



Frontline Voices

Final report

2025



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Foreword

As the United Nations' Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda marks its 25th anniversary, we face an uncomfortable truth: this once-groundbreaking framework is struggling precisely when the world needs it most. Anchored in UN Security Council Resolution 1325, the WPS agenda recognised that women's participation and gender perspectives are essential to conflict prevention, peacebuilding and security.

But a quarter century on, the WPS agenda is falling too short of its powerful promise at a time when, as UN Secretary-General António Guterres has observed, we are experiencing more armed conflicts across the globe than at any moment since World War II.

Yes, it is laudable that more than 100 countries have developed national action plans for implementing Resolution 1325 and that major international bodies – including the European Union, NATO, the African Union, and the OSCE – have woven WPS principles into their institutional frameworks. But, on this significant anniversary, there has been little tangible progress beyond that. Moreover, the gap between global WPS pledges and realities on

the ground in conflict-affected and fragile states has become impossible to ignore. Budgets are shrinking. Programmes have been dismantled. Women peace-builders are too often overlooked or sidelined.

This is a perilous time for the WPS agenda to lose momentum. Beyond the conflicts that have devastated Gaza, Ukraine and Sudan among others, the global surge in authoritarian and populist movements fundamentally threatens the values underpinning WPS. It suffered another blow this year when the United States backtracked on its WPS commitments by cancelling its WPS programme.

As a teenager in Ireland, I witnessed the formation of the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition, a cross-community initiative that proved instrumental in the peace process that ended thirty years of violence, with two of its members serving among the twenty negotiators who crafted the historic 1998 Good Friday Agreement. We know from that and other contexts that women's involvement in conflict prevention and resolution enhances outcomes across all

phases of conflict. Yet women remain conspicuously absent from most peace negotiations.

Related to this is the need – voiced by several participants in this Frontline Voices initiative – to resist the growing securitisation of the WPS agenda, which risks skewing its implementation at the expense of conflict resolution and peacebuilding. The war in Ukraine has changed the parameters of Europe's conversation on WPS as the continent adopts a more hard-nosed approach to security and defence. This has brought greater focus on women's roles within armed forces and heightened awareness of the specific challenges facing women in military service. But this increasing militarisation of the WPS agenda not only risks reducing it to representation, it also flattens its original ambitions.

What was clear during the Working Group meetings that comprised this initiative is that participants – including from Ukraine, Israel/Palestine, Libya, Yemen, Northern Ireland and Bosnia among others – still believe in the original promise of the WPS agenda to centre women in conflict prevention, resolution and

recovery. Many of them know from firsthand experience on the ground how important this is, particularly the role of women in forging a sustainable peace. Throughout the Frontline Voices initiative, these women discussed how to build on what has been achieved so far but also how to improve the WPS agenda so that it is fit for purpose in a rapidly changing world.

They know that if the Women, Peace and Security agenda is to survive, let alone flourish, in these turbulent times, we need to move beyond rhetoric and push for concrete outcomes that include more women at the policy table and a reimagined understanding of the role of women in peace and security. Moreover, the Women, Peace and Security agenda must be understood and implemented as a wider holistic human security initiative. The time is now.

Mary Fitzgerald

Trustee of Friends of Europe and Strategic Policy Lead on the Frontline Voices project

Introduction

“
Never has this agenda been more relevant than now.

“
This was not just about women. It was about peace for all. This is not a traditional gender equality agenda. It’s fundamentally a peace and security agenda.

Twenty-five years after the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1325, the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda is facing a crisis of credibility. What began as a powerful promise to place women at the centre of conflict prevention, resolution and recovery has lost momentum.

Through our project Frontline Voices: women shaping peace and security in Ukraine, Friends of Europe has sought to reimagine WPS in ways that are practical, grounded in current realities and honest about where things stand. While Ukraine has been used as a central case study, the analysis stretched further, drawing connections across diverse conflict contexts.

Carried out in partnership with Canada’s Department of National Defence, the project consisted of three structured working groups held under the Chatham House rule, followed by a public debate and this final report. A multimedia campaign, including podcasts, articles and video interviews, amplified these perspectives and ensured women with frontline experience could be widely heard. Bringing together women peacebuilders, civil society leaders, policymakers and defence experts, each working group

examined a core challenge. The first unpacked the legitimacy crisis surrounding WPS, looking at backlash, funding cuts and political resistance. The second focused on implementation: tokenism, lack of accountability and the structural barriers that still prevent women from shaping peace processes in a meaningful way. The third looked ahead, drawing lessons from diverse conflict settings and developing forward-looking recommendations on political power, security sector reform and the meaning of genuine participation.

