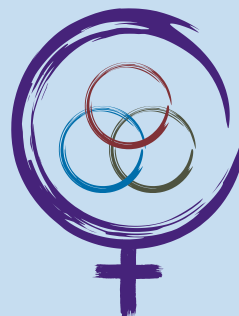


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REPORT



WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY AT THE 25TH ANNIVERSARY: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

MANUELA MESA

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Women, Peace and Security at the 25th Anniversary: a critical analysis.

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Summary

This report provides a review of the literature on the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda. Since the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 was adopted 25 years ago, a significant volume of literature has emerged on this agenda. This literature has addressed a range of issues, including the conceptualisation of the agenda, the language used, the localisation of the agenda, National Action Plans and their implementation, financing, and the establishment of monitoring and accountability mechanisms. The role played by civil society organisations, and in particular feminist organisations, in promoting this Agenda and turning it into a tool for advocacy at the international and national levels is analysed.

1. Introduction

2025 marks the 25th anniversary of the adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security. It has been a long process to include gender issues in the international peace and security agenda. Various laws, resolutions and directives have been introduced by the United Nations, the European Union and other international organisations. Together, these form a broad regulatory framework on gender, conflict and peacebuilding.

The Commission on the Status of Women first addressed the situation of women in armed conflict in 1969, highlighting the need to pay special attention to women and girls in emergency situations and during war. The First International Conference on Women (1975) led to the United Nations Decade for Women (1975–1985) in the 1970s. Then, in 1982, the UN General Assembly adopted Resolution 3763 on the participation of women in the promotion of peace and international cooperation.

Since then, four United Nations Conferences on Women have been held, establishing links between gender equality, development and peace. These have taken place in Mexico (1975), Copenhagen (1980), Nairobi (1985) and Beijing (1995). A significant number of documents, declarations and proposals have been drawn up, which have been key to creating a regulatory framework that incorporates the gender perspective into the peace and security agenda. A wide range of issues that shape and define the role of women in peacebuilding at the international and local levels have been addressed. Of all these, it was Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) of the United Nations Security Council, adopted in 2000, that marked a turning point in the international regulatory framework, recognising the differential impact of armed conflict on women and girls and the importance of incorporating a gender perspective into peacebuilding processes. Resolution 1325 establishes a comprehensive framework for addressing the impact of conflict on women and girls, promoting their participation, protection, prevention and assistance.

The precedents of UNSCR 1325 and the context in which it was adopted have made it a tool for action by civil society organisations and women's organisations at both the national and international levels.

2. Review of the anniversaries of UNSCR 1325

Over the years, local and international organisations have worked together to make significant progress on this agenda. They have used the most significant anniversaries — the tenth, fifteenth and twentieth — to assess achievements and develop proposals and initiatives. However, the strength of the global women's movement in favour of equal rights, and the incorporation of a gender perspective in peacebuilding, contrasts with the difficulties encountered when implementing this agenda in conflict zones and post-war rehabilitation processes.

On the tenth anniversary of the adoption of Resolution 1325, Uganda held the presidency of the Council, and the Secretary-General's report proposed the adoption of a set of indicators to assess compliance with the resolution. The report also recommended integrating a gender perspective into the international peace and security agenda. To this end, the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security (NGOWG) and the Peace Women programme, promoted by the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), presented various proposals through initiatives such as the Peace and Security Handbook (Butler, Mader & Kean, 2010). Other proposals included creating a forum for debate and regular exchange of experiences on Resolution 1325, promoting its integration into development cooperation policies, developing a European Action Plan on 1325, establishing a group of countries in support of Resolution 1325, and ensuring adequate financial resources (Cabrera and Surulaga, 2011). Finally, the importance of integrating the gender perspective into all United Nations structures, levels and programmes was emphasised, as was establishing the position of Special Representative on Sexual Violence. Many of these proposals were realised in subsequent years, helping to strengthen the various networks of organisations working on the WPS agenda.

