculinities in context of fragility. The projects are mainly in the field of development. They primarily focus on increasing women's economic empowerment and income-generating activities, awareness-raising for political participation and gender equality, which falls into the 'engaging men and boys' approach.

Under the umbrella of 'challenging gender norms, roles, and stereotypes' in favour of women's rights, some projects target the practices of men at the local level⁵⁸, particularly with community and religious leaders, as men are identified as the intermediaries in the territorial and social network, and if not properly addressed, are perceived by as significant barriers to the achievement of women's participation and gender equality.

The French interview partners report that there is less risk or opposition when the project relates to the protection and empowerment of women and when the approach to masculinities is therefore used as a prism to hold men accountable for the violence they predominantly perpetrate. Hence, there are projects strategically focusing on women and framed as gender equality, with the implicit

aim of reducing the influence of men and curbing the expected patriarchal resistance through positive measures.

THE NEW TREND OF 'POSITIVE MASCULINITY':

Interviewees also emphasized the new phenomenon of referring to "positive masculinity". This usually evolves around giving young men positive role models, constructed in opposition to "toxic (read: hegemonic) masculinity" which frames manhood as violent and abusive. A central role is here attributed to the alternative role model of the caring father. Projects focusing on gender-based violence had the biggest awareness of this strategy of dissuading men from violent practices by elevating a positive alternative. The use of (often famous and well respected) 'gender champions' to this end has gained traction as an effective way of raising public awareness.

GAPS, OBSTACLES, AND SILENCES IN IMPLEMENTATION:

Within the MEAE and its agencies, the objectives and projects related specifically to security, peace and violence prevention do not systematically treat the gender-transformative approach as a priority. If they do, for instance with Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) gender markers in program development, gender equality is treated largely as a *significant* objective (DAC 1)⁵⁹, and again not systematically as a *primary* objective (DAC 2), and is often synonymous with the participation and protection of women and girls. If the gender approach is comprehensively integrated with references to the role of men, boys, and/or masculinities, it is more a matter of personal initiatives, rather than institutional roadmap for all departments.

Specifically, the existing security, crisis and peace projects often do not make explicit that they de facto primarily focus on work with men and boys, who make up the majority of intermediaries in the field of security and crisis management. For instance, within the P/CVE work or DDR processes, beneficiaries and intended stakeholders are predominantly, if not entirely, men and boys. This goes for projects in crisis prevention and management, the fight against organized crime, but also for instance the promotion of human security and peacekeeping.

"There is still very little work on the vulnerability of men in conflict zones. When it comes to protection, we could look at the fact that it is mainly young men who are vulnerable to recruitment."

Fragility, Crisis and Conflict Division; Social Link Division, AFD

However, men in these areas remain invisible as men and thus as gendered beings because they are seen as the norm. This is an important blind spot considering that most recruitment and militarization techniques from both state and non-state armed groups precisely tap into the idea of hegemonic masculinity to promise a sense of community and re-assertion of a specific type of masculinity.

INVISIBLE MASCULINITIES:

Transforming masculinities is also about changing power relations among men. CSOs, both in Tunisia and Lebanon, stressed the lived experiences of refugee men who are an easy scapegoat and the target of hatred and xenophobia. The masculinities associated with male refugees is used to fuel the narrative of an external enemy and to reassert the "own" supposedly superior masculinity. This category of men is then particularly vulnerable but also largely excluded from funding and projects on gender equality and conflict prevention. These factors of heightened insecurity and inequality make them a prey for the recruitment of armed groups.

"When we talk about violence and its prevention, we have to talk about gender-based violence, which does not just mean women, but include men, in particular queer men. So, addressing gender disparities is very important to have access to education and rights. It's when people are deprived of these rights that they become targets for violence."

Marsa Sexual Health Center, Lebanon

Furthermore, male survivors of sexualized violence are also still largely ignored. The issue only came up in one conversation with Expertise France, but it is not currently a priority neither in policy nor programming. **Unlike the idea of male perpetrators and gatekeepers, the notion of male vulnerabilities, is still not widespread, let alone taken into consideration.**

5.4 MAPPING OF POTENTIALS AND RISKS

Our study shows that some awareness for masculinities already exists as do specific projects that include both approaches, engaging men and boys as well as transforming masculinities. We also discerned some important gaps that are not tackled yet. In the remainder we emphasize what also transpired throughout our interviews: that the majority sees a lot of potential in the concept of masculinities, but how to translate it into practice will need to be weighed against certain risks.