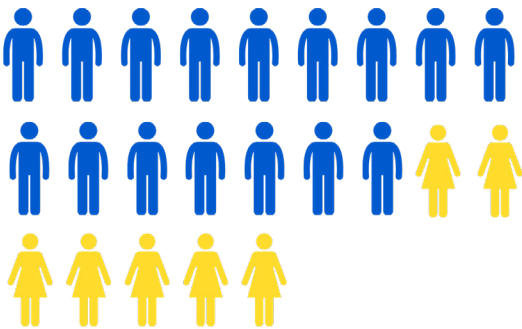
This report brings those insights together. Our recommendations have one goal: to ensure women hold real authority, not just presence, by restoring WPS to its original purpose – bringing justice, participation and accountability into processes long closed to many and making peace more representative and legitimate for all.

Women in leadership positions in peace operations

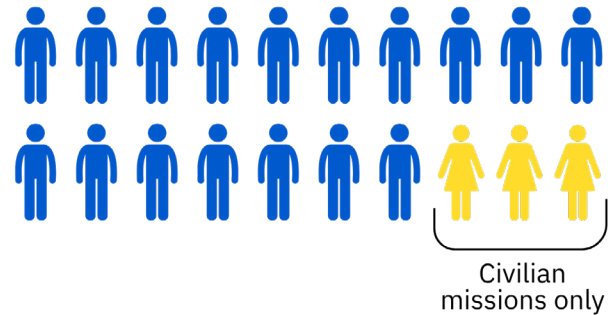
UN Peacekeeping Force Commanders



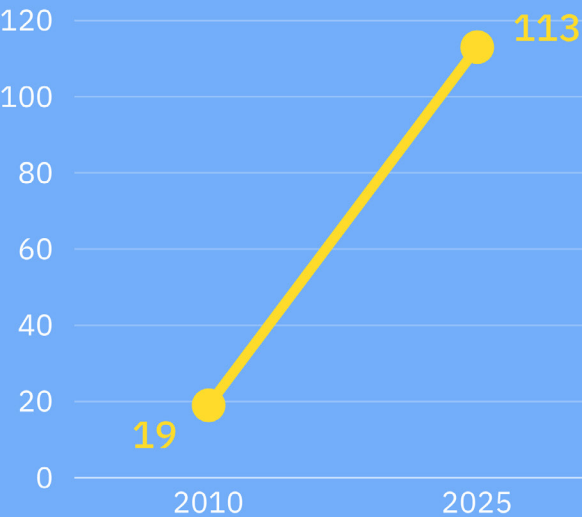
UN Peacekeeping & Special Political Missions Heads



EU Common Security & Defence Policy (CSDP) Mission and Operation Heads



The number of countries with with national action plans to implement the WPS agenda has grown significantly from 19 countries in 2010 to 113 in 2025.



Of 113 national action plans on women, peace and security, only 55% make explicit commitments to women’s participation in peace processes.



Since the UN Security Council adopted its landmark Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security in 2000, states and organisations have sought to increase women’s participation in peace operations. The agenda is built on four pillars:



Prevention

of conflict and of all forms of violence against women and girls in conflict and post-conflict settings



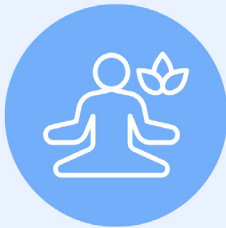
Participation

of women in peace and security decision-making at all levels, ensuring equal voice and representation



