

Recommendations

“The term “Armed Conflicts” in this statement includes all types of armed conflict as recognized by the Geneva Conventions I-IV and its Additional Protocols. As it is clear from the Annex to the Beijing Platform for Action serious violations of international humanitarian law, prohibiting attacks on civilian populations, continue to occur. International Humanitarian Law is systematically ignored at times and human rights are often violated in armed conflict situations. Violations of the human rights of women in conflict situations are violations of the fundamental principles of international human rights and humanitarian law.”

Recognizing the disproportionate and unique impacts of armed conflict on women and the critical need for their full participation in peace processes and access to power is one of the commitments of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Acknowledging that despite some progress over the past quarter-century, significant challenges remain, including persistent gender inequalities¹, insufficient resources² and limited female representation in peace and political processes.³

This document calls for concerted efforts by the states of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) to enhance gender-responsive approaches, ensure adequate mechanisms and funding, and promote women's leadership and participation in conflict prevention, resolution, and peacebuilding activities. By addressing these issues, we aim to foster more inclusive, meaningful, sustainable, resilient and lasting peace.

Chapter 1: Evolution of Women, Peace and Security

Following the adoption of the landmark United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325, many UN Member States developed National Action Plans (NAPs) to guide the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda at the national level.

UNECE region includes countries with varying levels of commitment and engagement with the WPS agenda. Currently, 78% of the states in the UNECE have committed to developing and

¹ UN Women. (2020). *Gender equality: Women's rights in review 25 years after Beijing*.

² OECD. (2021). *Aid in Support of Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment*. Retrieved from <https://www.oecd.org/dac/official-development-assistance-gender-equality.pdf>

³ United Nations Sustainable Development Group (23 October 2023). Women are increasingly at-risk in conflict, underrepresented in peace processes: New UN Secretary-General Report. Available at: <https://unsdg.un.org/latest/stories/women-are-increasingly-risk-conflict-underrepresented-peace-processes-new-un>

implementing NAPs on WPS. We are convinced that this statistic indicates a broad recognition of the importance of the WPS agenda within the region.⁴

Whereas several states have developed initial NAPs, some of them have not followed through with updates or comprehensive implementation due to the struggle with allocating sufficient funding⁵ and limited involvement of women's organizations and civil society for the effective implementation of their NAPs.

We call on UNECE states to **commit to establishing and maintaining comprehensive and adequately funded National Action Plans** by integrating gender-responsive budgeting into national budget processes. This can be accomplished through:

A. Allocating Dedicated Funding for the development, implementation and monitoring of NAPs within national budgets.

B. Creating a dedicated budget line for women's empowerment and gender equality initiatives in peace and security.

C. Involving civil society organizations, women's groups, and other relevant stakeholders in budgeting ensures that women's needs and priorities are adequately reflected.

D. Ensuring coherence and alignment between NAPs and other national strategies, such as those addressing poverty reduction, health, education and economic development.

We express our concern as gaps and challenges remain in guaranteeing women's full and equal participation in decision-making in all stages of peace processes, particularly in formal peace negotiations. In UN-led peace processes, women participated in 80 percent but composed only about 16 per cent of total participants. This percentage has decreased for two consecutive years.⁶

⁴ *Global Database on National Action Plans on Women, Peace, and Security*. Available at: <https://1325naps.peacewomen.org/>

⁵ Global Network of Women Peacebuilders (GNWP), Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC), International Civil Society Action Network (ICAN), Kvinna till Kvinna, MADRE, and Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) (2021); Fund Us Like You Want Us To WIN. Available at: <https://kvinnaillkvinna.org/publications/fund-us-like-you-want-us-to-win/>

⁶ United Nations Sustainable Development Group (23 October 2023). Women are increasingly at-risk in conflict, underrepresented in peace processes: New UN Secretary-General Report. Available at: <https://unsdg.un.org/latest/stories/women-are-increasingly-risk-conflict-underrepresented-peace-processes-new-un>

In compliance with the UNSCR 1325, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Beijing Declaration, **states must ensure the meaningful participation of women and girls in the development, implementation and monitoring of NAPs.** This should be achieved through consultations and partnerships with civil society organizations.⁷ This inclusive approach is crucial for addressing the unique perspectives and needs of women and girls' and is fundamental for achieving equality, development, and peace. However, to translate the insights of civil society organizations into concrete outcomes, robust gender equality mechanisms must be established.

States at UNECE should establish institutional structures and mechanisms⁸ to coordinate and oversee the implementation of the WPS agenda at the national level and provide training and capacity-building programs to ensure that relevant actors have the knowledge and skills necessary to integrate gender perspectives into their work effectively.⁹ These structures help maintain policy continuity and momentum for the WPS agenda across different government administrations and political cycles and streamline efforts across various sectors and government departments, ensuring that WPS initiatives are coherent and mutually reinforcing.