Multiple but not insuperable risks

"In an international context where fundamental women's rights are already put into question, I worry that masculinities might be appropriated by actors who push for a masculinist, not a feminist agenda, as some countries have already been doing at the UN."

French diplomat, Department for Sustainable Development, MEAE

RISK OF CONFUSION:

Across our interlocutors, the concern surfaced that the term would be misused due to confusion. The definition of the term masculinities seems not to be clear and many had not heard of it. This bears the risk of different actors attaching different meanings to it. Most of the representatives of CSOs in Lebanon and Tunisia **equated the concept of masculinities mainly to hegemonic masculinity.** This means they treated the concept as a way to describe male behavior in monolithic and singular terms, and not understood as a spectrum of expected roles, practices, and structures embedded in a system of relational, gendered power. Others stressed that masculinities were included within the paradigm of gender or that they on purpose did not mention it explicitly either to mitigate misappropriation risks or because they considered it more important to make women specifically visible.

"There are different interpretations around the term masculinities. It is important to carefully choose how we approach the communities when we want to work on changing social norms regarding masculinity to avoid creating tensions or offensive reactions."

KAFA, Lebanon

CSOs and French embassies mentioned that an **alternative term** to the approach of transforming masculinities could be "**transforming social norms**, roles and stereotypes". This might be more intuitively understood as it is more common practice. This was deemed important not just because of the risk of misunderstanding but also because of cultural sensitivity with regards to international power relations. If the term is not promoted from within civil society, it may come across as an external imposition or a "testing approach".

RISK OF CO-OPTATION:

Hand in hand with the risk of confusion goes **the, admittedly biggest, risk of misappropriation**. This was identified in particular at the **multilateral and local level**. French diplomats emphasised that the concept of masculinities could be co-opted by actors in international diplomacy to further question gender equality norms. Given the already raising backlash against gender equality this would be a highly problematic unintended outcome. It would be exactly juxtaposed to the aim of Feminist Diplomacy.

CSOs on the other hand, underlined the risk of reinforcing men's traditional roles and practices in the respective countries, further harming the very people the transformative approach aims to protect, including the deepening of stereotypes and the binary system of gender. The following potential risks were particularly mentioned:

- Militarized actors could allude to the term to advocate for reallocation of funding from gender equality to hard security programs that favor men in power.
- When men are engaged as allies to advocate for gender equality this also cements the idea that they ultimately yield the power over women's rights. This can be particularly damaging if their support is sought to advance sexual and reproductive health and rights.
- In an environment where NGOs are already under suspicion and 'gender ideology' or 'NGO masculinity' are used to brandish them as 'traitors', using a new term can fuel further defamation and even incite violence against civil society.

These two risks were represented across the different levels of investigation and actors. Other

aspects represent challenges that only or mainly count for just one of the different fields.

RISKS GENERALLY MENTIONED BY FRENCH INTERVIEWEES:

- **Absence of the gender approach:** Multiple respondents highlighted the issue that gender is not always considered central to the implementation of crisis and conflict prevention. Instead, the need of the population and humanitarian assistance is prioritized in a conflict-affected context. For instance, projects in Lebanon, to mitigate inter-community tensions between Syrian, Palestinian, and Lebanese communities, fail to integrate a gender-transformative approach and maintain the status quo. As the interlocutors mentioned, this might be a very important risk. If gender inequalities are not seen as a priority and neglected, gender roles and norms can be negatively affected by programming, thus leading to unintended consequences. This could include a rise of gender-based violence as well as a further re-traditionalization of gender roles, which would impede the achievement of outcomes.
- **One size fits it all:** By applying the concept of masculinities, there is potential risk in plastering a framework to fragile settings without taking local specificities into consideration.
- **Unclear roles and lack of knowledge:** Another point raised in the interviews was the insufficient comprehension of gender equality (or lack thereof) internally. For example, being a gender advisor at the French Embassy was conflated with work on anti-harassment and anti-discrimination. In addition, difficulty was raised to connect the gender concepts to the different strategic policies and translate them into practice. This particularly pertained to knowledge on the WPS agenda.
- **Insufficient knowledge-transfers:** The notion of masculinities has been partially integrated into programming, based on the demand of beneficiaries and feminist local organizations in the context of Latin America. However, staff encounter difficulty benefitting from experiences in other contexts because there is a lack of knowledge capitalization and absence of transfer of good practices and lessons learned between the regions in which

Expertise France and AFD operate. For instance, learnings from the EUROsociAL+ program have not been transferred to work on the MENA or Great Lake region⁶⁰.