Protection

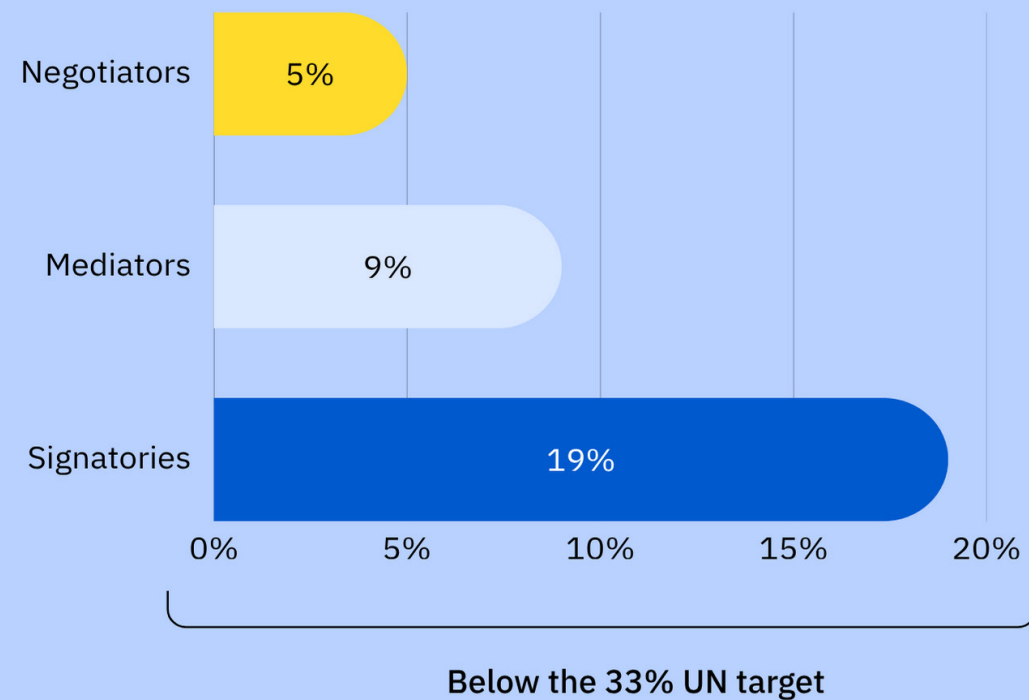
of women and girls from sexual and gender-based violence and the safeguarding of their rights in conflict situations



Relief & recovery

measures that address women’s specific needs while enabling them to act as agents of change during and after conflict

Women's participation in peace processes



Impact of foreign aid cuts

Of 411 women-led and women's rights organisations surveyed in March 2025 by UN Women:

FINANCIAL STRAIN



90%

of organisations reported financial strain

SHUT DOWN



47%

said they expected to shut down within six months if current funding levels persisted

DISMISSALS



72%

had already laid off staff

SUSPENSION



51%

had suspended programmes

Peace agreements resulting from negotiations in which women and civil society participate are:



Programmes most affected by funding cuts are those women and girls in crisis rely on most:



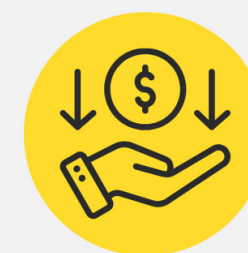
Gender-based violence response

67%



Protection

62%



Livelihoods & cash assistance

58%



Healthcare

52%

The WPS agenda under strain

The WPS agenda is facing pressures that undermine both its purpose and impact. Its legitimacy is increasingly challenged, with opponents framing gender inclusion as irrelevant or divisive. Implementation, even where formal commitments exist, too often stalls, and structural barriers persist within institutions, as women are steered into marginal roles while real decision-making remains closed. Funding for peacebuilding is chronically inadequate, with women-led organisations struggling to access even small streams of support. Geopolitical inconsistencies add to the strain, as governments champion WPS in some regions while remaining silent in others.

These dynamics are widely recognised by those working in the field. Addressing them requires more than pointing out gaps in delivery; it means understanding the political and structural forces that weaken the agenda from within. Confronting them directly is the only way to restore credibility and make WPS fit for the realities it was designed to address.

Legitimacy crisis and backlash

Resistance to the WPS agenda has intensified in recent years. Gender equality in peace and security is increasingly portrayed by some political actors as ideological, irrelevant or even harmful. Governments are less willing to prioritise gender-inclusive approaches. The shift towards tighter state control over civic participation has further narrowed the space for agendas like WPS, which rely on open dialogue, public accountability and inclusive policymaking.

The 2025 decision by the US Department of Defense to dismantle its WPS programme was a rejection of gender equality as a security priority. Elsewhere, the retreat has been quieter, with units downsized and commitments allowed to fade. Whether abrupt or discreet, the message is clear: gender inclusion can be abandoned when inconvenient.

