

# Status Quo or Bold Adaptation? Reclaiming the Women, Peace and Security Agenda

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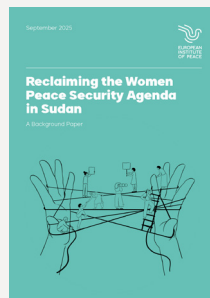
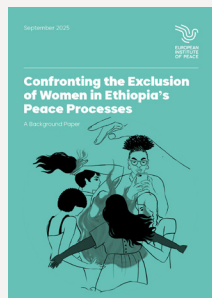
This report by the [European Institute of Peace](#) calls for a critical rethinking of the core principles behind the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda to ensure its effectiveness. As the political space for inclusive peace and security, and conflict prevention narrows and WPS and many other global commitments face erosion, it is essential to reshape the WPS agenda's vision and its practices to respond to challenges in conflict prevention, resolution and peacebuilding.

Far from being a lost cause, the WPS agenda can be revitalised to address rising militarisation and securitisation, climate and environmental crises, high-risk and hostile contexts and declining donor funding. Honest exploration of its strengths and weaknesses is essential to reaffirming its value as a transformative framework for inclusive and sustainable peace.

In this report we identify five persistent barriers preventing women's meaningful participation in conflict prevention and peace processes. We highlight two principles that could transform the WPS agenda and, using a traffic light system, assess 12 practices that can be used to overcome these barriers. We then propose actions for policymakers and practitioners to enhance women's meaningful participation in peacebuilding and conflict resolution.



The findings from this policy brief are grounded in a [global research report](#) that draws on expert interviews, an online survey with over 200 respondents and three background research papers conducted in [Myanmar](#), [Ethiopia](#) and [Sudan](#) with 129 key informants. The findings from the global report are also backed by references included in a [practitioner-friendly compendium of resources](#).



## Findings and recommendations

Two critical principles are key to the future impact of the WPS agenda. This matters, as many well-meaning practices are inefficient – or even fail – because they are not grounded principles of feminist peace which focuses on transforming the underlying causes of violence, insecurity and inequality to ensure justice, human security, inclusivity and power-sharing.

- **Radical inclusion** means a process of understanding and transforming the causes of oppression and conflict. Radical inclusion goes beyond simply adding more diverse people to meetings, project activities, research or decision-making tables. It aims to fundamentally redefine who is considered a legitimate peace actor and challenge the exclusionary systems that have long governed conflict resolution and security institutions and policies.
- **Decolonialism** within WPS challenges the dominance of white, global north feminist paradigms, international donor priorities, and top-down governance models. The 'decolonialist' approach prioritises locally driven, historically informed structural change to the systems and processes of peace and security including WPS.





Gender quotas  
Sub-national WPS Plans  
Rapid response, pooled funds and feminist funds  
Gender budgeting and markers  
Gender-disaggregated data and feminist storytelling



Digital tools for inclusion  
Gender mainstreaming  
Strategic litigation  
Men stepping up in solidarity  
Working with faith actors to contextualise



Feminist Foreign Policies  
Women's Mediation Networks

This report assesses 12 effective and promising practices using a traffic light system. Those in **green** are considered effective based on current evidence. Those coded **orange** are promising, but require caution and more nuanced application. Practices in **red** have yet to build momentum but could still bear fruit with more careful, evidence-informed efforts.

## Barriers and recommendations

The complexity of the five challenges we identify calls for rethinking WPS framing and implementation. Recommendations and practices are proposed to overcome these barriers and include:

### **BARRIER 1: Persistent patriarchal power and resistance**

What can be done? Inclusive transformation needs shifted power structures within all identity groups, not just adding allies to women's struggles. Gender-responsive conflict resolution requires strategic networking, radically inclusive dialogues, deep information sharing and working with men, as well as groups marginalised along social, religious, and economic lines, and with LGBTQIA+ communities as co-owners of systemic societal transformation.

