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# Emerging trends within the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda

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## About this report

The K4D Emerging Issues report series highlights research and emerging evidence to policy-makers to help inform policies that are more resilient. K4D staff researchers work with thematic experts and the UK Government's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) to identify where new or emerging research can inform and influence policy.

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## List of abbreviations

### Abbreviations

<b>AI</b>	Artificial intelligence
<b>ICT</b>	Information and communication technologies
<b>NAP</b>	National Action Plan
<b>PMSC</b>	Private military and security contractors
<b>POC</b>	Protection of civilians
<b>SGBV</b>	Sexual- and gender-based violence
<b>SOC</b>	Serious and organised crime
<b>UNSCR</b>	United Nations Security Council Resolution
<b>WPS</b>	Women, peace and security

# 1. Overview

**This report has identified emerging issues within the women, peace and security (WPS) agenda. Climate change has long been identified as a key cross-cutting issue and several potential avenues for WPS policy are identified. Other issues such as artificial intelligence (AI) have been highlighted as potentially relevant, but relatively little discussed with respect to WPS.**

The WPS agenda focuses on addressing the gendered impact of conflict and seeking to prevent conflict through increased women's participation. In this report, WPS is understood as a body of UN Security Council resolutions (UNSCRs) and state national action plans (NAPs) labelled as WPS; as well as other UN and state policies using the language and ideas of WPS; and actions and ideas produced by civil society and academics inspired by the United Nations (UN) agenda or sharing ideas with it.

The report focuses on new and emerging issues identified by academics and policymakers as relevant to the WPS agenda. Emerging trends and issues are broadly understood as:

- Parts of the WPS agenda that are increasingly part of policies formulated by the UN, member states or civil society actors.
- Parts of the WPS agenda that scholars or policymakers think have been neglected or not implemented sufficiently.
- Re-interpretations of the framing of the WPS agenda.
- New areas to which it is argued WPS should be applied.
- Parallel international policy agendas with conceptual or legislative overlap with WPS.

Emerging trends and issues are discussed with reference to their status in policy and implementation; normative debates about their place in the WPS agenda; and evidence on their implications for and applicability to certain contexts. The report does not seek to predict or assess the future trends or their relative importance, beyond highlighted existing interpretations of their status, implementation and potential implications.

The report discusses a variety of emerging issues. These include issues where the WPS agenda has already been applied, but where its implementation –or lack thereof – has been criticised, such as in counterterrorism and arms control, or the conceptualisation of gender. The ability of WPS instruments to address changing forms of conflict has also been criticised. Issues to which it is argued that WPS should, and could, be applied more thoroughly, such as gang violence and trafficking, are discussed. The report includes new fields such as cybersecurity and AI, about which there is relatively little literature linked to WPS, but agreement that it may be relevant.

## 2. Definitions

The women, peace and security (WPS) agenda is ‘the most significant collective effort to reform international security practices in accordance with feminist principles, broadly understood’. It seeks to address the ‘causes, character and resolution’ of war and conflict (Kirby and Shepherd 2021a: 1). It addresses the gendered impacts and causes of war, and proposes more consideration and mitigation of these effects, as well as more female participation in decision-making, as ways to address them. WPS is therefore a highly ambitious and wide-ranging agenda.

WPS includes efforts to use gendered approaches to prevent conflict, recognition that the effects of conflict are gendered, and measures to prevent or mitigate these effects. It is commonly conceptualised as four pillars:

- Participation: ensuring the representation of women at all levels of decision-making.
- Protection: protecting women and girls from attacks, including sexual- and gender-based violence.
- Prevention: using a gender perspective and women’s participation to prevent conflict and address the root causes of conflict.
- Relief and recovery: providing access to appropriate services for recovery and reconstruction.

UNSCR 1325 (2000) is often taken as the starting point of the WPS agenda. A number of later resolutions elaborated on the WPS agenda (Shepherd 2019),<sup>1</sup> which has since been integrated into NAPs by individual states (Hamilton, Naam and Shepherd 2020).<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that many emergent themes are developed in NAPs before they are seen in UNSCRs (Myrtilinen and Wright 2020). The WPS agenda at the UN has broadened in recent years (Hamilton *et al.* 2020: 12). However, Russia and China have objected to some of the new aspects of WPS and abstained on UNSCR 2467, while the US has opposed measures on sexual and reproductive health (*ibid.*). While the WPS agenda has been well established over the past 20 years, there is evidence that some states are seeking to dilute or undermine it.<sup>3</sup>

**The following UNSCRs on WPS have been passed:**<sup>4</sup> UNSCR 1325 (2000); UNSCR 1820 (2008); UNSCR 1888 (2009a); UNSCR 1889 (2009b); UNSCR 1960 (2010); UNSCR 2106 (2013a); UNSCR 2122 (2013b); UNSCR 2242 (2015); UNSCR 2467 (2019a) (the first not agreed unanimously, with abstentions from Russia and China); and UNSCR 2493 (2019b). There are also several UN resolutions that address the same issues but do not carry the WPS label, such as UNSCR 2272 on sexual exploitation and UNSCR 2331 on trafficking (P. Kirby, personal communication, 2022).

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<sup>1</sup> See next section for a list of UN resolutions related to WPS.

<sup>2</sup> A database of national action plans: <https://www.wpsnaps.org>

<sup>3</sup> Russia drafted a resolution in 2020 that was seen as an attempt to ‘dilute’ the WPS agenda: <https://www.womenpeacesecurity.org/blog-unsc-protect-wps-agenda-20th-anniversary/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.peacewomen.org/security-council/WPS-in-SC-Council>

It is important to note that the WPS agenda works through a wide variety of instruments and institutions beyond the UN and the state (Kirby and Shepherd 2021a: 7): 'protocols, policies, guidelines, advocacy campaigns, manifestos, offices, bureaucrats, networks, movements, institutions, training manuals, government ministries, communities, and individual citizens and subjects'. It can be discerned in state action (sanctions), domestic politics, reform of institutions and other examples. There is WPS practice that is not part of policy documents; and there are WPS policies that have not been enacted. Indeed, the WPS agenda is commonly understood as a set of norms (*ibid.*). Given the diversity of norms within the WPS agenda, they may sometimes be contradictory (e.g. increased proportions of women in militaries and diplomatic missions may contradict conceptions of WPS that see militarism as a cause of conflict that should be addressed by the WPS agenda). Some are procedural, others substantive; and they can be undertaken by both 'security' and 'peace' actors with sometimes conflicting underlying goals (*ibid.*). This review focuses on policy but includes evidence from practice where relevant.