The credibility of WPS is further eroded when it is co-opted to shore up existing structures rather than to rethink peace and security. Increasingly militarised, it is framed as a tool to improve operations or efficiency instead

of redistributing power. In this form, its core values of care, prevention and participation are stripped away, its political edge blunted. As a result, WPS risks becoming part of the very systems it was meant to transform.

Often labelled a ‘women’s concern’, WPS is kept at the periphery of serious political and security discussions. This is most visible when budget cuts and political pressure coincide: in some cases, dedicated units have been reduced or dismantled, leaving the agenda cited in documents but rarely acted on. On the other hand, its frequent framing as a Western construct overlooks the fact that the agenda was shaped by women from conflict-affected regions all over the world, whose experiences, leadership and advocacy were instrumental from the outset.

Implementation failures

More than 100 countries have adopted national action plans on WPS, yet implementation is often shallow. Many lack funding, timelines or links to broader strategies, allowing governments to claim credit without meaningful delivery.

Tracking progress is also a major weakness. Few countries have put in place robust monitoring and evaluation systems that would make it possible to assess whether stated goals are being met. Where reporting exists, it relies on activity counts rather than evidence of structural change, creating the appearance of progress while masking stagnation. More critically, there is no accountability for failure. Governments can endorse WPS

publicly yet ignore it in practice, with no binding obligations or enforcement to close the gap.

Progress too often depends on a small number of committed figures in government, civil society or international institutions. While their leadership is vital, it is also fragile. When these individuals leave, momentum often fades. With few structures to sustain or expand their work, gains are easily undone and institutional memory disappears.

Structural barriers

Even when political support exists, structural barriers continue to block meaningful change. In diplomacy, defence and security institutions, patriarchal norms remain deeply embedded. These



We’ve seen this happening for the best part of the last decade, the kind of backlash, really, against WPS. We’ve seen it in the budget cuts in the UK in the last five years, the redirection of WPS, the removal of some of the specialised units that focus on that.



Often women are brought in, really, to avoid criticism, as opposed to integrating a process from the beginning.

systems resist reform and often absorb the WPS agenda without shifting power. Women are channelled into support roles such as logistics, healthcare or communications, while decision-making and command posts remain closed. Superficial inclusion is presented as progress, but control over resources, access and agenda-setting stays untouched.

Where quotas or participation mechanisms are in place, women are often outnumbered, overburdened and excluded from informal networks where real decisions are made. When women do speak out on peace, security and governance issues, particularly those working at the grassroots level without institutional backing, they often face dismissal, intimidation or reputational attacks. Their involvement is permitted so long as it does not challenge existing power structures. In practice, participation has not led to political power, but rather carefully managed access.

Resource constraints

WPS initiatives remain significantly underfunded in comparison to conventional security measures. While military budgets rise, investment in peacebuilding has fallen, narrowing the scope for meaningful implementation.

Funding priorities are often set from the top down, privileging visibility and quick results over long-term engagement. Local women's organisations are asked to 'scale up' or 'innovate' without the core resources required to sustain basic operations. Heavy reporting demands overwhelm smaller groups, limiting their access to support and draining time from peacebuilding itself. This reinforces inequality, favouring large international NGOs over the smaller grassroots groups closest to communities.

National action plans are frequently launched without ring-fenced budgets, leaving ministries and civil society to absorb costs. This undermines

even the best-framed plans and makes it difficult to track progress or hold institutions accountable.

The lack of long-term, stable investment in gender-responsive peacebuilding also prevents scaling. Promising initiatives are too often short-lived, as funding cycles prioritise novelty over continuity. Organisations spend more time applying for survival-level funding than building alliances or shaping policy.

The current funding landscape often reinforces dependency and competition, rather than collaboration and resilience.

Insights from Debating Europe's Voices for Choices survey highlight how these budgetary imbalances are perceived by citizens themselves. Across five EU countries, men aged 18–35 placed greater emphasis on defence and technology spending, while women prioritised climate action and social policies. This divergence underscores the importance of gender-responsive budgeting: women's perspectives consistently broaden the definition of security and redirect resources towards prevention, resilience and social wellbeing.

Geopolitical inconsistencies

Perhaps one of the most serious challenges to WPS' credibility is the inconsistency with which it is applied. The same governments that champion the WPS agenda in some contexts remain silent in others, especially when strategic alliances or economic interests are at stake. This is particularly evident in Gaza where, according to UN Women, women and children bear the highest burden, comprising the majority of casualties. Yet, prominent voices – including in Europe – who are otherwise vocal on WPS-related issues have been silent on this aspect of the war in Gaza. The resulting accusations of double standards have caused rifts within a number of WPS-related organisations and raise further questions on whether the WPS agenda is fit for purpose.