Chapter 2: Growing Discrepancies between the Protection and Participation components of the WPS Agenda as connectors to empowering women in conflict prevention and peacebuilding, taking into account Action for Peace (A4P)

According to the UN Secretary General's 2021 report on "Our Common Agenda," one of the three foundations for a renewed social contract fit for the twenty-first century is Inclusion, Protection and Participation.¹⁰

Among the pillars of Resolution 1325, protection and participation are crucial components that intersect and serve as connectors to empower women in conflict prevention and peacebuilding efforts. According to the monitoring and accountability report of the Women, Peace and Security and Humanitarian Compact, as of July 2023, 144 out of 204, i.e., 70 percent of signatories to the Compact, were implementing specific actions to strengthen women's meaningful participation in peace processes.¹¹

Addressing the exclusion of women from peace processes and the prevalence of impunity¹² requires holistic approaches that include legal reforms, capacity-building and changes in social

⁷ A/75/982 Our Common Agenda Report of the Secretary-General- Para 121

⁸ Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action - Para 201, 203 (a and b) 206 (b and f)

⁹ *ibid*

¹⁰ A/75/982 Our Common Agenda Report of the Secretary-General- Para 19

¹¹ See <https://wpshcompact.org/monitoring-accountability/>

¹² S/2023/725 Women and peace and security Report of the Secretary-General September 28, 2023 see e.g Para 1

norms. High military expenditures often overshadow investments in human development, including education, healthcare and gender equality initiatives. Women continue to face entrenched barriers to direct participation in peace and political processes and women's organizations struggle to find resources while military spending continues to grow every year: global military spending surged to a record high of \$2.4 trillion in 2023, marking a 6.8% increase from the previous year and the sharpest year-on-year rise since 2009.¹³

Reaffirming the commitments under the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action to promote equal participation of women and equal opportunities for women to participate in all forums and peace activities at all levels¹⁴, we urge UNECE States and peace brokers to ensure that peace processes are fully inclusive, support the appointment of women mediators and negotiators and encourage inclusive delegations where women are absent or underrepresented. This can be facilitated by:

A. Creating and maintaining databases of female experts in peace and security, offering training programs, and providing mentorship opportunities.

B. Diverse Appointments: Encouraging the appointment of women from diverse backgrounds, including migrant women from conflict-affected areas, as experts based on their lived experiences.

C. Reduce Military Spending: Allocating funds and investing in global diplomacy capacity building in pursuance of achieving meaningful and sustainable lasting peace through diplomatic means, rather than military pursuance; striving to achieve global ceasefire.

Recognizing the importance of women's full, equal and meaningful participation in building peace is crucial to achieving inclusive and sustainable peace¹⁵. However, gender equality in peacebuilding also demands addressing the pervasive issue of sexual violence, which disproportionately affects women and girls in conflict settings. Without a significant reduction in conflict, violence and the proliferation of weapons, achieving the 2030 Agenda will remain unattainable for a substantial portion of humanity.¹⁶ Addressing sexual violence not only supports the overall goals of the WPS agenda but also reinforces the need for comprehensive

¹³ Tian, N., da Silva, D. L., Liang, X., & Scarazzato, L. (2024). Trends in World Military Expenditure, 2023. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. <https://doi.org/10.55163/BQGA2180>

¹⁴ Beijing Platform for Action - Para 142 (a) and 143 (b)

¹⁵ S/2023/725 Women and peace and security Report of the Secretary-General September 28 2023 see e.g Para 1

¹⁶ A/77/CRP.1/Add.8 Our Common Agenda Policy Brief 9: A New Agenda for Peace (3 July 2023)

strategies that protect and empower women and prevent all acts of violence against women in situations of armed and other conflicts.¹⁷

Addressing and overcoming this atrocity requires a multifaceted approach- starting from domesticating international treaties to strengthen national legal mechanisms and ensure accountability¹⁸, providing medical and psychological services to the victims/survivors of and witnesses to the war crimes¹⁹, investing in campaigns to raise awareness about the impacts of sexual violence and reduce stigma against survivors,²⁰ establishing early warning²¹ and referral services²² in conflict zones and partnering and funding local women's groups that work to prevent sexual violence and aid survivors.

