

CSO Connect Regional Peer Learning Series

A cross-country initiative bringing together civil society organizations to exchange knowledge, strengthen collaboration, and inspire collective impact across the MENA region.



When Experience Becomes Power The Story of Sawa for Development and Its Fight for Women's Rights

Sawa for Development, where Nawal Mdallaly shared real stories from Lebanon, stories of projects designed to protect women, empower them politically, and ensure that refugee children receive essential education. She spoke about advocacy campaigns pushing to amend laws that still shape women's daily lives. Through her words, a long struggle emerged against a political and social system that often leaves women out of key decision-making spaces. Nawal highlighted how the lack of legal protection and the weight of social norms continue to limit the political roles women can access.

Lebanon

A Right Gained, Yet a Dream Delayed



The discussion then travelled back to 1953, the year Lebanese women secured the right to vote, an important milestone, but one that did not fully open the doors to leadership. Participants painted a clear picture: Women in Lebanon possess the capability, yet reality restricts their opportunities. Social pressures, traditional perceptions of women in politics, and a lack of supportive legislation all keep women's political ambitions suspended. Despite this, civil society organizations remain a hopeful force, working to raise awareness, build women's capacities, and encourage them to step confidently into public life.

Legal and social challenges silently shape women's political participation

Civil society continues to address the role of religious courts, unfair electoral laws, and societal norms that assign gender roles with rigid caution. These organizations believe that achieving fair political participation for women requires deep legal reform, cultural transformation, and legislation that protects women from political violence.

From Syria to Iraq

One Reality, Many Faces

In Syria, the absence of a national plan to implement Resolution 1325 leaves women without structured support. In other areas, women's participation remains symbolic rather than substantive. Yet in Iraq, encouraging signs emerged, with women's movements achieving measurable progress despite heavy cultural and political challenges.

Society's Role in Shaping Women's Political Participation



Family dynamics and societal expectations continue to strongly influence women's choices and opportunities in politics. Meaningful progress depends on joint efforts, where both men and women actively contribute to creating safe and supportive political spaces. Cross-country knowledge exchange is crucial, as success stories in one context can inspire and drive transformative change in others.