

## **Background**

The Middle East and North Africa region is gravely suffering from the proliferation of weapons. Bombing of towns and cities has become a common practice in armed conflicts across the region, causing heavy civilian casualties and the destruction of schools, homes, hospitals, markets, and other infrastructure necessary for human life. There is also widespread availability of guns and other small arms that wreck havoc during and after conflicts. Women often suffer gravely and disproportionately from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, they also bear the brunt of small arms violence, especially when guns are brought home exacerbating domestic violence during and after conflicts.

## **WILPF's work in countering arms proliferation**

WILPF monitors and analyses the impact of international arms trade that fuels conflict in the MENA region on civilian population, particularly women and girls. We track where the weapons come from, who uses them, who is killed or injured by them, and how they change the lives of women and girls. We also advocate to stop the transfer of arms that facilitate and increase human rights violations on the national and international levels and expose those profiteering from violence in the MENA region.

## **Challenges encountered**

The origins of some of the weapons in many countries is difficult to trace, while for others, we know exactly where they are coming from. For instance in Syria, we have credible and reliable sources confirming that the Syrian government purchases most of its weapons from Russia; however, transfers to the Syrian opposition often follow a more circuitous route to their recipients, which makes the tracking process very challenging. Within Syria, as well as in Yemen, it is difficult to trace when some weapons being used in the conflict were transferred and from which country, particularly those used by non-State armed groups. It is even more difficult, in some cases, to identify specific models of some weapon systems and thus the producer of those weapons. It is therefore important to note that the numbers included in the infographics and video are not meant to be comprehensive to all warring parties in the conflict countries under study. Our dedicated team has included credible resources only, and given that no reliable information could be obtained for non-State armed groups, we were unable to reflect those in all the materials of the toolkit. Users can however find more elaborated information on some non-State armed groups in the webinar.

## **Why is this toolkit unique?**

Although many other resources highlight the impact that arms transfers have on civilians during conflict, this toolkit gives particular emphasis on the gendered dimensions of arms transfer that regularly goes unnoticed. In that sense, the toolkit seeks to highlight how arms transfers to governments and other armed actors in the region can be linked to gender-based violence and inflict disproportionate effects on women.

This toolkit is intended to provide civil society organisations in the MENA with **information available in Arabic** to help them integrate gender perspectives into tracking arms flows and highlighting their impacts on civilians. To make the toolkit equally useful for international non-governmental organisations and other peacebuilding practitioners, we made the resources also available in English.

## **This toolkit is aimed at:**

- Helping WILPF partners, sections and other local grassroots organizations in the MENA region to integrate gender perspectives into arms transfers and militarization by providing the resources in the local language (Arabic).
- Highlighting the relationships between gender, wars and arms transfers, particularly how different types of weapons impact women disproportionately during conflict.

- Providing the foundation for local and international activists and NGOs to conduct advocacy around the use and transfer of arms in the MENA region and raise awareness around the often-ignored gendered impacts that militarization has.

**The toolkit is composed of the following:**

- **Webinar** in **Arabic** that seeks to examine arms transfers to governments and other armed actors in the MENA region, discuss key arms transfers and their connection to bombing of towns and cities and other populated areas, as well as to gender-based violence, and highlight some of the challenges of tracking these arms transfers, and look at international efforts to stop them
- **Infographic** in **Arabic** and **English** that aims to expose arms transfers, military expenditures and types of weapons imported to Iraq, Libya, Syria and Yemen, and shed the light on what their devastating effects are in terms of casualties, humanitarian need, sexual and gender-based violence, and displacement.
- **Video** in **Arabic** with subtitles in **English** that serves as an informative tool to highlight the gendered impacts of arms transfers using an interactive and user-friendly technique, which not only translates the message in a simplified language but is also easy to share on social media and other platforms