In preparation for the fifteenth anniversary in 2015, intensive work was carried out to facilitate debate, coordination and the formation of alliances between civil society organisations (CSOs), with the aim of formulating solid, consensus-based proposals (Oxfam, 2015; NGOWG, 2015). The NGO Working Group on WPS drew up a roadmap setting out the main demands and proposals. The anniversary raised high expectations of the opportunity to advance the implementation of the agenda. The annual open debate took on special significance at this event (Mesa, 2015; Villellas, 2016).

A 'high-level' review was conducted, resulting in the UN Secretary-General commissioning the 'Global Study' entitled Preventing Armed Conflict, Transforming Justice, Securing Peace (Coomaraswamy, 2015). Led by Radika Coomaraswamy, this study was conceived as a participatory process to gather the voices of women from all regions of the world. The aim was to enable the formulation of clear and concise proposals on how governments and the United Nations system could advance the women, peace and security agenda (Allen et al., 2015).

¹ A coalition of 18 international organisations that advocate at the United Nations, and in particular at the Security Council, on the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda. More information at : <https://www.womenpeacesecurity.org/our-work/>

The *Global Study* was a robust document containing numerous proposals relating to participation, protection, justice, peace operations, human rights mechanisms and financing. Some of the most notable proposals were:

- ensuring that women's participation and leadership become central issues on the peace and security agenda;
- protecting the human rights of women and girls during and after conflict, especially in the context of emerging threats;
- ensuring that planning and accountability mechanisms have a gender perspective;
- strengthening the United Nations' architecture on gender issues and increasing awareness;
- adequately funding the WPS agenda.

To mark this anniversary, the Global Accelerator Instrument (GAI)^[2] on women, peace and security was established. This five-year funding mechanism includes donors and countries in conflict and supports women's organisations, activists and human rights defenders. The aim was to create a flexible and agile instrument. However, contributions were lower than expected. One of the novel elements of the open debate was the initiative of two civil society organisations (WILPF and NGOWG), who compiled the commitments made by Member States in writing and subsequently forwarded them to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, the Member States and regional organisations that had participated in the session through Spain's representation to the United Nations. This made them a Council document (United Nations, 2015). Spanish diplomacy's initiative was highly valued as an attempt to create a document of commitments from the Council itself, which could serve as a means of accountability in the coming years and help to bridge the persistent gap between words and actions.

This anniversary was marked by highs and lows: commitments made by governments fell short of expectations, and many doubts were raised about how to move forward with this agenda, which is so full of urgent challenges. As various analyses have pointed out (Mesa, 2015; Villellas, 2016), the fifteenth anniversary generated high expectations among civil society organisations, who saw it as an opportunity to build momentum and create the conditions necessary for a change in trend, moving from words to deeds. Proposals from the Global Study, the Spanish government's presidency of the Security Council — which had shown strong support for the WPS agenda — and networks of organisations suggested significant progress could be made in incorporating a gender perspective into peace processes, establishing conflict prevention measures, reducing sexual violence and increasing women's representation in the United Nations' institutional architecture. Ultimately, however, the commitments were underwhelming and failed to meet the high expectations that the anniversary had generated (Mesa, 2015: 162).

¹ Ver: <https://mptf.undp.org/fund/gai00>

By the twentieth anniversary of Resolution 1325, the international context had changed radically. Far-right groups were leading a coordinated offensive against equality and women's rights agendas, putting some of the measures adopted to promote women's participation in decision-making processes and protect them against gender-based violence at risk.

Furthermore, some of the proposals were highly controversial. Resolution 2242, adopted that year, incorporated the issue of terrorism and violent extremism into an agenda that had focused primarily on women's rights. This resolution was perceived by some women's groups as an attempt to securitise the agenda or co-opt it, so that it would shift from being focused on women's rights to being associated with other agendas on violent extremism and terrorism.

In 2019, the independent evaluation of progress in implementing Resolution 1325, commissioned by the United Nations Secretary-General, once again highlighted the need to incorporate a gender perspective into the institution's architecture, as well as strengthening gender-sensitive conflict analysis and its application to planning and resource allocation. As on previous occasions, it was proposed that at least 15% of peacebuilding funds should be earmarked for gender equality and the empowerment of women.