- **Lack of capacity:** Several interlocutors pointed to the lack of human resources and little budget internally for the implementation of strategies related to gender equality and conflict prevention. As a result, there are difficulties to implement all the components of these strategies, due to the lack of capacity, sometimes knowledge and skills by the operators, and much depends on single individuals which makes turn-over problematic. A need for more gender expertise across the departments and programs in the form of internal capacity building was mentioned.

RISKS RAISED BY CSOS IN LEBANON AND TUNISIA:

- **Positive masculinity with negative outcomes:** Positive masculinity is often employed to change norms and behavior behind gender-based violence. Tackling gender-based violence, however, demands the analysis of structures and norms that underpin violence, beyond violence itself, including fragile settings, with intersecting economic, social, political, legal, and environmental factors. There is therefore a risk of reducing the systemic problem to offering an alternative male role model. Moreover, the idea of a positive masculinity also bears important risks of essentialism. It makes men who promote peace and gender equality an exception while violent men are still seen as the norm. This may be particularly problematic if combined with misappropriation. Certain political forces may misuse the idea of "positive masculinity" to argue that refugee men had toxic masculinity in order to externalize systemic problems. Activists were furthermore concerned that "positive masculinity" also reinforces a hetero and cis-normative model of being a "real man". The promotion of "positive masculinity" usually does not leave room for discussing diverse gender identities, expressions and sexual orientations. This strategy can therefore prove to be counterproductive and put LGBTQ+ communities at high risk. Lastly,

since "positive" masculinity is often conveyed through the caring father figure it also leaves out men who do not have a family or children, which risks further aggravating their sense of masculinity.

- **Contextualisation and funding competition:** Promoting a singular good masculinity through programs that are implemented without the consultation of local actors will not live up the expectation of contextualising to really understand hegemonic masculinity in a specific space and time. It may encounter strong resistance, including from feminist organisations, especially if it entails supporting new projects at the expense of feminist advocacy and essential service provision. This could be counterproductive for women and girls who are the most affected. Of particular concern is that donors might make working with men a requirement for funding access, which would significantly hamper feminist CSO's liberty.
- **Risk of becoming a hot topic:** The transformative approach to masculinities might function as a donor-driven "hot topic" and could lose substance in the aid narrative. This could undermine relations between donors and recipients, in particular civil society. In fragile and conflict-affected contexts, CSOs face particularly scarce resources. The term 'transforming masculinities' could become a keyword, around which already underfunded CSOs will adapt and reframe their objectives and agenda. This will be done to receive funding but lack the necessary local embeddedness. This risk is reinforced with the lack of tenders that are not sufficiently adapted to the context and therefore dissociated from actual needs and complexity.

Promising potential

"I had not thought about gender in this transformative way before. We mainly lack the time to do so. But this was eye-opening"

French diplomat at the Embassy in Lebanon

Despite the risks mentioned, it is important to stress that there was strong agreement that to think about **masculinities was relevant and needed** to better understand how violence and

conflict settings are shaped and how to achieve sustainable peace.

There is **large agreement across the interlocutors that working on masculinities yields a significant potential to redirect gender-sensitivity to a more transformative approach** to violence prevention, fragility, and peacebuilding. Even when they mentioned the risks, all interlocutors emphasized that both transforming masculinities and work with men and boys play a pivotal role in hindering or enabling women's rights and gender equality in fragile contexts.

"I can only agree to talk about masculinities in plural because there is not one model of masculinity but many and they can also dissolve over time. This is a real potential in our work."

Department for Governance, Justice and Human Rights,
Expertise France

According to the **French interlocutors in the MEAE and operators** (Expertise France & AFD), **transforming masculinities** is a promising avenue for highlighting the continuum of violence as part of a more holistic gender perspective on fragility and peace. It acknowledges that there is no clear distinction between times of peace and conflict and helps to map out that different manifestations of violence, including gender-based violence, are intertwined, inform one another, and form a continuum. As such, masculinities were deemed a useful tool to comprehensively understand the contexts of fragility and meaningfully prevent violence. Secondly, including masculinities was pointed out as an opportunity for strengthening capacity building, ownership and possibly acceptance of a gender-transformative approach at the MEAE and at operator level.