While UNSCRs and subsequent state NAPs are often seen as central drivers of the WPS agenda, many point to alternative sources of policy and ideas. According to scholars, it is commonly assumed that actors in the global North drive the diffusion of WPS norms (Newby and O'Malley 2021). This view neglects the actions of actors in the global South and presents WPS as a Western agenda potentially at odds with values in the global South (*ibid.*: 7). In fact, most WPS activity occurs in civil society (*ibid.*). In terms of implementation, statist approaches can be inadequate where social norms place further restrictions on women (*ibid.*).

The WPS agenda comprises 'a broad-ranging set of ambitions' (McLeod 2021: 1), which can therefore be difficult to measure. The UN has 26 WPS indicators (*ibid.*: 4). Outside of the UN, the Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security (GIWPS)'s WPS Index provides data on inclusion, security and justice in 170 countries.<sup>5</sup> Such indicators have drawn criticism; namely, that they focus on descriptive rather than substantive representation. For example, they might count the numbers of women representatives in peace processes, but not assess their contributions. However, such indicators can be used to measure and compare progress, and can create accountability. The UN indicators have had positive effects, such as leading agencies to make gender advisors more senior. McLeod (*ibid.*) argues that they are good for 'goals that can be more effectively captured within the constraints of technocratic processes'. More broadly, there are data gaps on many aspects of women's security (data2x 2019).

In the broadest terms, there are several main criticisms of the WPS agenda. As general criticisms, they do not apply to every WPS policy or instrument but have nevertheless been identified as potential shortcomings:

- Many critics point to the weakness of the use of the category 'women' rather than 'gender'. While conflict clearly affects women and girls disproportionately, some WPS actors have used a gender lens to show how gendered inequalities affect other

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<sup>5</sup> <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/the-index/>



people, such as men and boys; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex (LGBTQI+) people; or intersections of other identities.

- The focus on women can also have the effect of essentialising them – often as victims – and neglecting the structural causes of inequality.
- It 'focuses on a narrow conception of security concerned with armed conflict, which therefore does not include the structural inequalities leading to particular vulnerabilities, other forms of violence such as crime or new forms such as cyber-attacks.
- In practice, it focuses on justice for victims of sexual violence and neglects other issues.
- Many scholars argue that there has been a limited uptake of the participation norm (Newby and O'Malley 2021) and that implementation overall is weak.

### Overview of new and emerging issues

Kirby and Shepherd (2021) have mapped the 'ecology' of WPS policy. The new issues that they have found in policy documents from 2010 onwards include: refugees/internally displaced persons (IDPs), terrorism, trafficking, transitional justice and climate change.

An Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe report identifies several new and emerging themes within the WPS agenda (Myrtilinen and Wright 2020). One theme integrated into the agenda is trafficking of persons (UNSCR 2467). New threats to peace have been highlighted by UNSCR 2242 (2015): rising violent extremism, terrorism, forced displacement, the impact of climate change and health pandemics. Analysis of themes identified in NAPs shows the following new and emerging issues: asylum seekers, refugees and IDPs; climate change or environmental degradation; disasters; violent extremism or terrorism; the inclusion of men and boys in the WPS agenda; reproductive rights or health care; and trafficking in persons. In addition, the NAP of Bosnia and Herzegovina mentions landmines, and those of Finland and Bosnia and Herzegovina mention small arms and light weapons. Emergent framings of WPS focus on structural gender inequalities, such as social norms and care burdens, which many feminist analyses of WPS discuss.

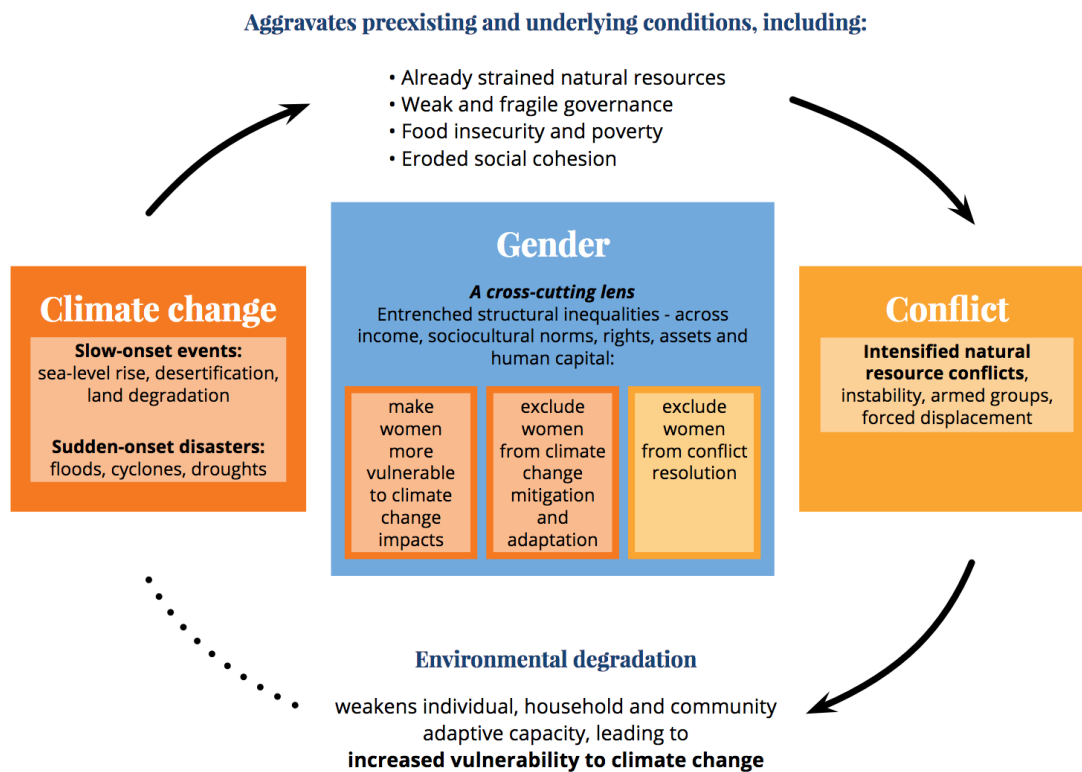
An analysis of NAPs conducted by the London School of Economics and the University of Sydney identifies nine new or emerging issues (Hamilton *et al.* 2020: 11): terrorism/extremism/radicalisation; arms trade/small arms/light weapons; transitional justice, reconciliation, reparations; trafficking; reproductive; LGBTQI+; disasters; and asylum seekers/refugees/displaced persons.