By the twentieth anniversary of Resolution 1325, the international context had changed radically. It was clear that extremist groups had gained ground in recent years, setting back the agenda for equality and women's rights. A coordinated international offensive against gender equality and 'gender ideology' had spread to many countries, and some of the measures adopted to protect women from gender-based violence and promote their participation in decision-making processes were being undermined.

While 2020 marked the 25th anniversary of the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which was intended to renew the United Nations' commitment to equality (UN Women, 2020), some of the rights enshrined in the Declaration were instead being called into question, particularly those relating to sexual and reproductive rights. Michelle Bachelet, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, warned of the risk of regression in guaranteeing women's rights given that they were under attack on many fronts, with discourses that legitimise inequality resurfacing. 'Women's rights are not negotiable,' she stressed in various forums. On the 20th anniversary of Resolution 1325, the international context had changed radically, with far-right groups leading a coordinated offensive against equality and women's rights agendas. This put some of the measures adopted to promote women's participation in decision-making and protect them against gender-based violence at risk

Added to this were the limited advances in the implementation of Resolution 1325 due to a lack of political will on the part of governments, limitations within the United Nations Security Council itself, limited funding for programmes, and the low impact that some measures have had on improving the lives of women living in conflict zones. While the proposals put forward in the 2015 Global Study remain valid on this 20th anniversary, a more unfavourable international context has raised fears of a setback to the equality and women's rights agenda.

The Working Group on the MPS (NGOWG) also proposed a roadmap on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the resolution, based on six principles: 1) Gender-specific dimensions of crises and armed conflicts must be taken into account. 2) A human rights approach is proposed to address all dimensions of the WPS agenda. 3) To achieve sustainable peace, the full, equal and meaningful participation of women at different levels of decision-making is necessary. 4) The WPS agenda requires an intersectional approach to gender equality. 5) Civil society is an integral part of the WPS agenda, and its full and meaningful participation must therefore be ensured. 6) The elimination of gender inequality is an international legal obligation and a collective responsibility of multilateral organisations and governments.

Five years have passed since then, and 2025 will mark the 25 (th) anniversary of the adoption of Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (WPS). However, the integration of gender equality into the field of international peace and security continues to face increasingly complex challenges. The international context in which Resolution 1325 was adopted in 2000 differs greatly from the current one. The year 2000 was a time of multilateralism, progress, and the consolidation of regional organisations. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were adopted, and significant progress was made in shaping a global agenda, setting objectives and targets to be achieved by 2015. This agenda would later evolve into the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Meanwhile, civil society organisations were playing an increasingly prominent role within the United Nations system, exploring alternative forms of participation and organising parallel forums and summits to influence agendas and action plans. However, the strengthening of democratic multilateralism in the first decade of the 21st century has given way to a period marked by the breakdown of the consensus that defined the international order after the Second World War, and especially after the end of the Cold War. We are now facing a period characterised by the deliberate erosion of the rules, principles, and laws that govern coexistence between states. This is undermining the foundations of multilateralism and weakening the pillars on which the international system was built.

This breakdown in international consensus manifests itself in various ways, from military interventions without international mandates and the illegal occupation of territories, to the exploitation of the multilateral system for geopolitical ends or the withdrawal from key agreements on climate change, nuclear disarmament or human rights. Furthermore, the legitimacy and capacity for action of the United Nations system, international institutions and accountability mechanisms is being undermined by intensifying attacks against them. The genocide being perpetrated in Gaza by the Israeli government, supported by the United States and with the complicity of European governments, is the starkest expression of how authoritarian governments and some democratic countries have adopted unilateral positions that flout international law. These positions obstruct mechanisms for dialogue and conflict resolution and prioritise an agenda of rearmament, posing an enormous risk to international security.

The fragmentation of the global order, impunity for international crimes, the weakening of civic spaces, and a lack of respect for multilateral institutions are creating an increasingly unstable environment in which the principles of justice, solidarity, and international cooperation are being replaced by a culture of force. This situation endangers the agenda for equality and women's rights.