At the embassy level, there was no direct distinction between the idea of including men and the explicit transformation of masculinities, and for some interlocutors working with men has not been explicitly part of their gender approach. However, the interviewees highlighted that there is considerable potential in including the transformative approach to masculinities, both in crisis, violence, and conflict prevention, as well as in the development realm. In particular, in the **Tunisian setting**, the interview partners found it particularly relevant for development projects that promote **women's income-generating activities**, where men and pre-existing gender

stereotypes need to be implicitly targeted.

The need for special attention to masculinities was particularly emphasised in the French Embassy's work in **Lebanon** in relation to serious risk of resurgence of violence. The respondents stressed the **importance of the work with men and boys in a militarized setting**, where it would be transformative to focus on disarmament, dealing with the past, and raising awareness among boys and young men about the consequences of violence and discuss alternative forms of expressing masculinity. The explicit integration of men and masculinities will also open space for better and more meaningful advocacy in diplomatic ties, enabling norms diffusion internally and externally with partners.

For **Lebanese and Tunisian CSOs**, **five main aspects were considered particularly relevant** in relation to both transforming masculinities and engaging men and boys. For civil society in Lebanon, the personal status law is the biggest basis of discrimination. No level of engagement will change gender inequality unless it tackles this and takes the role of religion seriously. Therefore, support for initiatives that aim to **change the personal status law** is primordial and in line with transforming masculinities and power relations. In both case studies, transforming masculinities is furthermore a potential tool to **hold men and structures accountable** for reproducing gendered-based violence and discrimination. It was viewed as an opportunity to **raise awareness among young men** about alternative forms of masculinities, thus tackling expected patriarchal norms⁶¹. Especially those organizations that work on gender-based violence also include work with predominantly male perpetrators. As a result, they see the integration of masculinities in gender-transformative peacebuilding as an **opportunity to strengthen the meaningful participation of grassroot local actors and community-based organizations**. Finally, the concept of masculinities was viewed as a chance to discuss the gendered power structure and **move beyond a binary perspective** of men and women and to also discuss gender disparities and vulnerabilities across the gender spectrum and in connection with other forms of discrimination.

6 Conclusions and recommendations

"Men can be supporters for gender equality, but they should not be treated systematically as leaders"

Helem NGO, Lebanon

6.1 CONCLUSION

Overall, it is true that using masculinities involves more risks than we had originally anticipated from a theoretical standpoint. As a conceptual tool for reflection **within the MEAE, AFD and Expertise France it is undoubtedly powerful and comes at a timely moment when feminist diplomacy has created a momentum** where these considerations have space and legitimacy. It is a powerful tool to break out of the internalized mainstream where gender is equated to women. Instead, it allows to centre gender power relations, make gender more transformative and therefore a really promising tool for more effective prevention and peacebuilding. It also represents a gateway to speaking about different power dynamics: SOGI, but also ethnic and social minorities. It also enables critical thinking about own lenses and reflexes, especially with regards to blind spots: P/CVE but also working with law enforcement and armed groups. These are gendered topics that are not perceived as such.

The situation looks slightly different both in multilateral spaces and in the field. There **misinterpretation and co-optation of the term masculinities are serious risks for which strong consultation and mitigating measures** will need to be taken beforehand. This risk needs to be read against a background of rising anti-gender backlash, especially in international diplomacy. It is therefore probably wise to use it at background knowledge to reflect about avenues for cooperation, advocacy, and intervention, but not as an explicit term. In the field, that risk is further coupled with real fear of competition for financial resources between actors. What fares best is to use the term for accountability, i.e. to openly discuss who the perpetrator is. It is also evident that many work on masculinities in terms of changing social norms, but just do not use the word. Others still work with men as allies, but it causes tensions. Most likely a combination of both approaches, engaging men and transforming masculinities will be necessary. And a first step to do so is to be aware of the differences between the two.

While it is true that masculinities as such are an integral part of gender theory and so explicit mention could be considered obsolete, we advocate for a different standpoint. Given that **gender is not interpreted and implemented in its full complexity and its transformative ambition, masculinities prove to be an important tool to reinvigorate a debate and approach that has been reduced to ticking the box.**

To avoid confusion, we suggest the following distinction: **Masculinities as a way of thinking and as a way of acting. Or, alternatively: as a conceptual and a practical tool.**

As a conceptual tool to think about the entirety of gendered power relations and how they are connected to other experiences of discrimination, masculinities are promising for all the different levels and actors we interviewed for this study.