### 3. Emerging trends

#### Climate insecurity

Climate change is a significant emerging theme within WPS, receiving significant academic and policy attention. Climate change is seen as a ‘threat multiplier’ with gendered dimensions (UN Women and UNEP 2020). Climate change can worsen economic conditions and increase social and political tensions, especially in unstable or fragile contexts. Smith, Olosky and Fernández (2021) describe a climate-gender-conflict nexus, whereby climate change aggravates strained socioeconomic conditions, increasing the chance of conflict. Conflict causes more environmental degradation, and weakens resilience to climatic stresses and conflict (*ibid.*).

**Figure 1: The gender-climate-conflict nexus**



Source: Smith et al. *'The Climate-Gender-Conflict Nexus'*. Georgetown. (2021: 6). Reproduced with permission.

In some cases, violence can centre on competition for natural resources (*ibid.*: 9). This may become more frequent because of climate change. In other cases, climatic stressors can weaken social and political cohesion. Climatic stresses and conflict are likely to have gendered effects, often because of women’s pre-existing vulnerabilities in a range of contexts, stemming from gendered inequalities (Mawby and Applebaum 2020). Migration is often a consequence of climate change and is shaped by gender. The UN states that ‘gender roles, relations, norms and expectations significantly affect women’s and men’s decisions to migrate, and their experiences of migration in the context of climate change’ (UN Women and UNEP 2020: 19).

## **Climate-conflict risks for women (protection, prevention and reconstruction)**

### **Opportunities/participation**

In many contexts, women have different adaptive capabilities, shaped by a gendered distribution of resources. For example, 'in developing contexts, women's limited wealth and social capital inhibits their ability and autonomy to proactively and willingly flee high-risk areas' (Smith *et al.* 2021: 7). They are therefore less able to benefit from the possibility of wage labour in other contexts. As it is usually men who migrate, women consequently take on other roles in the home. If women migrate, or move further from the home to collect resources, they are often at risk of attack.

There is a significant gap between women's work on the land and their voice in decision-making. A lack of land ownership means women are often left out of discussions on land issues and environmental governance processes (Kezie-Nwoha *et al.* 2021: 8; see also Smith *et al.* 2021). In rural areas of developing countries, women are often gatherers of natural resources but lack equal ownership rights.

Institutions and structures to adapt to climatic and conflict-related stresses are often gendered. Men often dominate natural resource-management systems, whether customary or statutory (Smith *et al.* 2021: 10). Climate-related security risks may also provide new ways for women to work in peacebuilding and the governance of natural resources. Greater female responsibility for livelihoods may lead to more female involvement in leadership and governance roles (UN Women and UNEP 2020: 17–20). Indeed, 'women play a critical role in their local communities as they mobilize to adapt to climate change and preserve natural resources' (Smith *et al.* 2021: 9). Women's participation in such leadership and governance roles has been shown to lead to good conservation outcomes (citing the World Bank and others).

### **Socioeconomic**

Underlying inequalities between men and women mean that climate and conflict events have different effects on women, and women have different means to respond to them. It is well documented that women tend to have less wealth and land rights; and are often restricted by gender norms and customary and legal rules (Smith *et al.* 2021: 6). For instance, 'in Guinea, women comprise over half of all agricultural workers, but just over five percent of agricultural landholders' (*ibid.*: 7). Moreover, women usually have a much greater burden of care than men, which can increase further in times of scarcity or conflict (*ibid.*: 6).

### **Protection risks**

UN Women and UNEP (2020: 17–20) outline several climate-related security risks. In general terms, the social, economic and political pressures brought by environmental change can 'undermine relationships, social cohesion and peace and security'. Fragile or conflict-affected states are less able to absorb these shocks. Climate-related security risks impact different groups differently, related to existing social structures: social roles, livelihoods, land ownership, legal rights, access to resources, social networks and other factors (*ibid.*: 17–20).

Adaptations may be shaped by gender roles and have gendered consequences. For example, men may be expected to be breadwinners and therefore to migrate for work and face related dangers. Women left behind may have to generate income and care for dependents, and may be exposed to new risks in undertaking tasks such as collecting water or fuel (*ibid.*: 17–20); ‘the prevalence and risk of sexual violence was raised as women had to travel longer distances in search of water and food and that changes in weather affecting crops had led to conflict within communities and households’ (Kezie-Nwoha *et al.* 2021: 8).

In situations of forced displacement, women face different risks and consequences. Women experience migration – driven by conflict or climate – differently. They are more likely to be subject to violence, lack support systems and not be involved in decision-making (*ibid.*: 9). Moreover, ‘women displaced by disasters face an increased risk of gender-based violence and have less access to relief resources. Furthermore, it is well established that refugee girls are half as likely to be in school as refugee boys’ (Smith *et al.* 2021: 8).

As an example, in northeastern Nigeria, climate change has put livelihoods under stress, which can have gendered consequences. Norms of masculinity and femininity can lead to particular forms of conflict, such as ‘conflict between young male pastoralists and women in farming communities’, with pastoralists more likely to enter someone else’s farmland if a woman is present. Climate change also contributes to the development of armed opposition groups in the region, whose recruitment, voluntary and involuntary, is gendered (UN Women and UNEP 2020: 28).

According to recent analysis of the place of climate change in the WPS agenda, women climate migrants ‘fall through the gap that exists between international law and agreements related to gender, those that address the environment and climate change, and those dealing with migration’ (Mawby and Applebaum 2020: 213). The WPS framework is a potentially effective way to address the issue, because it can integrate gender and security (*ibid.*).

## **Policy**

Climate change is only part of the WPS agenda to a limited extent. Scholars point to ‘a gap in relation to the intersection of gender, peace and the environment in practice and in policy’ (Kezie-Nwoha *et al.* 2021: 7). There is also a ‘lack of mechanisms to ensure women and girls’ participation and leadership in environmental governance, climate policy and peace processes’ (*ibid.*: 7). It has been shown that ‘progress in recognizing and responding to climate change as a security issue has thus far been minimal’ (Smith *et al.* 2021: 2). Climate change received a ‘ cursory mention’ in UNSCR 2242 (2015). The resolution ‘related climate change to global health pandemics, increasing numbers of refugees and internally displaced people, and the rise of violent extremism as factors that were changing the global landscape of peace and security’ (Smith *et al.* 2021: 5; see also: Csevár 2021; Yoshida and Céspedes-Báez 2021). Only a small number of NAPs make direct reference to climate change, or have goals or actions referring to climate change. Recent research on NAPs for the implementation of UNSCR 1325 finds that 17 out of 80 discuss climate change. This includes ‘six that acknowledged climate-related risks in discussions about their country’s respective peace and security contexts and needs’ (UN Women and UNEP 2020: 21). Finland, Ireland and the US have specific goals (Smith *et al.* 2021). According to UN Women

and UNEP (*ibid.*), 'gender dynamics are still poorly understood at the international level and are generally lacking in climate-security policy-making and practice to date' (*ibid.*: 10).