In this context, the 25th anniversary of the adoption of Resolution 1325 in 2025 raises enormous challenges. Among the proposals and recommendations made by the NGOWG in 2024, the following stand out: the urgent need to move towards greater efforts in prevention and dialogue, which implies increasing resources for peace and reducing military spending; rebuilding an international security architecture based on dialogue, consensus building and agreements; guaranteeing women's rights; increasing the presence of women at the negotiating table and supporting feminist movements in their plurality (NGOWG, 2024). Added to these proposals are the climate emergency, the effect of an extractive and predatory neoliberal capitalist model, and its gender impacts; repression against peacebuilders, human rights defenders and other civil society groups; neglect of armed conflict prevention and inclusive dialogue as ways of addressing conflicts; co-optation of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda (Villellas, Urrutia and Villellas, A, 2024).

In this situation, it is urgent to rethink and defend a renewed, inclusive, feminist multilateralism that recovers its transformative vocation, placing peace, human rights, climate justice and gender equality at its core. The feminist movement and a global network of women's organisations are committed to a transformative agenda that addresses the root causes of discrimination and the structural factors that legitimise violence. This agenda challenges patriarchal power structures. This movement promotes women's rights and their participation in decision-making processes, while also working to prevent violence and build sustainable, lasting peace. Only through collective action can we hope to address global challenges ranging from the climate crisis to ongoing wars. To achieve this, we must build a more just, sustainable and peaceful international order in which the equality agenda is effectively implemented.

3. Literature on Women, Peace and Security

Over the past 25 years, a significant body of literature has been produced on the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda. The background to UNSCR 1325, and the context in which it was adopted, have made it a tool for action by civil society organisations and women's organisations at the international level, but also at the national and local levels. This process has been accompanied by reflection and analysis by academia, NGOs, activists and peacebuilders.

It is a significant fact that none of the more than 2,200 resolutions adopted by the United Nations Security Council has had the scope and dissemination of Resolution 1325. Translated into over 100 languages, it is widely recognised by its number, name and content. Despite the lack of progress on the agenda, the lack of commitment from governments, and attempts by some actors to exploit it for their own ends, the appropriation of this resolution by civil society organisations has ensured that it remains relevant and continues to generate a multitude of initiatives. Resolution 1325 marked a policy shift in the Security Council by recognising the empowerment of women as integral to international peace and security (Barbé, 2016).

Over the past twenty-five years, some of the main debates and actions have focused on various political advocacy strategies. These include the incorporation of gender-sensitive language in treaties, redefining the security agenda, encouraging women's participation in peace processes, establishing monitoring and accountability mechanisms, and securing financing.

3.1. Gender-sensitive language

The incorporation and analysis of gender-sensitive language in the treaties and policy documents of the United Nations and regional organisations is one of the advocacy strategies that has been employed. The use of gender-sensitive language is an indicator of these institutions' commitment to the Women Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda. For this reason, civil society organisations have spent years ensuring that the gender perspective is included in United Nations agreements, treaties, and mandates. As a result of this advocacy work, there has been a significant increase in the number of references to WPS in resolutions adopted by the main United Nations bodies. However, this remains insufficient: For instance, only 10% of measures adopted by the Security Council contain gender-related references. Specific provisions on women and gender were also almost entirely absent from ceasefire and peace agreements resulting from processes led or co-led by the United Nations (NGOWG, 2020a).

The report, 'Where are the words?', was published by WILPF and the Centre for Women, Peace and Security at the London School of Economics. The Disappearance of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda in the Language of United Nations Security Council Country-Specific Resolutions (2020) notes that the ten resolutions adopted on women, peace and security (WPS) contain nearly 2,500 commitments that entail legal obligations and could be enforced by various actors, mechanisms, and subsidiary bodies. The report emphasises the language adopted by the Council because the Council's resolutions oblige states to develop legal norms that allow for the implementation of concrete measures with a gender perspective (Kenny and Stavrevska, 2020: 2). Notably, the country-specific resolutions adopted by the Council either do not incorporate the WPS Agenda or do so very weakly. Ongoing advocacy work is therefore required to ensure that these commitments form part of diplomatic efforts to implement the agenda (Kenny and Stavrevska, 2020: 3). In recent years, we have witnessed an offensive by the anti-gender movement against women's rights, seeking to reverse these achievements and change the language (Badell, 2024).