Selective donor engagement reinforces these dynamics, with support concentrated in politically palatable regions while others are neglected. The result is a fragmented and politically vulnerable agenda. When WPS is used as a diplomatic tool rather than a rights-based obligation, its legitimacy erodes. Applied selectively, it risks being seen less as a universal framework and more as an instrument of convenience.

CAUTIONARY TALES: WHERE WPS FALTERS WITHOUT FOLLOW-THROUGH

The WPS agenda has shown impact when backed by consistent support, but its gains rarely last without structural reinforcement. The cases below offer a mixed record: moments of advance, instances of rollback and the lessons they leave behind.

Ukraine: resilience without power

Ukraine is cited as an example of how WPS can function during active conflict. The country has revised its National Action Plan multiple times, developed regional plans and involved women widely. The role of women in Ukraine's defence and recovery efforts continues to grow. Since the full-scale invasion in 2022, the number of women serving in the armed forces has increased by more than 20 percent, reaching approximately 70,000. Women in uniform have called for equal rights, better conditions and access to leadership. Their persistence shows how far the agenda can stretch inside institutions not built with women in mind.

But their presence has not translated into structured influence. Women hold less than a quarter of parliamentary seats and four of 21 cabinet posts. Their presence at formal peace tables is rare, and they are often absent from recovery sectors such as infrastructure or energy, where long-standing structural and cultural barriers have limited access and participation.

Ukraine's WPS work shows resilience and evolution. Though only two national action plans exist formally, they have been repeatedly adapted to respond to shifting needs. The country has learned from experience, but more progress is needed.

Libya: visible, but unprotected

Libya offers an example of the ongoing challenges involved in ensuring women's inclusion in political processes. Libyan women have faced harassment and intimidation from political and security actors. Siham Sergiwa, a female parliamentarian, was forcibly disappeared in 2019. As acting UN envoy, Stephanie Williams made female participation in the 2020-2021 UN-led dialogue process one of her priorities. The unity government subsequently appointed during that process included women in key roles such as foreign minister and justice minister. But activists complain that such inclusion did not translate into wider gains for women and the WPS agenda got little support from Williams' immediate successor. Major

decisions around security and governance often moved forward without them. The current UN envoy Hanna Tetteh has committed to ensuring a minimum 25 percent representation of women in the latest dialogue process. In addition, she plans to establish a dedicated forum – the Libyan Women Caucus – to enable women members to consult with the broader Libyan women's constituency, exchange experience and receive technical support.

Bosnia and Herzegovina: women breaking the silence

In post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina, women played a key role in breaking long-standing silences around the conflict's darker chapters. They spoke out about sexual violence, campaigned for survivors and brought attention to children born of rape – issues that had often been ignored or denied. Their work helped push for legal recognition and sparked wider public discussion about the legacy of the war. By opening up space for these difficult conversations, they helped communities begin to confront

the past and move towards healing. This example shows that meaningful peacebuilding also depends on acknowledging trauma and creating room for truth-telling, even outside formal processes.

Yemen: building peace locally

Between 2011 and 2014, the National Dialogue Conference in Yemen gave women a role in shaping constitutional reform. They brought forward priorities and proposals, but as the conflict escalated, their influence was pushed aside and external actors failed to maintain their inclusion. Since then, Yemeni women have continued peacebuilding under far more difficult conditions, mediating local ceasefires, supporting detainee release and strengthening community ties.

Alongside this work, they have developed strategic frameworks to guide inclusive peace. The Feminist Peace Roadmap, led by the Peace Track Initiative, offers a phased approach to justice, human security and participation.

Northern Ireland: inclusion without sustained support

In Northern Ireland, the Women's Coalition played a key role in securing recognition for victims' rights during the Good Friday Agreement. Their involvement ensured that issues like domestic violence, sexual abuse and economic inequality were acknowledged in a highly political peace process. However, the follow-up has fallen short. Many of the communities most affected by conflict remain locked in cycles of poverty and marginalisation. The promise of inclusion was not fully translated into long-term implementation. This case highlights that even when women shape peace agreements, their influence can fade without continued investment and attention.