Resolutions addressing the link between the environment and conflict are largely gender-blind (Csevár 2021). The WPS framework does not make explicit reference to indigenous women, who are often greatly affected by climate issues (*ibid.*). Environmental peacebuilding is a growing field at the UN, with resolutions recognising climate, resource disputes and conflict. UNSCRs 2242 and 2467 highlight the link between conflict and gender, but it is argued that they do not consider environmental factors a significant driver of conflict (*ibid.*). The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) discusses the relationship between the environment and gender-based violence, but the UN Security Council does not address this. Several contexts have sought to include indigenous women, who have participated in truth commissions and received reparations for conflict-related attacks, and court judgements have acknowledged the targeting of indigenous communities in some contexts (UN WOMEN 2016).

UN Women has identified four UN policy frameworks that include opportunities for integrated action on gender, climate and security (UN Women and UNEP 2020: 46). These are: WPS; sustaining peace; climate change (UNFCCC) and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Environmental peacebuilding understands the links between gender, environment and conflict more broadly than WPS. The WPS agenda is separate from the practice of environmental peacebuilding, despite recognition that climate can lead to insecurity (Kezie-Nwoha *et al.* 2021; Yoshida and Céspedes-Báez, 2021). Yoshida and Céspedes-Báez (*ibid.*) call for greater integration of environmental peacebuilding within the WPS agenda. Whereas WPS focuses on women in natural resource management, environmental peacebuilding is a broader field that also considers 'how the environment relates to conflict prevention, climate security, disaster risk reduction and post-disaster reduction, and peacebuilding efforts between communities'. They argue that WPS can have a narrow legal focus that 'eclipses broader consideration of the ecological and environmental violence that affects women's livelihoods' (*ibid.*). In particular, the 'relief and recovery' pillar of WPS often focuses on survivors of sexual violence and should instead seek to intervene in structural social and economic inequalities.

In Colombia, violence between state and paramilitary forces often had both environmental and gender dimensions (*ibid.*). Despite not having a NAP, Colombia's 2016 peace agreement included significant gender dimensions surrounding women who had borne arms, displacement and, in particular, sexual violence. The peace agreement also included the environment but did not link this with gender. Nevertheless, 'women in these circumstances become more vulnerable to gender-based violence, labour exploitation and impoverishment' (*ibid.*: 26). For example, there was violence against human rights defenders and environmental rights defenders. Justice should therefore address 'spiritual and ecological violence carried out on land, and their significant impacts on livelihoods, on ways of being and living' (*ibid.*: 31).

The preliminary decision of the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP) on Katsa Su – a part of Colombia populated by Awa indigenous people – recognised that in Awa cosmology women

have a particular relationship with the land. Although the final judgement has not been made yet, Yoshida and Cespedes-Báez (*ibid.*) argue that this provides a ‘possible opening’ for consideration of intersections of environmental and gender justice.

**Examples of gendered risks not fully addressed by the WPS agenda** also include ‘corporate activity, such as mining, [which] creates insecure environments, with reports of an increase in sexual and gender-based violence and trafficking in women and girls’ (Kezie-Nwoha *et al.* 2021: 9). Environmental and land activists defending land from environmental degradation are also attacked and killed (*ibid.*: 9).

## Cybersecurity

Cybersecurity is a broad field that includes both security issues between citizens (e.g. online harassment) and issues more directly linked to conflict, such as radicalisation, campaigns against minorities<sup>6</sup> and disinformation. Misinformation is defined as ‘false information that is spread by individuals who believe the information to be true or who have not taken the time to verify it’, while disinformation is ‘false information that is fabricated or disseminated with malicious intent’ (for these definitions and related terms, see: ICRC, 2021: 18-19).

Cyber-harassment between citizens has been identified as an issue outside of conflict settings. Findings from a range of contexts show the gendered effects of cyber-attacks. Evidence from the European Union (EU) shows that cyber-violence is more likely to affect women and girls. Examples of cyber-violence include: cyber-stalking; non-consensual pornography (or ‘revenge porn’); gender-based slurs and harassment; ‘slut shaming’;<sup>7</sup> unsolicited pornography; ‘sextortion’<sup>8</sup>; rape and death threats; and electronically enabled trafficking (Guerrina and Wright 2020). Malicious information spread via the internet can be difficult to regulate because users can migrate to unregulated platforms (Sharland *et al.* 2021: 29).

In conflict settings, cyber-attacks pose various threats to civilians. They can also lead to radicalisation. Cyberspace can create threats for marginalised groups in fragile and conflict-affected countries by spreading mis- and disinformation (Mhajne, K.C. and Whetstone 2021). Cyberspace can be used to recruit women and girls into extremist groups (*ibid.*). However, a 2018 report by the International Committee of the Red Cross on the effects of cyber-war on civilians does not mention gender or women and instead focuses on civilians (Gisel and Olejnik 2018).

**Cybersecurity and cyber-threats have not been comprehensively examined as part of the WPS agenda** (Sharland *et al.* 2021). Mhajne *et al.* (2021) point to the ‘need for finding an international legal framework to regulate and address the insecurities that women, girls, and other marginalised groups face in the cyber realm’ (*ibid.*: 2). According to this view, WPS should grow to include cybersecurity. Women’s participation in cybersecurity is mentioned in Denmark’s 2020 NAP, Ireland’s 2019 NAP and NATO’s 2018 ‘WPS Policy and

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<sup>6</sup> For example, the use of websites to incite violence against ethnic Rohingyas in Myanmar: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-46105934>

<sup>7</sup> Expressions attacking women’s reputations based on gendered views about the value of chastity

<sup>8</sup> Sexualised extortion



Action Plan', which states that it will use gender perspectives in its cybersecurity work (P. Kirby, personal communication, 2022).