3.2. The concept of security

Another issue addressed in the literature is the concept of security and peace. Authors such as Carol Cohn (2015), Cynthia Enloe (2014) and Cynthia Cockburn (2009) have analysed how peace and international security have traditionally been conceived from a male perspective. In this regard, they have explored the implications of United Nations Resolution 1325, which broadened the meaning of these concepts by incorporating the voices of women in conflict zones and bringing their demands to the attention of international bodies.

From this perspective, traditional conceptions of security have been questioned, particularly those based on the idea of 'national security', a concept that is rooted in the myth of men as protectors of women and girls. However, contemporary armed conflicts have shown this idea to be false. In many contexts, it is more dangerous for a woman to fetch water from the river than it is for a man to be a soldier in a militia, as has been highlighted in numerous forums. Nevertheless, the traditional view of security, centred on the protection of the state through military means, persists.

The integration of a gender perspective into security studies highlights the structural inequalities that perpetuate violence within and between States. Gender-based violence, including sexual violence, is a manifestation of a power imbalance and is closely linked to the way in which control and domination are exercised. Some authors have argued that the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda has not transformed the traditional approach to security in practice, but has instead instrumentalised women's rights without challenging militarised security structures. For example, Resolution 1325 does not challenge the idea that security is based on the ability to win wars or exercise force rather than prioritising diplomacy and peaceful conflict resolution (Miralles, 2019; Urrutia et al., 2020: 11–12).

From a feminist perspective, militarism and the violence it perpetuates pose one of the greatest threats to people's security (Mari Tripp and Worth, 2022). Organisations such as WILPF International have historically denounced military spending and advocated its redistribution to social sectors. Preventing conflict must be a priority on the WPS agenda, with a focus on early warning systems and improving preventive dialogues at local, national, and international levels.

The challenge ahead is how to effectively incorporate the gender perspective into national and international security (Oudraat and Brown, 2017: 1). This requires a significant shift in the national security paradigm towards a human security model centred on life, social justice, and sustainability. A comprehensive approach to security must go beyond traditional military challenges such as arms races, armed conflicts and terrorism, and also consider non-traditional and non-military issues affecting national and international security, such as global warming, economic development, human rights and governance (Stokes, 2020).

The aim is to broaden existing perspectives and develop a new framework that examines gender dynamics in conflicts, considers institutional responses, and ensures the implementation of inclusive policies. For women in war zones, peace and security entail more than just the absence of violence; they also require access to human rights, social justice, participatory democracy and the recognition of diversity (Oudraaty Brown, 2017: 5; Porter, 2012: 227).

3.3. The differential impact of gender in the analysis of armed conflicts

UNSCR 1325 has also generated relevant analysis and reflection on this issue. Over the past 25 years, civil society organisations have promoted a broad, multi-level agenda covering a wide range of issues related to the prevention of violence, the protection and participation of women, and involving multiple actors at multilateral, regional, national and local levels.

Several studies have shown that gender inequality is a key factor in predicting conflict and instability. Countries with weak human rights standards are more likely to engage in violent, militarised interstate disputes (Herbert, 2014: 2). According to the *2020 Alert report* produced by the Escola de Cultura de Pau at the University of Barcelona, which is based on cases where data on gender equality is available, 58% of armed conflicts take place in contexts with high or very high levels of gender discrimination. This figure rises to 83% when contexts with medium levels of discrimination are included (Escola de Cultura de Pau, 2020: 138). Civil society organisations and the feminist movement have therefore emphasised the importance of tackling discriminatory structures and institutions to prevent conflict (Weldon and Htun, 2013; WILPF, 2020). The absence of women in decision-making spaces reflects a lack of equality and a gender agenda that fails to address the root causes of inequality. In order to build more peaceful societies, it is crucial to promote social and political inclusion, and to eliminate discriminatory practices.

