STATE OF THE FIELD

Violent conflict upends and polarizes societies, disrupting social structures and gender roles. Projects and policies intended to assist communities that are fragile or affected by violence are more successful when they consider the different effects conflict has on men, women, boys, and girls. Approaches to conflict resolution that account for gender issues and include a broader array of society reduce gender-based violence, enhance gender equality, defuse conflict, and lead to more sustainable peace.

USIP’S WORK

The U.S. Institute of Peace’s research, policy-shaping, and in-country programs strengthen the ability of people and organizations in conflict zones to create sustainable, inclusive solutions for peace and equality. Through over 50 projects worldwide, the Institute works with governments, international organizations, practitioners, and academics to increase the understanding of gender dynamics in conflict and expand the concept of the “Gender Inclusive Framework and Theory,” a guiding approach to understanding gender to be inclusive of women, men, and other gender identities. Recent work includes:

Engaging Women in Peace and Security. USIP established in 2020 the Women Building Peace Award to highlight and amplify the essential work of women peacebuilders in fragile and conflict-affected countries. The award annually honors one woman peacebuilder who has made a substantial contribution to the pursuit of peace and security in her community or country.

USIP also supports women peacebuilders who are mediators in Colombia, leaders of nonviolent movements, as well as religious leaders across the Middle East who are advancing the rights of women and girls.
To prevent and counter violent extremism (P/CVE) in East Africa and the Sahel, USIP supports women’s capacity, agency and influence that help to break down barriers to participation, enable networks of women to lead in their local communities, and facilitate connections with local and national policy actors to affect change.

International research demonstrates that men are not inherently violent, and as part of the Institute’s Peaceful Masculinities work, USIP collaborates with security actors to promote a more expansive narrative about men by challenging masculine identities that favor violence to solving problems.

**Pioneering Research.** USIP examines some of the toughest research questions on gender and peacebuilding. By connecting research with practice, USIP amplifies scholarship on issues ranging from the prevention of conflict-related sexual violence to women’s roles in violent extremism.

Since 2013, USIP has convened the Missing Peace Initiative Scholars Network, which comprises international researchers who analyze and help to prevent sexual violence in some of the world’s most turbulent places. USIP brings these scholars together annually to identify gaps in knowledge and to make recommendations to policymakers.

USIP experts apply this knowledge by training peacekeeping missions to reduce sexual exploitation and abuse in countries across Africa. Such trainings help security forces better recognize these abuses, including the complex patterns of power and behaviors that contribute to a cycle of violence.

As the impacts of violent conflict and extremism increase, it is critical to amplify women’s roles in the prevention, mediation, and resolution of violence. USIP conducts in-country research to examine how women utilize indigenous and traditional religious roles to negotiate and mediate for peace across the Middle East.

**Strengthening Policy.** USIP is the secretariat of the U.S. Civil Society Working Group, which harnesses the knowledge of over 55 NGOs with expertise on the impact of violent conflict on women and girls. This knowledge contributes to the implementation of the U.S. National Strategy on Women, Peace, and Security through regular consultations with key departments and agencies of the USG, which recognizes the unique challenges and needs of women and girls in violent conflict and ensures women’s participation in peace negotiations and post-war reconstruction.

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**Defining Gender**

Gender describes the roles and expectations that a society finds most appropriate and valuable for men, women, boys, girls, and sexual and gender minorities. Gender is more than an individual’s biological sex. Gender is learned patterns of behavior. During violent conflict, gender norms can be radically altered. Conditions—including access to resources, mobility, and personal safety—can particularly worsen for many women, girls, and sexual and gender minorities. Transitions out of violent conflict, however, also mark an opportunity to improve the social status of women through education and legislation.