A recent UN Institute for Disarmament Research report identifies six priority areas (Sharland *et al.* 2021):

### **Women's participation in cybersecurity negotiations**

Limited female participation is one of the most commonly identified issues. Women are underrepresented in task forces on cybersecurity. They can help to provide a diversity of perspectives and identify female cybersecurity needs. However, measured by levels of gender representation on different committees there has been limited progress (*ibid.*: 21–23).

### **Cyber-violence against women and girls**

Online abuse has been disproportionately targeted at women. Online methods are also used to coordinate 'real world' harassment and attacks, such as 'incel' shootings.<sup>9</sup> The internet and 'dark web' may also be used to organise crimes such as human trafficking, sexual abuse and sexual exploitation. Cyber-violence can take the form of hacking, impersonation, surveillance, harassment, recruitment and malicious distribution of information.

The WPS agenda should include protecting women from online abuse. Digital information and communication technologies (ICTs) can help share information about threats to women's security, but can also be used to generate other types of threat.

### **Online harassment and women's participation in political processes**

The 'digital divide' in access to the internet is gendered and can limit women's involvement in various political processes. ICTs also facilitate abuse and harassment of female participants in politics. Disinformation campaigns, aided by algorithms, can undermine female politicians' credibility. Digital forgeries of visual or audio content, known as 'deepfakes', are one form of disinformation that have been deployed against women.

### **Gender and online radicalisation**

Extremist groups have spread gendered ideas that undermine women's rights. These include misogynistic ideas for men, and the recruitment of women into groups such as ISIS. More research is needed on gendered engagement with online extremist platforms. Both state and non-state groups have used the internet in campaigns to spread disinformation or incite hatred and violence.

### **Gendered impacts of cyber-incidents**

Cyber-incidents can affect men and women differently. For example, women who use the internet to help keep themselves safe will experience a cyber-attack that prevents access to the internet differently to men. Sharland *et al.* (2021) also give the example of a cyber-attack

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<sup>9</sup> Incel refers to men who define themselves as 'involuntary celibates' and often express misogynistic views.

that published health records in Brazil, which included abortion records, potentially exposing women to threats from anti-abortion activists and laws.

**Gender bias in digital technologies** is also identified by Sharland et al. (2021). It is discussed here under the separate heading of artificial intelligence (below).

## Artificial intelligence

**Research has shown that algorithms can include many biases.** Algorithms are used to identify threats, but they can be shaped by gender biases:

threat models, reporting and user-control procedures, and advertising of cybersecurity technologies mean that women are more likely to have cybersecurity threats downplayed or omitted, more likely to have additional security burdens, and more likely to be affected by disingenuous cybersecurity marketing (Sharland *et al.* 2021: 31).

Biases in AI may be exacerbated because data gaps on women's security are widespread (data2x 2019). Areas where data are lacking include: war-related mortality and morbidity; forcible displacement; conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV); women's participation in peace and security processes; safety in public spaces and on transit; violence against children; and human trafficking (*ibid.*).

### **There is limited information on the gendered effects of AI in conflict situations.**

However, findings from various fields show that AI often reflects social biases, meaning its use may disadvantage certain groups. It is widely acknowledged that algorithms used in everyday commerce, security and government are often biased along gender and other lines, reflecting many social biases. Given this, the dangers of autonomous weapons systems may fall particularly on certain groups (Sharkey 2018). When autonomous weapons systems use AI to select targets in conflict, current evidence suggests that hidden biases in the algorithms they use will lead to high levels of misidentification (*ibid.*). The decision-making processes of algorithms are often opaque, which means that 'we cannot tell what features are responsible for classifying a person or object as a legitimate target' (*ibid.*).

None of the UNSCRs on WPS mention digital or internet technologies. They have only occasionally been mentioned in open discussion. They are mentioned more often in annual WPS reports submitted to the UN Secretary-General (*ibid.*: 13). UN General Assembly committees on cybersecurity did not mention gender until an open-ended working group report in 2019. A working paper 'proposed that gender equality and the meaningful participation of women should be at the centre of international peace and security in cyberspace' (*ibid.*: 17). But no consensus was reached and the final report omitted certain issues.

## Types of conflict

Mary Kaldor's 'new wars' concept describes wars driven by a logic where parties have more to gain by continuing violence, often characterised by simultaneous local and transnational



disputes, conflicts over identity, predatory political economy and attacks on civilians (Chinkin, Kaldor and Yadav 2020). It is argued that such conflicts increasingly predominate. WPS resolutions at the UN 'tacitly recognise' the importance of non-state actors and the prevalence of attacks on civilians in many conflicts today (*ibid.*: 3).

However, the literature shows the WPS agenda is better equipped to deal with some forms of conflict than others (Hamilton *et al.* 2020: 12). In particular, UN Security Council measures focus on international and non-international armed conflicts, and sexual violence as a weapon of war. The language of gender is common in UNSCRs, but 'coercive enforcement of protection is uneven' across different types of threat (Hultman and Muvumba Sellström 2019: 603).

It is argued that the UN Security Council focuses on state and intrastate conflicts, and tends not to address more localised violence such as that targeting indigenous women (Csevár 2021). The Security Council is unlikely to address violence outside of international or non-international armed conflicts, such as instances of violence against indigenous women over natural resources. Attacks against indigenous women are increasing. They are often motivated by a desire to exploit natural resources on land claimed by both indigenous groups and states. The attacks often occur within states in the form of violence committed by security forces, and do not constitute international or non-international armed conflicts. The Security Council chooses to prioritise state sovereignty and non-intervention (*ibid.*). The WPS agenda should therefore operate across a broader range of conflicts (*ibid.*; UN WOMEN 2016).

It has been argued that the WPS and protection of civilians (POC) agendas have many overlaps, and could be better integrated (Hultman and Muvumba Sellström 2019). Hultman and Muvumba Sellström (*ibid.*) trace convergence of the POC and WPS agendas, often through a focus on SGBV. The POC agenda was mainly written in gender-neutral language, although 'civilians' is often implicitly understood to mean women and children. Some POC missions include clauses about protection from sexual violence that are 'clearly influenced by the WPS agenda' (*ibid.*: 601). For example, the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO) includes women protection advisors to monitor and report on SGBV. Work includes protection teams, patrols by peacekeepers, distribution of fuel, and construction of lavatories and shelters to limit opportunities for violence against women. Gender advisors and female police units have also been used in POC missions. However, sexual abuse by peacekeepers is a significant problem.

