

BRIEF PAPER ON THE WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY AGENDA (WPS)

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The context

Women's meaningful participation in peace processes, such as negotiation, mediation, peacekeeping, and reconstruction, contributes to more long-term and inclusive peace. Research regularly reveals that when women are participating in peace talks, the agreements last longer. Their inclusion promotes trust and legitimacy in peacebuilding by ensuring that half of the population's perspectives and experiences are represented. Ignoring women's contributions hinders peacekeeping efforts, maintains gender inequity, and reinforces damaging stereotypes.

On a general note and in the realm of the 25 anniversary since the adoption of UNSC Resolution 1325, launching the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, women's various responsibilities in conflict and crises are framed. They are not only victims, but also agents of change, leading grassroots peacebuilding efforts, assisting communities, and campaigning for justice and human rights. In this endeavor, under a collective perspective, women's organizations are at the forefront of peacebuilding and disaster response, but they are underfunded and devalued. Thus, adopt fully funded national programs to expand women's meaningful engagement in all aspects of peace and security, as well as funding for women's organizations in times of conflict and crisis.

The International Community is called to reflect on and revitalize the WPS agenda's transformative potential. The more productive path appears to be full—and accelerated, according to the recently adopted Pact for the Future—implementation of all four pillars of the agenda, including doubling down on essentialist or stereotyping language about both men and women, supporting WPS localization to address community-level security concerns, and advocating for de-securitization across all aspects of the agenda.

Quantitative overview

According to latest data from the UNSG Report – ‘Review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly’ (E/CN.6/2025/3): “Over the past five years, violent conflicts and humanitarian crises have intensified to unprecedented levels, affecting more people than ever before. In 2023, more than 170 armed conflicts were recorded, and approximately 612 million women and girls lived within 50 kilometres of these conflicts, more than 50 per cent higher than just a decade ago.”

Legal framework

According to the contents of the aforementioned UNSG Report, in relation to the normative body of the UNSC as well as the reference to women as key agents of change in peace agreements, it is important to recall that:

“Between 2015 and 2023, more than 65 per cent of the decisions of the Security Council explicitly included gender-related issues, compared with 32 per cent in the previous 15 years. The average has been trending down in the past two years, however, and reached 58 per cent in 2023, the lowest in seven years. Overall, there has been growing attention to women and peace and security and there have been innovations in the working methods of the Security Council, including by having more women from civil society briefing the Security Council.

Since 2016, the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security has provided a space for regular consultations between Council experts and the United Nations on urgent concerns in country-specific situations. Despite these advances, the Security Council has struggled to cope with the challenging peace and security environment and to uphold the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, including in situations such as the wars in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, the Sudan and Ukraine”.

[The percentage of peace agreements with gender provisions](#) has increased since the 1990s. Between 1990 and 2000, only 12 per cent of peace agreements included references to women. By 2011-2020 the share grew

to 31 per cent. However, in 2023, only 26 per cent (8) peace and ceasefire agreements mentioned women, girls, or gender. In many peace processes, those igniting wars are invited to the negotiating table, while those seeking true peace, such as women's groups, are sidelined. In 2023, none of the peace agreements reached included [representatives of women's groups as signatories](#).

“When women are signatories to peace agreements (which is an indicator of their substantive participation in the negotiations), on average, the agreements last longer than in cases in which they were not. Furthermore, women signatories are often linked to women's civil society groups, which are critical for bringing gender equality issues into the process and ensuring their implementation”.

Strategic and programming documents & NAPs in line with the UN WPS agenda

According to latest data 111 countries and territories have adopted national action plans on women and peace and security; only 29 NAPs (26 per cent) included a budget at adoption– a signal that the government puts at least some financial resources towards implementing the NAP; of these NAPs, 89 (81 per cent) include monitoring frameworks with indicators, which are key to tracking the government's progress.

43 per cent of countries and territories reported having adopted gender-responsive approaches to humanitarian action and crisis response, a slight increase from 40 per cent in 2019. A key innovation in recent years has been the growth of humanitarian response plans that integrate actions across three cross-cutting areas of gender equality: fostering women's economic empowerment, promoting sexual and reproductive health and eliminating gender-based violence.