#### Recommendations:

- Halt securitisation of the WPS agenda and recentre the critical roles of women's rights organisations to enable peacebuilding at all levels.
- Advocate for and fund inclusive consultations with women, men and groups experiencing oppression to increase the likelihood that peace and security policies are shaped by those most affected by conflict.
- Move beyond women's symbolic representation (the numbers of women) towards holding male leaders accountable for dismantling patriarchal systems within institutions and realising women's substantive representation (fully engaged, participating confidently and influencing decisions).
- Increase long-term funding for community engagement initiatives and groups that promote male solidarity for gender equality and shared leadership between men and women. Develop measurable accountability mechanisms that ensure rhetoric aligns with action.
- Invest in long-term mentoring and coaching processes that elevate feminist leadership and women's confidence in conflict-affected regions.

- Support faith leaders to develop culturally and socially relevant justice and equity initiatives that meld interpretations of religious texts affirming women's rights and leadership, non-violence and equality.
- Recognise that gender disaggregated data and feminist storytelling are important accountability tools measuring how peace and security interventions affect diverse individuals. Require all peace and security initiatives to include community feedback loops, be far more transparent and make available analysis on their work to promote cross learning.



### Box 1: Myanmar

Myanmar's protracted crisis creates deeply gendered barriers to women's meaningful participation in political, peace and environmental governance. Women face intersecting exclusions rooted in insecurity, restrictive norms, institutional blind spots and unequal access to international support. Our research identified four interrelated barriers: pervasive insecurity particularly online and in relation to extractive industries; restrictive social-political norms and gender inequalities; gender-blind and narrowly designed interventions; and uneven, poorly tailored international funding. Recommended strategies include strengthening gender-responsive risk management systems, confronting militarised and patriarchal ideologies, integrating gender in WPS frameworks, and providing long-term, flexible funding to grassroots women's groups working at the intersection of gender, environment and peace.

## BARRIER 2: Threats to women's security

What can be done? Addressing risks to women's security and conflict-related trauma requires designing inclusive and trauma-informed responses with culturally and socially appropriate and accessible mental health and psychosocial support. Concurrently, investing in long-term, community-based trauma response initiatives can contribute to holistic approaches to health and social cohesion.

### Recommendations:

- Strengthen online safeguarding in response to increasing technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TBGBV), by supporting the development of survivor-centred protection protocols and digital security frameworks for women peacebuilders and environmental defenders. These must be complemented by inclusive early warning and monitoring systems, especially in high-risk digital environments and high-risk sectors such as extractive industries, developed in collaboration with technology firms and resource companies, to prevent harm and ensure rapid response to emerging risks.
- Provide flexible, core funding for safe houses, relocation schemes, and gender-responsive, community-based mental health and psychosocial services, to better protect human rights defenders. Promote peer counsellors, safe referrals and information collection to prevent and respond to gender-based violence (GBV) in all its forms.
- Provide mental health and psychosocial support for men and boys in post-war contexts to address trauma, forced conscription and socialisation into violent masculinities.
- Invest in feminist early warning systems that proactively identify risks, power and abuse. Codesign with women's rights and environmental justice organisations, feminist analysts and journalists.

- Invest in holistic disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) programmes that recognise women and youth in fighting forces may not always be holding weapons but play various roles and need to be fully included in DDR.
- Use strategic litigation as a tool for systemic change, dismantling discriminatory laws, addressing GBV and securing healing and reparations for survivors. It requires sustained funding, structural investment in the capacities of lawyers, human rights actors and women's rights organisations, building cross-sectoral alliances and safeguards to prevent backlash.