POC nevertheless has a narrower understanding of SGBV than in the WPS agenda. The POC and WPS agendas both tend to frame SGBV as a weapon of war. The WPS agenda is theoretically broader in that many of the measures it calls for are peacebuilding or development measures. In the WPS agenda, SGBV is understood as part of other dynamics than armed conflict. However, critics argue that in practice WPS instruments fixate on SGBV as a weapon of war.

**The WPS agenda also contains no provisions on private military and security contractors (PMSCs)** involved in trafficking, buying sex from trafficked women, rape, torture or similar human rights abuses (Forcada and Lazaro 2020). This is despite the growing use of PMSCs in recent conflicts and evidence of their involvement in gender-based abuses

(*ibid.*). Given gaps in international instruments on PMSCs' conduct, the WPS agenda should address the issue specifically and push to develop indicators, guidelines, and training and accountability mechanisms (*ibid.*).

## Serious and organised crime

Serious and organised crime (SOC) is responsible for high levels of violence with gendered consequences that some argue should be included within the WPS agenda.<sup>10</sup> **Gang violence can lead to rates of death at levels similar to those of countries in conflict** (Applebaum and Mawby 2018). El Salvador, Venezuela and Honduras all have high levels of violence (Viollaz and Klugman 2018).

**Criminal violence is gendered.** Many crimes disproportionately affect women. For example, in 2017–18, 58 per cent of registered victims of trafficking in the EU-28 were female (European Commission 2021: 15) and 88 per cent of victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation were female (65% women, 23% girls) (*ibid.*: 22). Crimes are shaped by gender roles and expectations, among other factors. Research on gender and organised crime finds that 'gender norms and women's participation in SOC are varied and highly contextual' (Hicks 2021; Applebaum and Mawby 2018). Women have roles as both victims and perpetrators of SOC (Hicks 2021). They are more likely to have leadership roles in some types of crime, such as trafficking (Guerrina and Wright 2020). Women's positions may develop from pre-existing gendered roles. In Central and South America, women are involved in gangs, as parents, and in criminal activities such as extortion and selling drugs, as well as being victims (Viollaz and Klugman 2018).

The effects of SOC are not always included in WPS policy or research. There is relatively little mention of organised crime in NAPs (P. Kirby, personal communication, 2022); such as there is mostly focuses on security sector reform. Norway's 2019 NAP includes terrorism, trafficking and crime, while El Salvador's 2017 NAP links organised crime and civic insecurity (P. Kirby, personal communication, 2022). The GIWPS WPS Index uses the Uppsala Conflict Data Program to measure deaths caused by violence. While it does not formally exclude gang violence, the programme's criteria for inclusion of 'the use of armed force between two organized armed groups, neither of which is the government of a state, which results in at least 25 battle-related deaths in a year' means that in situations where it is hard to attribute 25 deaths to an identifiable actor, or less than two armed actors, many instances of gang violence will not be taken into account (*ibid.*: 4–5). Incorporating more accurate data on gang violence would see El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, Nicaragua and Mexico fall down the GIWPS WPS Index rankings considerably (*ibid.*).

Applebaum and Mawby (2018) argue that gang violence can be analysed through a gendered 'new war' paradigm and addressed using a WPS lens. Entry points for WPS analysis and action include that women work within gangs; violence against women is a feature of gang control; gangs are a source of humanitarian crises with, for example,

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<sup>10</sup> [unodc.org/unodc/en/gender/news/food-for-thought-unscr-1325-on-women-peace-and-security-and-its-link-to-unodc-mandates.html?testme](https://unodc.org/unodc/en/gender/news/food-for-thought-unscr-1325-on-women-peace-and-security-and-its-link-to-unodc-mandates.html?testme)

thousands emigrating from El Salvador; and that gangs seek to close down civil society (*ibid.*).

## Migration

The threat of trafficking is gendered, but its transnational nature means it is not always addressed by WPS or other policies. There are several distinct aspects of the nexus between gender, migration and crime (P. Kirby, personal communication, 2022). For example, a security view focuses on the gendered harms committed by people traffickers. Relatedly, the gendered harms committed by anti-trafficking and anti-migration efforts can be shown. Women driven to migrate by conflict are ‘marginal’ in NAPs (Holvikivi and Reeves 2020). Migrating women are discussed in WPS documents, and some European NAPs include migrants within European borders. However, in practice the needs of women and girls – some of which are the product of European border policies – are neglected (*ibid.*; Kirby 2020).

**Instruments for IDP protection have aims in common with the WPS agenda.** This is rooted in an overlap of aims and understandings. Hall (2019: 10) shows how the WPS agenda and IDP protection outlined by the guiding principles have ‘shared normative roots’. They both draw on human rights instruments for women. Migration is written into the WPS agenda, with UNSCR 1325 stating that women and children are over-represented in refugee and IDP populations (*ibid.*). In addition, migrant groups have been involved in developing NAPs in the Netherlands (refugee organisations in peacebuilding) and Australia (focus on vulnerable women) (*ibid.*).

Hall (*ibid.*) advocates focusing on three narratives around which WPS and IDP protection can align:

- Conceptualising a continuum of violence; for example, deriving from Elizabeth Ferris’ understanding of ‘violence, as a cause of flight, violence during flight, violence in camps, family violence and violence and prostitution’ (*ibid.*: 9).
- A political economy approach that ‘avoids compartmentalisation’ and disconnecting forms of violence from their causes, instead focusing on political and economic inequalities at the root of such violence. This could help widen the WPS agenda from its focus on sexual violence.
- Recognising agency and capturing feminist gains, to acknowledge and support women’s role in decision-making at all levels.

## Arms control

**There is room for the WPS agenda and arms control to be further linked as they have shared aims and both recognise the gendered consequences of weapons proliferation** (Acheson and Butler 2019; Myrtilinen 2020).

Small arms control is included in several UNSCRs and NAPs. Currently, only a few UNSCRs mention arms control, but several NAPs mention it (particularly small arms control and de-

mining). UNSCR 1325 calls for gender sensitivity in disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration and mine-clearance programmes (Myrntinen 2020). Broader disarmament goals have not yet been brought into WPS policy.