As a practical tool that informs tenders and project funding its application should be rolled out only after thorough contextualisation and in close collaboration with local feminist civil society. Only then will be clear which approach: engaging or transforming is appropriate, or whether there might also be a third option.

6.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on what we have learned from this research, we propose the following recommendations. By integrating a gender-transformative approach to peacebuilding and violence prevention, policymakers, diplomats and practitioners can better recognize early warning signals, adapt to rapid conflict dynamics changes, and by doing so, mitigate fragility drivers and tackle harm.

GENDER-TRANSFORMATIVE AND FEMINIST POLICY FRAMEWORKS

- Adopt masculinities as part of Feminist Diplomacy and foreign policy more generally, but in particular for effective violence and conflict prevention as well as the full implementation of the WPS agenda and International Strategy for Equality of Women and Men.
- Mention masculinities in the next Prevention, Resilience and Sustainable Peace Strategy, highlighting theoretical and practical relevance as well as the two main risks of confusion and co-optation.
- Extend FFP from diplomacy *stricto sensu* to all field of foreign policy. The upcoming revision of the International Strategy for Equality of Women and Men would be an opportunity to adopt a comprehensive strategic framework for Feminist Diplomacy with clear guiding principles and to explicitly establish a connection between FFP and the new Third WPS National Action Plan.

CLEAR TERMINOLOGY AND DEFINITION OF MASCULINITIES

- Make sure to define what is meant by masculinities. We suggest distinguishing between masculinities as a conceptual and a practical tool, the latter of which mainly revolving around either engaging men or transforming patriarchal norms. It is important to distinguish between using it as a way of thinking about gender and as a way of funding gender equality programs.
- Ensure staff across different levels understand the meaning of masculinities by providing specific training and/or a handbook.
- Promote gender trainings and instruments, which introduce masculinities, in favour of

better fragility measures and strategy and providing practical steps of how to translate new strategies.

GENDER-TRANSFORMATIVE APPROACH AT ALL STAGES OF PROGRAMME PLANNING AND MONITORING, EVALUATION, ACCOUNTABILITY AND LEARNING FRAMEWORK

- Focus on monitoring, evaluation and learning mechanisms as accountability instruments through data collection and sex-disaggregation.
- Apply the good practice of translating strategic policies on gender equality into practice and throughout the design-implementation-evaluation program cycle, by using DAC1/DAC2 as a concrete methodology for gender equality as a cross-cutting theme, including the issue of masculinities.

DIGITAL-GENDER NEXUS IN POLICY FORMULATION

- Enhance the impact of the FFP and the DFP by linking the two strategies so they can build off each other.
- Include online violence, that results from structural gender-based inequality, in violence prevention and WPS.

NORMS DIFFUSION

- Push for masculinities approach to reach other donors, such as the EU, with which Expertise France operates.
- Strengthen the work with other governments encouraging them to adopt and implement meaningful feminist foreign policies with or without the 'feminist' label for meaningful change on gender equality in international processes such as the EU, NATO, G7, G20.
- FFP not only puts human security at its center, but also aims at overcoming all power structures, including imperialism and colonialism. Local CSOs were sensitive to France's past, also because some of the discriminatory legislation is a direct legacy of that time. Critical self-reflection, together with local actors, in the name of France's FFP ambitions, would positively contribute to France's standing in the MENA region.

KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER AND PRACTICE

- Before rolling out masculinities work in the field, conduct a capitalization of experiences in other contexts. This will enable learning from the experiences in using sport events, couple therapy, fatherhood programs, training for law enforcement but also gender-based violence projects as an entry point to address masculinities.

CO-OPTATION MITIGATION MEASURE

- Weigh the risk of co-optation before using the term publicly, especially at multilateral level and in the field. In the latter arena, this should be accompanied by strong contextualization and dialogue with feminist CSOs.
- Avoid risk of weakening feminist CSOs by consulting them beforehand and continue funding them even if they do not (explicitly) work on masculinities.

FEMINIST FUNDING

- Strengthen feminist funding practices by improving the quality of these resources, with particular attention to providing, core, service-centred, flexible, multi-term funding. Given the risk of funding competition if more work on masculinities will be pursued, increase available funding for feminist CSOs and include them in the design of tenders.