## Box 2: Ethiopia

Ethiopia stands at a critical juncture, torn between a legacy of violent political transitions and hope for inclusive peace. Women and girls bear the brunt of displacement, sexual violence and economic collapse, yet their leadership in peacebuilding remains undervalued, unsupported and structurally sidelined. Our research identified four interconnected barriers to women's meaningful participation: insecurity and shrinking civic space; policy inertia and lack of accountability; financial barriers and economic exclusion; and restrictive gender norms and social stigma. We recommend the inclusion of women as architects of peace design, strategy and delivery through coordinated legal, financial and community-led interventions addressing entrenched gender inequality.

## BARRIER 3: Efforts are narrow, hierarchical and siloed

What can be done? Human security should be central to Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP) and National Action Plans (NAPs). To ensure policy coherence and tackle the root causes of insecurity and injustice, it is essential to integrate FFP and NAPs across diplomatic, trade, development, defence, immigration and security services. Integration should not only be vertical (across ministries) but horizontal (across local, national, and regional levels), and entails embedding intersectional analysis and co-creation with grassroots women's organisations to dismantle systemic inequalities at all scales.

### Recommendations:

- Reaffirm national leadership on WPS with consistent funding, political will and policy coherence. Create WPS focal points across ministries—not just foreign affairs and defence—for internal and external policy coherence and sustained impact. Ensure WPS principles are embedded into all portfolios.
- Promote a broader, people and environment-centred approach to security. Human security is more than military capability or state-centric responses. It includes the rights, safety, and wellbeing of all.
- Pilot sub-regional Action Plans that translate WPS into local action on economic security, disarmament, environmental and climate resilience, health and development. Use culturally appropriate language and terminology and reference men and masculinities, enable a robust and independent monitoring and evaluation framework led by civil society, and ensure predictable sustained financing. Prioritise the expertise of civil society and sub-national authorities and powerholders to decentralise design and implementation of sub-national WPS Plans.
- Ensure adequate resources, expertise and national institutional support to sub-national Action Plans.

- Invest in astute gender advisers who have strategic influence with senior management and dedicated budgets to mainstream gender effectively across institutions. Use strong accountability frameworks, such as performance indicators and reporting systems, to track impact. Networks can help exchange good practices and navigate institutional barriers.
- Support FFP's potential to strengthen WPS implementation by ensuring consistent political will, cross-sector coordination and accountability, coherence with the country's domestic policy agenda and collaboration with domestic and global feminist movements and women's organisations.
- Use strategic litigation to expose the gendered harms of conflict, inequality and ecological degradation.

## **BARRIER 4: Incrementalism, exclusion and marginalisation**

What can be done? Gender quotas can be used to remedy historical disadvantage and incremental inclusion. Building critical mass can help move beyond symbolic representation, expediting women into substantive and influential roles. Mixed gender mediation and facilitation teams and quotas should be consistently embedded in all peace processes. Conflict parties should be socialised early-on and enforce women in formal and substantive decision-making roles.

### Recommendations:

- Mandate and champion effective (evidence-informed, implementable, monitored and supported with additional measures) gender quotas (minimum 30 per cent women) in all preparatory talks, ceasefires, confidence-building measures, peace mediations and institutional support during political settlements. Partner with women's mediation networks to identify women for roles.
- Exploit political will and effort to ensure gender-balanced facilitation and mediation teams are deployed by all multilateral and bilateral actors.
- Foster intersectionality within gender quotas, ensuring inclusion of a broad range of societal groups.
- Establish enabling measures to elevate women to actively shape ideas and decisions in male dominated spaces, not just by being numerically present. Such measures include gender equality caucuses to mobilise across party or conflict lines, women's only spaces to strategize how to overcome participation barriers and providing childcare onsite.
- Support women's led and women's rights organisations with expertise in thematic topics to consistently engage with conflict parties and mediators before and during peace negotiations to influence agendas.
- Support the use of digital tools for inclusion to counter misinformation and for remote engagement, to allow women to participate despite geographical and political constraints.
- Dismantle entrenched biases about who is a legitimate peace actor. Redefine expertise and authority beyond political elites and state security actors to include those who are central to shaping and sustaining peace, such as refugee, rural and Indigenous women. Address the heightened risks these groups face by tailoring security and safeguarding provisions.