The arms control agenda has not framed its work in gendered terms (*ibid.*). However, several arms control measures include language that could help link with the WPS agenda. Two UNSCRs on small arms control address WPS issues. UNSCR 2117 (2013) and UNSCR 2220 (2015) call for ‘women’s full and meaningful participation in all policymaking, planning and implementation processes’, as well as better data on gendered impacts. UNSCR 2151 (2014) on security sector reform also highlights the need for women’s participation. UNSCR 2365 (2017) on demining calls for gender to be considered (*ibid.*). The 2013 Arms Trade Treaty links the dissemination of weapons with gender-based violence. Article 7(4) requires states to assess the risk that any weapons sold will be used in SGBV (Acheson and Butler 2019). This risk assessment can provide data that are also useful for WPS measures (P. Kirby, personal communication, 2022).

Lack of sex-disaggregated data means it is hard to discern the extent of women’s participation in arms control and disarmament activities (Myrntinen 2020). What data are available show that women are underrepresented (*ibid.*). A broader problem identified by Acheson and Butler (2019) is that states’ unwillingness to prioritise conflict prevention over the lucrative arms trade is likely to remain a significant barrier.

Some voices within the WPS sphere argue that as militarism is a cause of conflict, efforts that do not address this are missing a crucial driver (Kaptan 2020; Kirby and Shepherd, 2021). Militarism is linked to violent masculinity, as well as SGBV, human trafficking, small arms proliferation and conflict (Kaptan 2020). In some contexts, such as contemporary Ukraine, WPS ideas are linked to militarism, which is itself a cause of conflict (O’Sullivan 2019).

## Extremism and counterterrorism

**Significant efforts have been made to link counterterrorism instruments with the WPS agenda.** UNSCRs have linked WPS with counterterrorism since 2013. For example, UNSCR 2242 (2015) called for a gender-sensitive approach to counterterrorism, consultation with women’s organisations and increases in the number of women in leadership positions (Aroussi 2020). However, counterterrorism measures tend to focus on a small number, which therefore do not address many WPS perspectives.

The expansion of WPS to include counterterrorism creates dangers:

because the terms of inclusion have been set by male-dominated security institutions and states whose interest in a robust dialogue about the definition of terrorism, the causes conducive to the production of terrorism, and the relationship between terrorism and legitimate claims for self-determination by collective groups has been virtually nil (Aoláin 2016).

Inclusion does not mean that 'all harms' resulting from terrorism and counterterrorism will be treated 'even-handedly'. Aoláin (*ibid.*) points to an 'uneven evocation of the WPS agenda in resolutions addressing situations of collective, cyclical and extremist violence'.

Counterterrorism legislation does not substantively include WPS issues, while WPS measures focus on 'old' wars.

**UNSCRs contain no agreed upon definition of violent extremism, which leaves them open to appropriation by particular states** (Aroussi 2020). For instance, Aroussi (*ibid.*)

argues that in Kenya counterterrorism measures neglect non-Muslim extremism, such as crime and gender-based violence, which have a significant effect on women's lives.

Measures centre on Islamist group Al-Shabaab, but women are not seen as perpetrators of Al-Shabaab violence in Kenya, so there is little provision for women in the legislation.

Kenyan counterterrorism plans do not refer to gender and WPS plans do not refer to terrorism. The focus on counterterrorism has encouraged a shift in funding from

development work to security-based counterterrorism measures (*ibid.*). Analysis of

government documents shows that 'the policy move to bring violent extremism into the WPS agenda has increased the participation of men and a few elite women in this sphere' in a

country with strong gender and ethnic hierarchies, and stereotypes of Muslim women. The result is that Muslim women are seen as sources of intelligence on potential male terrorists,

but excluded from decision-making (*ibid.*).

## Gender and intersectionality

**A significant amount of scholarship and policy attention is about including intersecting identities within the WPS agenda, and on how identity is conceptualised.**

A long-standing criticism of the WPS agenda is that it essentialises women as victims in need of protection, rather than addressing the gendered causes and consequences of war.

Women participating in the conflict prevention efforts are disproportionately from elite

groups. Many therefore advocate for greater involvement of groups including, but not limited to, women with disabilities and indigenous women, who are often disproportionately affected

by conflict and violence. More widely, analysis based on the intersecting inequalities producing conflict and vulnerability is called for.

Men and boys are mentioned in the WPS agenda; for instance, UNSCR 2242 calls for the engagement of men and boys in the WPS agenda (Shepherd 2019). However, in UN WPS

measures overall, gender is often used to mean women, rather than as a basis for a

gendered analysis of the inequalities and norms underlying conflict (Myrntinen 2019). No UN resolution has discussed gender beyond male and female, to include trans and intersex

people (*ibid.*). Engagement with men in the WPS agenda is often 'tokenistic' and focused on simplistic divisions between 'good' and 'bad' men (Duriesmith 2018). Women, by contrast,

are implicitly constructed as 'victims' (Myrntinen 2019). Age is another factor that intersects with gender. It is argued that there is room to integrate the WPS and youth, peace and

security agendas (UN WOMEN 2018).

Many argue for more context-specific understandings of gender roles. Chinkin *et al.* (2020: 7–8) point to new forms of masculinity tied up with forms of violence characterised as 'new wars' and list hyper-masculinity, predatory masculinity, mutated colonial masculinity, victim

masculinity and global-hybrid masculinity. More context-specific and nuanced understandings of gender roles could help inform programming. Chinkin *et al.* (2021) point to anti-extremism work in Pakistan that has chosen to emphasise women's roles as mothers.

**UN and state WPS measures have done relatively little to include women with disabilities.** Women with disabilities are recognised in UNSCR 1325 (2000). However, only nine of 34 NAPs mention women with disabilities, and the focus is on vulnerabilities rather than participation (Stienstra 2019). NAPs surveyed have not consulted organisations of women with disabilities and there are few indicators on the issue (*ibid.*). More could be done to include data on and views of women with disabilities, and work for more inclusion of women with disabilities in peacebuilding to bring WPS instruments in line with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (*ibid.*).

Research shows that 'women and girls with disabilities are disproportionately vulnerable to violence in conflicts and remain invisible and excluded from most post-conflict processes' (*ibid.*: 1). Conflicts cause disability, as well as having negative effects on those with disabilities (*ibid.*). For example, those with hearing impairments may not be able to hear signs of conflict, while those with disabilities may be abandoned or lose access to community structures, carers or aids (*ibid.*).

The experience of disability is gendered; for example, 'women and girls with disabilities experience greater gender-based violence than women without disabilities or men with disabilities' (Ortoleva cited in *ibid.*, p. 4). Women are more likely to have a disproportionate share of the burden of caring for children with disabilities (*ibid.*). Women with disabilities are not included in peace initiatives or post-conflict justice (*ibid.*).