With regard to sexual violence in times of war, UNSCR 1325 marked a turning point in that it recognised the issue as central to international peace and security (Simic, 2010; Aroussi, 2017; Reilly, 2018). Studies by authors such as Cynthia Enloe (2014) and Caroline Moser (2001) have shown that sexual violence in war contexts is not random, but rather a response to structural gender dynamics. It is used as a tool of domination, ethnic cleansing, dehumanisation and terror. Furthermore, the literature shows that sexual violence is not limited to the military sphere, but is also committed by non-state actors. It persists after conflicts in 'post-conflict' situations when militarisation and impunity perpetuate violence.

In some situations, sexual violence has been used to justify military intervention rather than to promote the transformation of security structures (Shepherd, 2016; Kirby & Shepherd, 2016). The inclusion of women in security forces and peacekeeping missions illustrates the challenges associated with integrating a gender perspective into these patriarchal and masculine institutions, which conflicts with anti-militarist feminism. The links between patriarchy, masculinity, and violence against women within these institutions must be recognised (Mújica, 2021; Besozzi, 2022).

3.4. Women's participation at the negotiating table

Some approaches prioritise women's agency, recognising their role as agents of peace. Other approaches focus on the structures that generate violence and discriminate against women, thereby preventing progress in terms of their rights and equal participation in peace and security. Addressing these inequalities and discrimination requires structural change.

Some authors (e.g. Villellas, 2016) have analysed women's participation in peace processes. As Villellas (2016) explains, the design of institutional processes determines who participates, how peace agreements are designed, what they contain, and how they are monitored and implemented. This design is predetermined by gender. Therefore, UNSCR 1325 should be used to intervene in these processes. Women must participate in peace processes as political subjects with rights, which has broader consequences in terms of social inclusion. As Cohn (2015: 328) points out, 'including women also means bringing many more social sectors to the peace table, as gender intersects with ethnicity, religion, class, caste and clan'. Furthermore, peace processes must include a broader timeframe covering the formal and informal processes leading up to negotiations.

The inclusion of a gender perspective must go beyond increasing the number of women in different decision-making spaces. It must also incorporate qualitative measures that truly change existing power relations in political, social and military structures, and put an end to the inequality and violence suffered by women in conflict situations.

Another issue analysed is the framework within which the WPS agenda is set. The fact that some actors consider it a 'women's' agenda has consequences; the way in which women and girls are talked about can be infantile and reinforce the idea that they lack agency. This maintains patterns that exclude women from participating in security policies (Oudraat & Brown, 2017: 2). This creates an essentialist narrative that portrays women as victims who need protection, perpetuating a militarised and masculine notion of security that focuses primarily on sexual violence while ignoring the 'continuum of violence' and the relationship between different forms of violence (Cockburn, 2009).

Women's participation must go beyond quantitative indicators that reflect the increase in women in peace missions or the greater number of women in UN structures, and instead focus on the quality of women's involvement. While this is undoubtedly important, it is insufficient. While increasing the number of women in these spaces may be a first step, it is not enough. However, a gender-inclusive approach must also encompass qualitative measures that can genuinely transform existing power dynamics within political, social, and military structures, thereby putting an end to the inequality and violence experienced by women in conflict situations.

3.5. Accountability and Financing of the Agenda

In 2019, the Secretary-General commissioned an independent assessment of progress in implementing UNSCR 1325 with regard to accountability and financing. The resulting report emphasised the importance of incorporating a gender perspective into institutional structures and conflict analysis, and of applying this analysis to planning and resource allocation. It also reiterated the proposal to allocate at least 15% of peacebuilding funds to gender equality and women's empowerment. Various authors and institutions have addressed the issue of funding in a similar manner (Cordaid/GNWP, 2014; Fal, Dutra and Cabrera, 2017).

