

# What Does Political Participation Mean for Syrian Refugee Women?

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## Abstract

Women play an important role in peace and security processes, often acting as insider-mediators within their own community groups and brokering peace processes. Yet it is often taken for granted that participation in civil society is desirable and that participation in the public sphere is something that women are enabled to do. How women interact in the public sphere and how individuals see themselves in relation to institutions and authority figures depends upon various socio-political, socio-economic, and cultural characteristics within the context of the nation-state. Researching Syrian refugee women, however, requires understanding the ways in which individuals also negotiate structures and institutions outside of the nation state, such as the social, economic, and cultural environments in neighbouring countries where women are currently seeking refuge (in the Syrian context, this includes Jordan, Syrian, Iraq, and Turkey and many other EU member countries). Syrian refugee women represent a diversity of socio-cultural, socio-economic, and socio-political circumstances, many of which have changed significantly since the conflict began. For example, while there are some 4 million Syrian people seeking refuge in neighbouring countries such as Jordan and Lebanon, and others are seeking refuge in Europe, World Vision also reports that some 6.5 million people are displaced within Syria. Further, the Australian Department of Social Services (DSS) reports that 21,506 refugees from Syria and Iraq have been resettled in Australia as at 9 June 2017. Therefore, three major types of political status can be identified: (1) those within the struggling nation-state; (2) those with no political or citizenship status, such as those seeking refuge in neighbouring countries; and (3) those who have been resettled in another nation-state, including refugees who have been resettled in Australia. It is therefore necessary to understand the Syrian diaspora as a phenomenon (its contours, composition and reach) and how and in what ways the diaspora impacts on political participation. This paper considers political participation from the perspective of Syrian refugee women and theorises how a nuanced understanding of political participation can help to connect dispersed individuals.