Additionally thirteen regional and sub-regional organizations have adopted [action plans or strategies](#) to accelerate progress on the women, peace, and security agenda and improve monitoring of results with member countries. More countries are developing and implementing local action plans on women peace and security. As of 2024, at least 13 countries have such plans, including Bosnia and Herzegovina, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Iraq, Kenya, Liberia, Mali, Nigeria, Philippines, Serbia, Somalia, Ukraine, and Uganda.

Women's and girls participation and leadership in peace processes

As stated by the UNSG in his last report “Despite strong evidence that women's participation in peace processes strengthens outcomes, women's exclusion from such processes remains the norm”.

In 2023, the United Nations supported an initial minimum aim of one-third female participation in mediation and peace processes, which would be reached by the implementation of special measures, targets, and incentives (S/2023/725).

In the **2024 Pact for the Future**, Member States acknowledged that women's full, equal, safe, and meaningful participation in decision-making at all levels of peace and security, including conflict prevention and resolution, was critical to achieving long-term peace.

In the **Political Declaration** adopted by consensus in the 69 Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women in March 2025, the membership has been committed to “(q) Strengthening the protection of all women and girls in armed conflict and ensuring women's full, equal and meaningful participation and leadership at all levels of decision-making and in all stages of peace processes and mediation efforts, prevention and resolution of armed conflicts, peacebuilding, post-conflict reconstruction, and in humanitarian action, as an essential factor for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security, and encouraging the development, implementation and financing of national action plans, as well as support for local women's organizations and peacebuilders, in conflict prevention, peacebuilding and sustaining peace; [...]”.

With regard to the **multiple forms of participation of women and girls in peace processes** at large, the following could be included: the coordination of humanitarian and relief efforts, the observation of post-conflict elections, the implementation of peace education programs, and the mediation and settlement of interpersonal, tribal, or community conflicts before they turn into conflict; local-level talks between armed actors to prevent the escalation of intercommunal tensions, broker ceasefires, or establish civilian safe zones.

The UNSG report update the UN membership practices as for the **promotion and support for women's participation and leadership in peace processes and, particularly, in humanitarian action**:

“Some 59 per cent of States reported that they had promoted and supported women's meaningful participation in peace processes [... This] figure increases to 69 per cent for conflict- and crisis-affected countries. Specific actions to support women's participation include: convening spaces for women's mobilization around peace talks, setting up funding mechanisms to support women's inclusion, appointing women to mediation and facilitation teams, capacity-building, developing guidance tools and providing opportunities for networking so as to ensure that women are ready and able to participate in peace negotiations. Some States have also advocated with conflict parties to improve the gender balance of their delegations”.

“60 per cent of States reported having promoted and supported women's meaningful participation in humanitarian crisis and response activities, compared with 43 per cent five years ago. That figure stands at 62 per cent for conflict- and crisis-affected countries. Data from the annual gender accountability framework reports, produced by UN-Women on behalf of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Gender Reference Group, point to improvements in consulting with women's organizations in humanitarian contexts, while gaps remain. In 2023, 85 per cent of humanitarian contexts reported that they had held at least one consultation with local women's organizations as part of the annual humanitarian planning process, marking a steady improvement from previous years (starting from 56 per cent in 2018)”.

As it regards the significant **participation of women in transitional justice processes and international justice mechanisms**, “including women's voices in providing an official record of past events, acknowledging harms and often deeply gendered forms of human rights violations, and providing them with access to justice, all have the potential to build a shared pathway towards reconciliation”.

Additionally, the **localization of the participation of women in peace processes** is a key issue: in the UNSG report is evident that “At the national and community levels, networks of women mediators reported having had impact in addressing local conflicts and community tensions, including by brokering local ceasefires, humanitarian access or the release of prisoners. Some countries reported that they had supported United Nations efforts to promote women's participation, through independent delegations, reserved seats, minimum targets and other conditions and incentives for the structure of peace negotiations, as well as through funding for women's organizations or for the Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund. A promising approach in the African Union is the development of a framework to set a minimum quota of women's representation in these processes, which is aligned with the global commitment called for by the United Nations”.

Lastly, the participation of women in peace processes is based upon a **targeted financial support to women's local prevention and peacebuilding efforts**, thus strengthening conflict analysis and early warning systems.