AMPLIFYING LOCAL AGENCY

- Invest in advocacy activities to create a bridge between civil society and government and a space for deliberation to pressure for change. Increase CSO credibility and leverage by endorsing their activities.
- Be accountable to feminist organisations and activists by providing regular public reporting on progress on policy implementation and funding independent monitoring of policy implementation by civil society organisation.

SPECIFIC TO TUNISIA

- Invest in constitutional entity for sustainable development and violence prevention and help establishing a high equality council in the country that will enable CSOs to more meaningfully participate in political decision-making.

SPECIFIC TO LEBANON

- Invest in in-kind contributions after the Beirut blast, support outreach in rural areas complementing NGO work with tailored research and trainings, as well as invest in advocacy against the confessional personal status law.

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About the authors and swisspeace

Dr. Leandra Bias is an award-winning feminist political scientist specializing in two major fields: (1) Authoritarianism/democracy, transnational feminism, and anti-gender backlash, and (2) foreign policy, conflict and peace studies, and (feminist) civil society. Her regional focus is on post-communist Europe, particularly Russia and the Western Balkans. At swisspeace, she worked as a Senior Researcher and Gender and Peacebuilding Advisor, implementing applied research projects related to Feminist Foreign Policy. Her focus was particularly on gendered dynamics of conflict and their feminist prevention and transformation, the implementation of the UN Women, Peace and Security Agenda, and the relationship between masculinities, militarism, and gender-based violence. Before that, Dr. Bias was a visiting fellow at the Institute of Philosophy and Social Theory at the University of Belgrade, at the Department of Comparative Politics at the Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration in St. Petersburg, and the Interdisciplinary Centre for Gender Studies at the University of Bern. She holds a PhD from the Department of Politics and International Relations at the University of Oxford.

Yasmine Janah is an Associate Program Officer on Gender and Peacebuilding at swisspeace and is responsible for projects and mandates related to gender and peacebuilding. Prior to that, she worked across conflict-affected and fragile contexts with the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) in Cameroon, the Ministry of Women's Affairs in the Republic of Congo, CARE International in Morocco, and various non-governmental organizations in France, Taiwan, and Germany. In these capacities, she supported and advised on peacebuilding efforts with a wide range of stakeholders on gender- and security-related policies (Women, Peace, and Security agenda and UNSCR 1325 National Action Plans, disarmament, conflict transformation). Her primary work and research focus on exploring the intersection of gender relations, violence, and conflict prevention. She holds an MA in Gender, Violence, and Conflict from the Department of Global Studies at the University of Sussex in the UK and an MA in International Relations with a major in Public International Law from the School of International Studies, TU Dresden in Germany.

swisspeace is a practice and research institute dedicated to advancing effective peacebuilding. Partnerships with local and international actors are at the core of our work. Together, we combine competence and creativity to reduce violence and promote peace in contexts affected by conflicts. swisspeace is an associated Institute of the University of Basel and a member of the Swiss Academy of Humanities and Social Sciences. Its most important partners and clients are the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, the State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation, international organizations, think tanks, and NGOs.

The swisspeace gender and peacebuilding team offers expertise in analyzing gendered drivers of violence and conflict and contributing to all topics considered crucial to the improvement and implementation of conflict prevention and conflict transformation. The gender and peacebuilding team is part of the Policy & Platform program, specializing in formulating policy recommendations for governments, international organizations, and NGOs stemming from joint learning processes.

One of Policy & Platform's current flagship projects is a four-year project with the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, contributing to the implementation of Switzerland's National Action Plan for UNSC Resolution 1325.

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Annexes - List of interview partners

FRENCH PARTNERS:

- Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires Etrangères – Département du Développement Durable
- Ambassade de France au Liban
- Ambassade de France en Tunisie
- Agence Française de Développement – Division Fragilités, Crises et Conflits; Division Lien Social
- Expertise France – Département Paix, Stabilité et Sécurité; Département Gouvernance, Justice et Droits Humains; Département de la Stratégie et des Partenariats

LEBANESE PARTNERS:

- ABAAD – Resource Center for Gender Equality
- Arab Institute for Women (AiW), Lebanese American University
- Fe-Male
- Fifty-Fifty
- Helem NGO هلم
- KAFA
- Marsa Sexual Health Center
- National Commission for Lebanese Women (NCLW)

TUNISIAN PARTNERS:

- Association Tunisienne des Femmes Démocrates (ATFD)
- Centre de Recherche et de Formation sur la Femme Arabe – CAWTAR
- Initiative Mawjoudin pour l'Egalité