3.6. Convergence and expansion with other agendas

The agenda has gradually expanded into other areas. The United Nations Security Council's policy has been analysed (Shepherd, 2008; Tryggestad, 2009; Bell & O'Rourke, 2010; Pratt & Richter-Devroe, 2011), as have the inclusion of women in peacekeeping operations (Karim, 2017; Deiana & McDonagh, 2018) and the use of the women, peace and security agenda as justification for humanitarian intervention (e.g. Dharmapuri, 2013; Davies et al., 2015), alongside disarmament, arms control and military spending.

Significant progress has been made in recognising the gender impact of humanitarian crises, particularly in relation to forced displacement. There have also been efforts to improve coordination with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with the aim of addressing the gender perspective in a cross-cutting manner, particularly with regard to SDG 5 on gender equality.

Progress has also been made in convergence with the Global Care Agenda, which, like Resolution 1325, is based on a feminist approach to the sustainability of life and the transformation of unjust power structures that exclude women. The aim is to dismantle patriarchal hierarchies that perpetuate inequalities and democratise decision-making spaces. However, the agenda has become increasingly complex and is being used by various actors in different, and sometimes contradictory, ways. This has given rise to new interpretations that need to be analysed (Basur, Kirby & Shepherd, 2020). This is evident in the incorporation of the agenda into regional bodies such as the African Union and the OSCE, and even military organisations such as NATO, which poses enormous challenges. Another issue present in this agenda is the tension between military structures that incorporate the WPS Agenda and feminist pacifist approaches that advocate demilitarisation, human security, and the prevention of violence.

4. Localising the Women, Peace and Security Agenda

There is extensive literature on the localisation of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda (Hamilton, Naam and Shepherd, 2020; Ormhaug, 2014; GNWP, 2018).

The expression 'localisation of the agenda' is part of the multilevel logic and refers to placing actions at the local level, so that communities and women implement them in that sphere to achieve equality. Mavic Cabrera, director of the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders (GNWP), highlights that this participatory approach seeks to exchange local-level experiences and design public policies that promote greater equality in peacebuilding processes, both in conflict situations and in contexts where armed violence is not directly present.

The WPS agenda is based on a participatory assessment of the main requirements for achieving peace and security in each territory. It involves key local stakeholders, such as mayors, community leaders, religious leaders, youth associations, and women's organisations, in the process. The aim is to identify the actions needed to build sustainable peace and promote gender equality in each area, and to develop a local action plan to complement other local or national plans. The objective is to strengthen cooperation between local and national actors. This participatory approach seeks to facilitate the exchange of experiences at a local level and to design public policies oriented towards achieving greater equality in peace-building processes (Cabrera, 2013).

In his annual report on the SDGs to the Security Council in 2017 (S/2017/861), the United Nations Secretary-General highlighted the importance of these localisation programmes for the agenda, as they transform international, regional and national commitments into local actions based on community needs. The objectives of localisation include:

- Help identify and respond to local priorities and concerns in the WPS Agenda.
- Foster local leadership, ownership and commitment to the implementation of the WPS Agenda.
- Improve the capacity of civil society organisations to monitor the local implementation of the WPS Agenda and hold local authorities accountable.
- Develop concrete legal and policy instruments that strengthen the implementation of the WPS Agenda at the local level.
- Promote systematic coordination and cooperation between local authorities, civil society organisations, local leaders, the United Nations, regional organisations and donors (GNWP, 2018: 19).

The Global Network of Women Peacebuilders is one of the pioneering organisations in promoting the localisation of the WPS Agenda. It has implemented localisation strategies in Armenia, Burundi, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Georgia, Kenya, Liberia, Moldova, Nepal, Nigeria, the Philippines, Serbia, Sierra Leone, South Sudan, Uganda and Ukraine. Experience has shown that this strategy is an effective means of translating policies into concrete actions (Cabrera, 2013; GNWP, 2018). Women human rights defenders play a vital role in localising the WPS agenda. They address inequalities and generate collective peace-building processes from the ground up that challenge power relations and the patriarchal, racist and classist systems that generate violence. The main obstacle to women's equal participation is the enormous resistance of political elites and men to a more equitable distribution of power. Women face gender roles that prevent them from expressing themselves freely, and these roles lie at the root of problems such as violence and a lack of economic independence. This is why achieving gender equality requires a medium- and long-term process of social transformation that can begin at the local level. Local initiatives for the positive transformation of conflicts, led by women peace and human rights activists who work on the front line to prevent violence, must be supported through technical, financial and political assistance, as well as protection against the risks they face.