A UN Women recent study examining the levels of funding reaching women's organizations in conflict and crisis settings, which has decreased for three years in a row, found:

- Funding initiatives are often concentrated among a few donors and in some cases may simply repackage existing allocations rather than provide new funding.
- A significant share of aid goes to international NGOs rather than directly to local women's organizations.
- Donors are familiar with the minimum 15 per cent financing target for gender equality, but they are less aware of the 1 per cent goal for women's organizations specifically, first proposed by the UN Secretary-General during the 20th anniversary of resolution 1325 (2000) and reiterated in the New Agenda for Peace.
- The shift in focus towards humanitarian aid, which integrates gender equality the least, as reduced the resources available for women's organizations in conflict settings. Only 17 per cent of humanitarian aid targets gender equality, compared to 50 per cent in the peace and security sector.

The financial support is also one of the main goals to renew the global commitment for the full implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action through high-impact measures such as: “Drive accountability for the women and peace and security agenda and gender-responsive humanitarian action by

adopting fully financed national plans and funding local women's organizations that are leading responses to crises and conflicts".

From a practical point of view, as for **multi-partner trust funds financing women, peace and security**:

- **The [United Nations Peacebuilding Fund](#)** approved in 2023 approved \$202.5 million in support for peacebuilding initiatives in 36 countries, of which [over 47 per cent \(\\$95.9 million\) was allocated to gender equality](#). The Fund's usage of the gender equality marker is a model for other funds.
- **The United Nations Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund (WPHF)** has supported more than 1,300 local women's organizations in 44 crisis-affected countries since 2016; in 2023, the Fund launched the "[Invest-In-Women](#)", global campaign which aims to raise \$300 million by 2025 to support the critical work of local women's organizations facing increasingly complex crises; in 2024, it has been linked to the WPS-HA Compact to reach [225 signatories and is tracking 1180 actions on advocacy, financing, policy, and programming in 197 countries and territories](#).
- **The Elsie Initiative Fund for Uniformed Women in Peace Operations (EIF)** since 2019 has mobilised over \$37 million and supported 12 security institutions in 8 Troop and Police Contributing Countries to tackle barriers preventing the equal participation of uniformed women in peace operations.
- **The Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) and country-based pooled funds (CBPFs)** in 2023 allocated \$467 million (70 per cent) for projects on gender equality.

UN mediation tools & the role and contribution of women and girls

The United Nations features mediation as a "process wherein an intermediary facilitates the engagement of two or more parties, with their explicit consent, in the prevention, management, or resolution of a conflict by aiding them in formulating mutually satisfactory solutions". This definition emphasizes mediation as a distinct method of conflict resolution, while concurrently encompassing both formal and informal practices, narratives, and themes pertinent to UN mediation across all locations where the UN operates, ranging from its headquarters to missions globally.

In this view, the WPS agenda could be shaped in order to reframe the role and contribution of women and girls as mediators in all stages of peace processes at large.

Peace agreements are formal or high-level peace processes where mediation tools are less open to women participation. As such, they provide opportunities for the reordering of societal institutions: thus, an inclusive approach to mediation can potentially transform the status of women since, in many cases, conflicts and crises force women into new roles and spur their political mobilization. In other terms, an inclusive process means a final peace agreement including provisions on gender equality and, at it is the case – using WPS language in a ceasefire or comprehensive peace agreement – on accountability mechanisms for post-conflict institution building.

Despite the clear applicability of the WPS agenda to mediation, only in 2016 the Guidance on Gender and Inclusive Mediation Strategies has been released: nonetheless securing the presence of women not affiliated with conflict parties, especially in high-level negotiations, continues to be difficult.

Mediation tools could be examined regarding the potential erosion of the rights-based case for women's participation. The WPS agenda in this perspective is strongly interrelated with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, which guarantees political participation as a human right. As women's participation has positive effects not only in the short but medium and long term of a peace process, it is properly the longevity of a peace agreement, particularly where women could be actively involved in a negotiating team, that is a factual outcome: this means that it's women's influence, rather than just their presence, that leads to this result. However, it makes women's right to political participation conditional on how well they can facilitate a peace process, especially when they have strong – even if political – standing which put at risk their right to participate.

Finally, mediation practices demand for moral and expert legitimacy in global governance, refining approaches which ask women to be fully reactive and flexible to secure their participation in mediation teams, also matching the updated relevance of the WPS agenda today.