A path to restoring legitimacy

The challenges facing the WPS agenda today are not reasons to retreat, they are reasons to rethink and rebuild. Drawing on the experiences of working group members from diplomacy, defence, civil society and frontline contexts, the recommendations that follow are both practical and ambitious. They build on what is already working, identify what must change and target governments, multilateral bodies, funders and decision-makers across sectors.

The aim is to renew the systems that shape peace and security, so that gender equality and inclusive participation are embedded from the outset and safeguarded over time.

Institutional transformation (not only reform)

Renewing the WPS agenda requires more than minor reforms. It calls for a deep shift in how institutions function and who they are built for.

Guarantee women's political power. Political quotas must go beyond numbers to ensure women shape decisions and control outcomes in peace and security. This principle should also be embedded at the international level, with the WPS framework moving beyond Resolution 1325 to mandate gender equality in political leadership and link participation directly to power and accountability.

Strengthen monitoring – and back it up with consequences. Monitoring and evaluation frameworks should be improved to capture the full scope of

women's contributions, recognising prevention, mediation, care and trust-building as core peace work. They must also effectively track not just how budgets are spent but where the money goes, with spending tracked by gender, geography and sector. And because reporting without consequences is toothless, the data must be made public to strengthen accountability. Institutions that fail to implement WPS must face real consequences, enforced by independent bodies with civil society oversight.

Institutionalise participation so it does not depend on individuals. Too often, progress is driven by a handful of people who are personally committed to making it happen. But when they leave, initiatives stall, structures weaken and gains are lost. Meaningful participation must be built into institutional frameworks, not left to the motivation or presence of a few.

Funding reform

The WPS agenda cannot be implemented without resources. Yet funding remains inconsistent, short-term and skewed toward international organisations. What is needed is sustained investment in the infrastructure and actors that make peace possible.

Ensure that funding is long-term, predictable and gender-responsive. Move beyond fragmented project cycles by committing to multi-year investments that enable continuity – in particular to women's organisations involved in peacebuilding, community security and crisis response. At the same time, make gender-responsive budgeting a core requirement across all levels by integrating WPS financing into national planning cycles, regional strategies and institutional budgets. Funding for women's leadership, peacebuilding and protection must be built into core financial planning.

Fund grassroots and transnational peacebuilding. Smaller organisations often lack access to donor systems, yet they carry vital community networks and knowledge. Flexible funding should support them as core actors in prevention,

mediation and recovery, while also sustaining transnational women's networks that share strategies and strengthen local impact. Resources must enable local peacebuilders to tackle both the immediate impacts of conflict and the deeper inequalities that fuel it, from exclusion and discrimination to economic marginalisation.

Challenge the rising dominance of militarised budgets. Military spending has increased steadily for over a decade and is now accelerating in response to geopolitical tensions. Redirecting even a small share of this spending towards women-led peacebuilding, prevention, and community-based recovery would significantly strengthen the capacity of WPS initiatives and support more sustainable peace outcomes.



There's something universal about this. There's something timeless about this. Whether we have the agenda on paper or not, women peacebuilders were there before 1325, they will be there long after we're gone.



We need to invest in human architecture for peace, not just military spending.

Meaningful participation strategies

Representation is not the same as power. Across every discussion, participants returned to this point: women are often present, but rarely in positions that shape outcomes.



Women who are building peace under fire deserve more than words. They deserve power, protection and a place at the table to shape the policies and to make a difference.

Ensure women's full and early participation in peace processes and national action plans.

Women must be effectively involved from the earliest stages of peacebuilding through to post-conflict governance. Selection for roles in negotiations and decision-making should be transparent, accountable and inclusive of women from diverse backgrounds. Their participation must also extend across the full spectrum of issues, from governance and economic recovery to security and the rule of law, not confined to 'soft' humanitarian matters or social reconciliation. At the same time, local women's organisations and networks must have an active role in shaping priorities, delivering activities and reviewing outcomes of national action plans.



We should look for not only WPS, but WPS plus political power for women.

Protect women peacebuilders and their visibility.

Women who step into public and political spaces face threats online and offline, often used as political tactics to silence them. Protection must reflect these realities, with digital safety, legal support and political solidarity. Institutions that promote women's visibility must also share responsibility for their safety, with collective safeguards so recognition does not come at the cost of harm or isolation.

