SUMMER 2020

From conception to inclusion
20 years into the Women, Peace and Security Agenda
The European Commission support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents which reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

Cover image credits: CC/Flick – UN Women/Ryan Brown

Co-organised with

Co-funded by the Europe for Citizens Programme of the European Union

Co-organised with

BRUSSELS INTERNATIONAL CENTER
In light of the 20th anniversary of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, Friends of Europe and the Brussels International Center brought together the power of local knowledge from those working in the field and the policy expertise from international institutions to explore different pathways and political alternatives for a transformative Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda.

Resolution 1325, adopted in October 2000, urges all actors to increase the participation of women and incorporate gender perspectives in peace and security. It also underlines that structural violence against women and girls is intrinsically linked to violent conflict, making it clear that special measures must be taken to protect women and girls from gender-based violence.

“We have structures, we have policies, we have action plans, political outspoken very strong commitment in all existing organisations […] but we also know that policy frameworks in place are not making necessarily the things happen where we would like them to happen: in conflict and post-conflict settings” Charlotte Isaksson, Senior Gender Advisor at the EEAS

Twenty years on, many of the WPS agenda’s provisions remain little more than pious intentions. Although the inclusion of women in peace and security has improved in the past two decades, there is still a lot to do.

“We have structures, we have policies, we have action plans, political outspoken very strong commitment in all existing organisations […] but we also know that policy frameworks in place are not making necessarily the things happen where we would like them to happen: in conflict and post-conflict settings” Charlotte Isaksson, Senior Gender Advisor at the EEAS - 26:54

The general sense among participants was that there have been many positive developments since the adoption of UNSCR 1325. 20 years ago, there was a lack of awareness of the need of applying gender perspectives to peace and security and leaders did not see need for having a gender advisor. Nowadays, it is seen as a requirement that most acknowledge as essential. Moreover, institutions have finally addressed the issue of sexual violence in conflict, a topic that was once considered taboo. However, now that the policies and tools are there, they need to be used and implemented effectively so that they reach those they were designed for.
"What is missing is leadership, accountability and funding for this agenda to happen"
Paivi Kannisto, Chief of the Peace and Security Section at UN Women

The implementation of the WPS agenda is a matter of political will and budget allocation. It is essential to hold governments and institutions accountable for their promises so that they provide direct support to the WPS agenda via funding.

One illustrative example is the unfolding of the implementation of Colombian peace agreement. Rosa Emilia Salamanca argues that this agreement is considered one of the most inclusive agreements because women organisations in Colombia took the WPS agenda and made it theirs. They fought relentlessly to ensure that women were included in the entire peace process and that the agreement included gender provisions. However, due to a lack of political will and resources, the agreement has yet to move from good intentions to implemented reality.

"Women have been asking to change and move forward with the idea of another kind of perception of security. [...] Security means health security and security from violence against women that has raised in a very incredible way in this pandemic"
Rosa Emilia Salamanca, Director at Corporación de investigación y acción social y económica (CIASE)

The implementation of the WPS agenda is not only about inclusion but also about tackling the socioeconomic issues that disproportionally affect women, making them more vulnerable to poverty and sexual and gender-based violence. The focus should be on improving security for women so that they can become active participants. Protection and participation are equally important – you can’t have one without the other. “Improving local security will enable greater gender equality, therefore promoting women’s role in conflict resolution” said Iliot Muthaka during his closing remarks.
“It is time for actors in different levels to be aware of the problems that people are facing in conflict areas. They have no one to talk on behalf of them […] All the things we are talking most of the time is not really representing the voices of women who are affected by sexual violence and rape in conflict” Ilot Muthaka, International Programme Manager for Ghana and Liberia at the Swedish Association for Sexuality Education (RFSU)

More work needs to be done to effectively close the gap between local and international institutions, and ensure that local voices are listened to. Charlotte Isaksson argued that the initiatives and current measures must be continuously re-evaluated to review who has a voice, what their role is, and how effective their participation should be. Citizens in conflict and post-conflict settings must be given a stronger voice. They will require reforms “higher up in the pyramid”. Institutions need to find a balance between symbolic activities and activities that directly affect people in conflict-affected areas in a positive way.

“If you want to count numbers, you just get numbers. Equality is about putting policies into practices and programmes and making sure that the voices are heard; and just because you increase the number of women that doesn’t automatically happen” Clare Hutchinson, NATO Secretary-General’s Special Representative for Women, Peace and Security
Leaders need to understand that inclusion is not only about numbers; a gender lens should be applied to all aspects of peace and security. There is an overemphasis on counting numbers – this alone will not lead to success. WPS has to cut across all aspects of peace and security, including cyber, counterterrorism, defence investment, defence planning, etc. The WPS agenda is not a matter that affects only women; it impacts everyone’s security.

The full debate can be watched here.