**The WPS agenda is also seen to have geographic and political imbalances.** According to a postcolonial critique, the WPS agenda sees people in the global South as 'recipients' of norms developed in the global North (Parashar 2019). Best practices advocated as part of the WPS agenda seldom match the complex social structures and conflict dynamics in many contexts (*ibid.*). Research on the gendered effects of conflict has imbalances and focuses on case studies suiting Western priorities. There is a lot of research on sexual violence, and not much on state violence against indigenous people and gender minorities (*ibid.*). Countering violent extremism (CVE) policies drawing on WPS also fail to consider the complex dynamics of power and histories of conflict in many contexts (Aroussi 2020; Parashar 2019).

## Health

### Global health

Men dominate global health leadership, while the burdens and ill effects of pandemics fall disproportionately on women (Davies *et al.* 2019). It is therefore argued that the Covid-19 pandemic and similar events should be seen through a gender lens (Ratawatte 2021). The burden of many caring roles also falls disproportionately on women. Pandemics, such as Covid-19, may also prompt emergency measures by governments, which erode women's rights or indirectly affect them (*ibid.*).

### Sexual and reproductive health



**Sexual and reproductive health is mentioned in UNSCR 2106 (2013), but is generally absent from UNSCRs and not required in annual monitoring** (Davies and Harman 2020; Pierson and Thomson 2018). Reproductive health is mentioned in NAPs, but the language is often vague and few refer to abortion (Pierson and Thomson 2018). Abortion remains controversial in the WPS agenda because some states are reluctant to fund it. For example, the US has operated a 'global gag rule' that removes funding from organisations offering abortions and opposed such measures in UNSCR 2467. As a consequence, reproductive rights have been neglected in the WPS agenda (*ibid.*). Despite these difficulties, Davies and Harman (2020) argue that it should be framed as a security and rights issue, and aligned with the WPS agenda.

Evidence from health and development work shows that 'conflict affects women's access to reproductive health, and increases in unsafe abortion are widely reported by those working in the field' (Pierson and Thomson 2018: 4). Displaced women and victims of sexual violence are particularly affected, but services are not always provided. Health insecurity means that women face extra burdens after conflicts, with maternal mortality a particular concern (Davies and Harman 2020). It acts as a barrier to women accessing the four WPS pillars (*ibid.*).

## Transitional justice

**The UN Security Council's WPS agenda include support for reparative justice.**

Transitional justice includes a wide range of 'judicial and non-judicial instruments and mechanisms, such as trials, truth commissions, lustration, memorials, reparations' with varying implications in terms of attribution of blame, punishment for perpetrators and support for victims (de Almagro 2017). The approach chosen will vary from context to context.

UNSCR 2122 (2013) includes women's needs in post-conflict contexts, while UNSCR 2106 (2013) discusses sexual violence in transitional justice (Fonseka and Schulz 2018). UNSCR 2467 (2019) urges states to 'adopt a survivor-centred approach in preventing and responding' to conflict-related sexual violence (Labenski 2020: 2).

**However, justice and reparations processes have not always applied a gender perspective and have been uneven.** States' reparative processes:

have been concerned with reparation for violations of political and civil rights (for example arbitrary detention, summary execution, forced disappearance) which disproportionately affect men rather than the sexual and gender-based violence that more typically is perpetrated against women and girls' (*ibid.*: 3).

It is argued that sexual exploitation and abuse are often treated less urgently than conflict-related sexual violence (Anania 2021).

**Some argue that transitional justice should be more ambitious.** A UN Women study on the progress of the WPS agenda in 2015 suggested that transitional justice should consider how gender inequality is a factor in violence against women, and that reparations should address this (de Almagro 2017). Efforts, including by the International Criminal Court, to prosecute those responsible for SGBV in recent years can be linked to the WPS agenda

(*ibid.*). The EU's transitional justice framework has sought to comply with WPS resolutions by taking a gender-sensitive approach. However, it has been criticised for its conservative approach to gender that does not seek to transform the inequalities shaping gendered violence and its focus on security (*ibid.*).

Non-governmental organisations have sought to help communities and states deliver justice programmes in a gender-sensitive manner. Following from UNSCR 2467, a Global Survivors Fund was launched to help survivors and ensure that states implement justice and restitution programmes (Labenski 2020).

## The local turn

**It has been argued that a 'bottom-up' approach is needed to foster local agency and ensure that the WPS agenda is implemented in a meaningful way** (Lynch 2019).

Delivering the norms encouraged by the WPS agenda requires 'dialogue and contestation by stakeholders' that does not happen when the WPS agenda is implemented solely by international or national instruments (*ibid.*). This is a response to the perceived limitations of NAPs, which are often produced by stable countries rather than the post-conflict states where WPS is likely to be implemented; and which do not always encourage participation from civil society or meaningful implementation (*ibid.*). There is evidence that local groups can use the language of CEDAW in countries in which it is ratified as a way to mobilise (*ibid.*). Localisation can be particularly helpful in areas where there is distrust of the central government (Cabrera-Balleza and Ful Dutra Santos 2018). According to the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders (GNWP), 'while the impact of decentralization on women's participation remains under-researched, it is clear that local-level policy development creates a unique space for the promotion of women's empowerment' (*ibid.*: 17). Local involvement can also help prevent national decisions being overturned or ignored at the local level (*ibid.*: 17).

GNWP runs localisation programmes to encourage implementation of WPS measures where there is no NAP or NAPs are implemented weakly. In Colombia, where localisation programmes have been run, 'local authorities and women's rights activists drafted municipal action plans to implement UNSCR 1325' and action plans on violence against LGBTQI+ people were drawn up (*ibid.*: 27–37; Lynch 2019).

**A recent move has been to focus on the role of human rights defenders or female peacebuilders.** UNSCRs argue for greater participation of women, but do not acknowledge their specific role as peacebuilders (Anderlini 2020). Greater recognition of female peacebuilders would improve peace outcomes, since they 'are the key conduit through which war-affected populations voice their concerns, experiences and needs' (*ibid.*: 6). They are also subject to gendered threats, including verbal attacks, threats to them and their families, attacks on their reputations, arrest and other bureaucratic attacks. However, there are no international mechanisms to protect female peacebuilders (*ibid.*).



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## Key websites

- LSE Centre for Women, Peace and Security: <https://www.lse.ac.uk/women-peace-security>
- LSE/Sydney University Database of NAPs: <https://www.wpsnaps.org/>
- UN Women: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/peace-and-security>
- Women's International League for Peace and Freedom: <https://peacewomen.org/>

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