CYBERSECURITY AND THE WPS AGENDA

Digital technologies are increasingly shaping conflict dynamics and peacebuilding efforts. Yet cybersecurity policies are rarely examined through a WPS lens. This gap leaves women, girls and marginalised groups more exposed to online harms, while their voices remain underrepresented in digital governance. Insights from Debating Europe's Voices for Choices survey confirm this: young women across Europe reported feeling significantly more unsafe online than men, with many describing harassment, disinformation and sexualised threats as routine risks.

To ensure that peace and security frameworks reflect today's realities:

Make women part of cybersecurity decision-making

Women's leadership and participation must be built into the design, governance and enforcement of cybersecurity systems. This means ensuring representation in policy-making bodies, consulting women's groups and digital rights actors, and collecting gender-disaggregated data to inform decisions.

Prevent gender-based online harms

Conflict-sensitive cybersecurity strategies should address online harassment, disinformation and cyber-enabled gender-based violence. Governments and platforms must strengthen early warning and response systems, improve digital literacy and put safeguards in place against the misuse of technology for surveillance and repression.

Protect digital rights in line with human rights standards

Protection mechanisms that apply offline need to be extended online. This includes legal accountability for cyber-harassment and cybercrime, survivor-centred investigation methods, secure handling of personal data and clear obligations for digital companies to remove harmful content and protect users.

Use technology for survivor-centred recovery

In post-conflict or crisis contexts, technology can help sustain peacebuilding if used responsibly. Relief and recovery efforts should include robust disaster recovery plans for cyberattacks, ensure that organisations supporting survivors can continue their work, and guarantee that digital tools strengthen – rather than undermine – security and social cohesion.

Use emerging gaps in military systems to advance equality.

Recruitment shortages and shifting security challenges are opening space for change. Women's contributions to intelligence, early warning and preventive diplomacy are increasingly recognised as strategic. This moment should be used to reform security structures from within.

Integrate gender into military doctrines and operations.

Go beyond training by embedding gender perspectives in strategies, operations and peacekeeping mandates, rewriting doctrines rather than adding them on.

Guarantee women's participation as political power.

Women should contribute to shaping decisions, controlling resources and setting the terms of peace before, during and after negotiations – not just be present in the room. This requires women to hold roles in parliaments, ministries and local councils, embedding influence across institutions. States and international actors must apply sustained diplomatic pressure to ensure women's inclusion in negotiating teams, backed by advocacy, engagement and monitoring so commitments lead to real power.

Localisation and contextualisation

No peace process can be meaningful if it speaks over the people it claims to serve. One of the strongest insights from the working group discussions was that strategies built far from the conflict zone rarely hold.

Root peace strategies in local experience and language.

WPS must be shaped by those already preventing, responding to and recovering from conflict, with approaches grounded in local priorities and ways of speaking about power, justice and care. Engaging with community leaders, including those initially resistant to change, is essential. Without this cultural fluency, initiatives risk alienating communities and will likely fail.



To localise was one of the really good methods that we worked on.

Create inclusive spaces for dialogue.

Peacebuilding does not require full agreement, but it does require spaces where people can listen, challenge each other and reflect without being forced into rigid positions. In many communities, tensions around gender roles and rights run deep, while political debate is shaped by speed, confrontation and pressure to dominate. Women are often spoken over or pushed to adopt combative styles to be heard. Low-barrier, community-based dialogue and inclusive political forums can counter these dynamics by building trust, allowing space for disagreement and rooting gender equality in local context rather than imposing it from outside.

INTERSECTIONALITY IN THE WPS AGENDA

The WPS agenda will not deliver unless it takes intersectionality seriously. Gender never stands alone: it intersects with race, class, disability, sexuality and other identities that shape how conflict is experienced. Yet policies often treat these issues separately.

Women with disabilities are one example. They are largely invisible in WPS frameworks, while disability-focused approaches rarely address gender. They face heightened risks of conflict-related sexual violence and are frequently excluded from peace negotiations, disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration programmes. War itself is disabling, which means their numbers grow in every conflict. Without targeted measures, women with disabilities risk returning to their communities even more marginalised. Yet many also act as peacebuilders – organisers, mediators and leaders who strengthen resilience and recovery.

National action plans too often fail to reflect this diversity. A lack of sex-, age- and disability-disaggregated data limits understanding, while drafting processes rarely include indigenous leaders, disabled activists or LGBTQI+ voices. Militaries also need more than

gender-sensitivity training: personnel should be equipped with intersectional analysis to address these overlapping realities in practice.

