

The Women, Peace and Security Agenda Beyond 25 Years: Building institutions for the future

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VENUE

UN Women

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Convened by the **United Nations University Centre for Policy Research (UNU-CPR)**, with support from the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development of Germany (BMZ) and UN Women.

Summary Report on Discussions

The Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda marked its twenty-fifth anniversary in 2025. In its first 25 years, the agenda has expanded beyond the mandate of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and its landmark resolution (UNSC Resolution 1325). This workshop's discussion surfaced the vast range of successes, lessons learned and gaps in the WPS agenda's first 25 years and identified priority areas for future work. This report summarizes the discussion.

Participants provided expert analysis, reflections and diverse views from the UN system, civil society, Member States and academia. Over the course of the workshop, five key questions emerged:

- (1) Where have there been successes in the WPS agenda? What can policymakers learn from those successes?
- (2) Which areas of the WPS agenda require urgent implementation and institutionalization?
- (3) What threats and barriers does the WPS agenda face in its implementation and institutionalization?
- (4) How do policymakers, civil society organizations and multilateral institutions respond to a critical gap in funding for the WPS agenda?
- (5) How do different epistemic and professional communities better communicate with one another to ensure better governance of the WPS agenda?

Participants emphasized that the WPS agenda was an innovation, brought about through a unique coalition of insiders and outsiders to the multilateral system. They also emphasized the importance of learning across sectors (multilateral and regional organizations, foreign ministries, development ministries and civil society organizations) to address governance gaps. They emphasized the importance of constructive cooperation in the face of funding gaps and ideological opposition to the WPS agenda.

Identifying Governance Gaps and Opportunities

The WPS agenda is a policy ecosystem¹ spanning many areas of development, humanitarianism and security. There are two critical areas in this ecosystem where governance gaps remain. First, participants suggested digital technologies and cybersecurity require new governance mechanisms that fully and meaningfully focus on gender equality. This requires learning lessons from other areas of the WPS agenda and other areas of digital technology governance. Full implementation of the WPS agenda depends on closing gender gaps in digital technology governance. It also means avoiding previous mistakes in digital governance. This requires cooperation across Member States, multilateral institutions, the private sector, and civil society and women's rights organizations. It also requires pairing effective innovations with these persistent governance gaps.

Second, participants suggested the WPS agenda lacks sufficient mechanisms to address emerging climate security threats, ranging from water security to food security. This gap sits at the intersection of climate change, conflict and humanitarian disasters. Each of these challenges have gendered effects and consequences. It is therefore important that these are not siloed separately from the WPS agenda. The WPS agenda must be meaningfully integrated in new institutions dealing with climate change, conflict and humanitarian disasters. Similarly, it must be meaningfully integrated into initiatives such as climate financing. More than just gender mainstreaming in policy generally, it is important to consider the threats to human security in these areas that may be unequally distributed by gender.

Other gaps identified by participants and recent UN documents include disarmament, mediation processes and misinformation and disinformation. Each of these are areas where the WPS agenda can offer innovative ideas. Overall, a key takeaway is that it is important to embed WPS principles across thematic areas of security and development and ensure a symbiotic relationship between work in these areas and work on gender equality. Moreover, it is about concrete lessons regarding where innovation works, where it is missing and how gaps can be addressed.

Evidence and Cooperation for the WPS Agenda

Participants highlighted successful approaches to cooperation that may contribute to closing the governance gaps they surfaced. Key innovation cases come from regional organizations, who have been leaders in defining the WPS agenda. The work of regional organizations is a source of inspiration for WPS cooperation and evidence of the agenda's effectiveness. For example, the African Union (AU) has been a leader on accountability mechanisms regarding the WPS agenda. This includes its Continental Results Framework, which has become a global standard on monitoring and reporting on implementation of the agenda. The AU has also successfully integrated the WPS agenda in its Peace and Security Council. Similarly, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations Regional Action Plan is a case of successful multilateral cooperation on the WPS agenda. It brought together States with very different priorities on issues under the agenda and created an inclusive and open document that was adaptable to different local contexts.

¹ Paul Kirby and Laura Shepherd, *Governing the Feminist Peace: The Vitality and Failure of the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda* (New York, Columbia University Press, 2024).