### Box 3: Sudan

Sudan is home to two of Africa's longest civil wars and has experienced continuous internal strife since independence. Our research identified five key blockages to women's meaningful participation: restrictive gender norms, limited civic and peace education, divisions within civil society, limited international funding and influence, and dire humanitarian crisis due to continued armed conflict. Recommendations include using locally led practices to build community trust, bolstering intersectional civic education, creating common platforms for unified WPS advancement, and ensuring flexible core funding for women-led peacemaking.

## BARRIER 5: Underfunding and weak political investment in women-led organisations

What can be done? Sub-national and community-led efforts by women and feminist organisations need to be amplified. A radical reparative approach must provide long term quality, flexible, equitable core funding to feminist organisations and movements, and redressing injustice and replacing colonial risk-management frameworks.

### Recommendations:

- Scale up and strengthen regional, national and sub-national feminist funding models and commit to greater risk tolerance and sharing from those most insulated – UN, INGOs and bilateral donors – to accompany organisations to meet their goals. This can involve lightening administrative burdens as well as excessive and unsafe reporting, and providing tangible digital security.
- Redistribute financial resources and decision-making power away from large international organisations and towards sub-national, feminist and community-led movements. Prioritise direct, multi-year core flexible funding to counter shrinking space, increasing risks and activity-based budgets.
- Enable funds for women's caucuses, maternity and family leave, and training and mentoring for women to confidently navigate male-dominated spaces and guarantee their involvement.
- Use gender responsive budgeting and gender equality markers as accountability tools to evaluate, strengthen and adapt funding strategies. Track gender equality allocations in budgets and measure how interventions impact different groups of women. Oversight mechanisms are required to monitor implementation, hurdles and ways to adapt such tools.
- Provide reparations to rebalance the unjust wealth accumulated from colonialism and extractive economic practices.

# Conclusion

Barriers to women's meaningful participation in peace and security are not incidental nor an unintentional oversight: they are loaded with history, oppressive power dynamics and systemic. The formal WPS agenda agreed in 2000 has spurred decades of incremental normative and behavioural change however women's participation in public life and politics is all too often tokenistic, instrumentalised, conditional and sidelined.

The barriers identified require more than incremental reform: significant structural change is needed. Recognising women as agents of change (and men as agents of solidarity), resourcing inclusive and accountable leadership and transforming exclusivity is critical to accelerate this shift. Legal frameworks must be updated, inclusive processes institutionalised, and financing made accessible and long term. Enabling environments – physical, digital, political – must also be reshape and safeguarded so that participation is not only possible, but meaningful.

Advancing women's participation is not just a matter of justice: it is a strategic imperative for sustainable peace.

## References and acknowledgements

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The brief is based on a global report under the same title [“Status Quo or Bold Adaptation? Reclaiming the Women, Peace and Security Agenda”](#) accompanied by three background research papers entitled [“Confronting the Exclusion of Women in Ethiopia’s Peace Processes”](#), [“Navigating Barriers To Women’s Participation in Policy Spaces Intersecting with Environmental Peacebuilding”](#) and [“Reclaiming the Women, Peace and Security Agenda in Sudan”](#). The findings from the global report are backed by references included in a [practitioner-friendly compendium of resources](#).

The global report was written by Sophia Close and Siad Darwish. It was reviewed by Cate Buchanan (Senior Advisor), Paul Seils (Peace Practice and Innovation Unit Director), Miriam Reifferscheidt (Gender & Peacemaking Programme Manager) and Pauline Chauveau (Gender & Peacemaking Programme Officer). The copy-editing was done by Kelley Friel, the design created by Dorothee Olivereau, and the illustrations by Vidushi Yadav / [Studio We are Stories](#).

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