The European Union is well placed to lead by example. As one of the world's largest humanitarian donors and a key actor in international peace and security, it has both the reach and the responsibility to set global standards. Its Disability Strategy 2021–2030 and Gender Action Plan III already mandate an intersectional approach. Building on this, EU-funded programmes should adopt a twin-track model: mainstreaming gender and disability across all actions while also creating targeted measures to dismantle barriers for women and girls with disabilities.

Ultimately, women with disabilities must be seen not only as people to protect, but as central actors in building peace. The EU and its member states – many of them UN Security Council members – can press this shift globally, turning intersectionality from principle into standard.

Conclusion: sustaining momentum through transformation

Redefining security

Security was one of the most contested terms in every discussion. Participants stressed that for the WPS agenda to stay relevant, its understanding of security must shift. What makes people feel safe is not simply military strength or state control, but access to justice, community resilience, protection from violence, and the ability to live with dignity. Yet these priorities are often sidelined as funding and attention flow to militarised approaches.

Redefine security beyond the military. Security policy must shift from armed strength and reactive force towards prevention, resilience and dignity. Expanding defence budgets while neglecting peacebuilding sends the wrong message. At the same time, WPS should not be narrowed to counting women in uniform; addressing discrimination in security institutions matters,

but real progress comes from transforming the conditions that fuel violence and exclusion.

Acknowledge the strategic value of women's contributions to intelligence and early warning. In many contexts women are able to access communities, information and networks that remain closed to other actors, allowing them to spot threats early and help defuse tensions before they escalate. Their ability to build trust and gather insights from diverse sources strengthens both intelligence and community relations.

Make community wellbeing and human dignity central to security. Peace is not just the absence of violence; it is the presence of trust, services and stability. Real safety comes from conditions that allow people to live with confidence, opportunity and agency.

CLIMATE AND THE WPS AGENDA

The WPS agenda cannot ignore the climate crisis. Environmental shocks now drive conflict risks through resource scarcity, displacement and social unrest and their effects fall unevenly. Women and marginalised groups often face the sharpest impacts, from increased gender-based violence and loss of income to heavier unpaid work and disrupted education.

These risks echo the gendered harms seen in armed conflict, but they also open space for solutions. When women lead climate adaptation and resource management, communities are better prepared, less vulnerable to instability and more resilient. Linking climate action to WPS priorities can multiply benefits for peace, equality and sustainability.

Making climate security a core part of WPS strategies and embedding intersectional analysis in all responses can transform how we address both environmental and security challenges, preventing crises before they escalate and building peace that lasts.

The WPS agenda is being tested. Institutional commitments are under pressure, peacebuilding is increasingly sidelined by militarised responses and, in many contexts, women's participation is still treated as symbolic. But this moment also offers a chance to reshape what the agenda could become. Revisiting WPS now could allow governments and institutions to correct course, reinforce commitments and move closer to what the agenda was meant to deliver.

Institutions are entering a period of adjustment, marked by shifting security strategies, growing recognition of climate and digital threats and a rethinking of diplomatic approaches. This recalibration opens the possibility of embedding WPS principles from the outset, rather than adding them as afterthoughts or symbolic moves.

What has emerged from this process is a picture of resilience. Women peacebuilders continue to lead, adapt and connect across borders, despite political resistance and uneven support. The growing body of good practices shows how inclusion, prevention and justice can be translated into action. These are methods that can be used, scaled

and embedded across systems. What is needed now is sustained support and serious political will to implement what works.

31 October 2025 marks the 25th anniversary of Resolution 1325. A quarter of a century later, now is the moment to reaffirm its original purpose and bring it closer to the centre of today's policy and security debates. WPS was never meant to be a narrow gender equality exercise, but a human security initiative, focused on creating the conditions for peace through participation, justice and long-term accountability. At its core, it was designed to reimagine institutions, to build more inclusive and fair approaches to conflict and recovery. Advancing this vision means shifting from reactive defence to proactive transformation, where leadership is shared and decision-making is shaped by those closest to the impact of violence. Participants throughout this project showed what that looks like. Their approach to hope is practical and grounded in action. It is a method for change, rooted in collective strategy and lived experience and we hope it will continue to shape the future of this agenda.

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