Outside of regional organizations, there are opportunities for learning from civil society organizations, who have effectively created women-led peacemaking institutions such as the Peace Track Initiative in Yemen. Similarly, civil society organizations provide essential work for achieving the goals of the WPS agenda, making it important for their work to be supported through development funding, especially for those that may be affected by the Mexico City Rule.²

There are three opportunities Member States can seize. The first opportunity is in championing the interlinkages between critical global challenges and gender equality. The second is in forming coalitions of like-minded small or middle powers to advance the WPS agenda. While some States have deprioritized the agenda, many others retain an interest in centring gender equality across security, development and humanitarian sectors. There are therefore opportunities for “mini-lateral” cooperation or even multi-stakeholder cooperation. Finally, Member States can seize the opportunity to learn from innovative practice that already exists within the WPS agenda and outside of it. This will allow for innovations from WPS to be applied elsewhere and vice-versa.

Responding to Challenges Ahead

In 2026, the WPS agenda faces many challenges. The first challenge is a significant drop in funding for WPS work, reflecting a larger drop off in funding for multilateral institutions, civil society organizations and cooperation between the two (especially in development). Creativity and innovation are needed to overcome this funding challenge.

The second challenge is a backlash against the principles of gender equality and women’s rights. Women’s rights are a testing ground for broader attacks on democracy, civil liberties and the key principles of justice, peace, tolerance and cooperation that underpin multilateralism and the UN Charter. As attacks on equality and democracy spread at the national level, multilateral cooperation becomes more difficult. At the intersection of these two issues are policies that limit the use of development aid for particular gender equality and women’s rights outcomes. This is a challenge for the entire development sector and for the WPS agenda specifically.

Multilateral organizations are undertaking significant reform and restructuring. Therefore, the third challenge lies in preserving the existing successes of the WPS agenda in any new or emerging institutional configurations. Initiatives such as UN80 offer opportunities for closer collaboration between those working to strengthen gender equality, but it is important to ensure that institutional memory and momentum on WPS is maintained.

Finally, in responding to each of these challenges, participants highlighted the importance of strengthening narratives about the importance of gender equality and the WPS agenda. In “holding the line” to protect gender equality successes, it is critical to expand the coalition of actors engaged on the WPS agenda. This will include new forms of cooperation where there are shared values between actors, even if they do not share a common language. For example, stakeholders may agree on the value of “leave no one behind” from the Sustainable Development Goals. That can be a starting point for finding common ground. Bringing more stakeholders into the WPS ecosystem is critical for its future.

² The Mexico City Rule (when in effect) is a policy of the United States Government that requires foreign non-governmental organizations to certify that they will not use any funds to perform or promote abortion to receive any United States family planning assistance. It has recently expanded to apply to the vast majority of American global health funding and to activities relating to diversity, equity, inclusion and “gender ideology”.

Conclusion

UNSC Resolution 1325 is an innovative UN resolution. It was a uniquely successful collaboration between UNSC Member States and civil society organizations. The WPS agenda has grown into a larger ecosystem across security, development and humanitarianism that is much broader than Resolution 1325 alone. As the Secretary-General's Report on WPS indicates, "progress extends far beyond the adoption of Security Council resolutions and national action plans or the political declarations made in global capitals".³ Yet despite this progress, challenges remain. Going forward, it is critical that multilateral organizations, States and civil society continue to strengthen their collaboration and cooperation. Only through continued cooperation and learning from past governance will implementation of the WPS agenda succeed.

In summary, this discussion explored the past and future of the WPS agenda across three areas: identifying governance gaps and opportunities, mobilizing cooperation for the WPS agenda and responding to the challenges ahead. Experts discussed successes, lessons learned, best practices, innovations and opportunities for improvement as the WPS agenda confronts a challenging period of global politics.

As part of its larger event series in collaboration with the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), the GGI Platform convened experts from academia, UN bodies, civil society organizations and Member States. The event took place in partnership with UN Women. The GGI Platform's research identifies both (a) areas of international cooperation in need of innovation; and (b) innovative governance features with the potential for use elsewhere. The GGI Platform will continue to engage on issues of the WPS Agenda through future events, reports and publications.