Therefore, we urge UNECE states to ensure that the explicit prohibition of sexual violence under the law of armed conflict is integrated into national law, military doctrine and training.²³ This can be ensured by

A. I Ratifying and domesticating international treaties that address sexual violence in conflict, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) with particular focus on art.6²⁴, 2020 general recommendations 38,²⁵ 1949 Anti-Trafficking Convention General Assembly Res/317 (IV)²⁶ the Rome Statute of the

¹⁷ Beijing Platform for Action- Para 146 (e)

¹⁸ Beijing Platform for Action - para 230 a and g

¹⁹E/2010/4–E/CN.6/2010/2 Review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly and its contribution to shaping a gender perspective towards the full realization of the Millennium Development Goals Report of the Secretary-General Para 114

²⁰ E/2010/4–E/CN.6/2010/2 Review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly and its contribution to shaping a gender perspective towards the full realization of the Millennium Development Goals Report of the Secretary-General Para 148

²¹ E/CN.6/2020/3 Review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly Report of the Secretary-General. Para 261

²² Ibid, Para 159

²³ <https://www.icrc.org/en/unsc-women-peace-security-president-statement-2023>.

²⁴

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-elimination-all-forms-discrimination-against-women>

²⁵

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/general-comments-and-recommendations/general-recommendation-no38-2020-trafficking-women#:~:text=In%20the%20present%20general%20recommendation,exploitation%20and%20leads%20to%20trafficking.>

²⁶

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-suppression-traffic-persons-and-exploitation>

International Criminal Court (ICC)²⁷, and the Istanbul Convention²⁸. Develop comprehensive national and local laws that define and criminalize sexual violence, ensuring they align with international standards

A. II Actively pursuing investigations and prosecutions of those responsible for sexual violence in conflict²⁹, including through international mechanisms like the ICC if national systems are unable or unwilling to prosecute.

A. III Training Law Enforcement and Judiciary: Provide specialized training for police, prosecutors, and judges on handling cases of sexual violence in conflict, focusing on gender sensitivity and survivor-centered approaches.

A. IV Establishing Specialized Units: Create dedicated units within law enforcement agencies to investigate and prosecute sexual violence in conflict, including all forms of traffic in women and exploitation of prostitution of women. “States Parties shall take all appropriate measures, including legislation, to suppress all forms of traffic in women and exploitation of prostitution of women”³⁰

B. Ensuring Robust Legal Protections: Strengthen legal protections for women and girls, including witness protection programs to safeguard those who testify against perpetrators.

C. Creating Referral Pathways: Establish clear pathways for survivors to access medical, legal, and psychosocial support, ensuring coordination between different service providers.

D. Training for First Responders: Train first responders, including humanitarian workers and local authorities, on how to handle disclosures of sexual violence and refer survivors to appropriate services.

E. Utilizing media and public education campaigns to challenge the stigma associated with sexual violence and to promote a culture of respect for human rights and gender equality.

Chapter 3: The empowerment of women leading peace processes, conflict prevention, mediation, and peacebuilding within the WPS agenda through National Action Plans (NAPs)

²⁷ Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court 2187 U.N.T.S. 90

²⁸ Council of Europe Treaty Series - No. 210

²⁹ Pact for the Future: zero draft (26 January 2024) retrieved from https://www.un.org/pga/wp-content/uploads/sites/108/2024/01/SOTF-Co-Facilitators-Zero-Draft_Pact-for-the-Future-circulation.pdf

³⁰<https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-elimination-all-forms-discrimination-against-women>, CEDAW art.6

In line with the Beijing Declaration, one effective method to advance people-centered sustainable development is to provide basic education, lifelong learning opportunities, literacy and training. Promoting a systematic change in conflict prevention approaches involves tackling the underlying causes of conflict, violence, and instability. This change requires the integration of peace education across all levels of society.

Aligning Peace Education with WPS Goals can be a strategic and impactful approach to:

1. Empowering women and girls with skills for conflict resolution and peacebuilding
2. Raising awareness about gender-based and conflict-related violence and human rights
3. Promoting women's leadership and participation in peace processes

A. UNECE states should promote and investigate peace literacy education that encourages critical thinking, allow individuals to analyze conflicts and consider non-violent solutions and support inculcating values of peace and non-violence in future generations. This long-term investment is crucial for sustaining peace, especially in states recovering from conflict.

B. States should Incorporate Peace Literacy Education into NAP Objectives by explicitly including it as a goal, detailing how it will support women's roles in peace and security.

C. Support awareness campaigns by conducting campaigns to raise awareness about the importance of peace education in communities. Emphasize the role of women in peacebuilding and cooperate with the media to highlight the importance of peace, non-violence, and the role of education in achieving these goals.

On the other hand, states should utilize journalism to advance peace, counteract detrimental narratives and uphold the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda by offering training on conflict-sensitive reporting and ethical and peace journalism. This involves promoting the highlighting of stories related to peacebuilding, successful conflict resolution, and the positive influence of women's involvement in peace processes. This can be ensured by

A. Establishing dedicated sections or programs within media outlets focused on WPS topics.

B. Allocating funding and resources to support independent media outlets, particularly those operating in conflict-affected areas.

And ensure that women of all ages from conflict-affected areas are an integral part of all peace processes, conflict mediation and peacebuilding through National Action Plans.