One such case is Colombia, where local organisations have worked to advance the implementation of the resolution by developing proposals to guarantee women's participation and creating spaces for dialogue, reconciliation and actions to promote non-repetition. They have the support of the National Women's Network, a platform of organisations that organised the National Women and Peace Summit and succeeded in creating a Gender Sub-Commission in the Havana Peace Process (Mesa, 2014; Fisas, 2014: 69; ECP, 2015). Since then, women's organisations have carried out multiple initiatives. For example, the International League of Women for Peace and Freedom in Colombia (LIMPAL) uses the resolution to prevent violence in territories, organising workshops related to conflict resolution, the reconstruction of social fabric and reconciliation processes based on memory and healing, particularly for women who are victims of armed conflict. They are also advocating for the establishment of a National Action Plan for Resolution 1325 in Colombia. In October 2018, several civil society organisations published the document 'Peace Advances with Women: Observations for the Incorporation of a Gender Approach in the Peace Agreement', taking stock of the fulfilment of commitments regarding gender equality made in the Agreement (Cotes, 2018).

Implementing the agenda shows that supporting women's organisations is a safe and positive choice, as they have a broader and more inclusive understanding of what is happening in conflict zones and the needs of affected populations. Furthermore, the agenda has strengthened the social fabric by generating an inclusive language and creating alliances between various women's organisations at national and international levels.

Local organisations have been the main drivers of the MPS Agenda, implementing actions in their territory and working daily to defend the rights of women and vulnerable populations. For this reason, it is crucial to incorporate a gender perspective into peacebuilding and post-war rehabilitation programmes.

5. National Action Plans

Another area analysed is National Action Plans (NAPs) for implementing UNSCR 1325. Various issues have been addressed in the literature, including the importance of funding, political will and coordination, inclusion and localisation, and systemic monitoring and evaluation frameworks (Hamilton, Naam and Shepherd, 2020; Owen, 2011; Cabrera and Surulaga, 2011; Cordaid/GNWP, 2014; EPLO).

The process of developing National Action Plans and defining their content, as well as the monitoring and evaluation processes, has provided CSOs with an extraordinary opportunity to participate and highlight the need to involve women and adopt a gender-sensitive approach in peace negotiations and peacebuilding processes. Many of the action plans have been developed with the participation of civil society or through consultation processes. These plans enable CSOs to engage in dialogue with their governments on relevant gender and conflict issues, and to monitor the fulfilment of commitments made.

According to Hamilton, Naam and Shepherd (2020), the experience varies greatly from country to country. In some cases, governments were firmly committed to the WPS agenda, promoting the development of a National Action Plan. This was the case in countries such as Sweden, Finland, Norway, the Netherlands and Spain, where civil society organisations were involved from the outset and helped to promote this agenda.

In other cases, the National Action Plans were the result of advocacy by CSOs with governments. For instance, in Ireland in 2010, a coalition of human rights, development and feminist organisations created a guide outlining six steps for developing an action plan. This process included the participation of CSOs, particularly those with experience of working with women's organisations in conflict zones. In Colombia, CSOs — particularly the Women's Network for Peace — have for years been campaigning to encourage the Colombian government to adopt an Action Plan. They continue to use Resolution 1325 to demand justice and an end to impunity in the country.

In Liberia and other countries affected by conflict, a highly participatory process was implemented that incorporated women's needs and proposals, promoted institutional strengthening, and secured international support. Liberia and Norway also established a partnership to develop the action plan together and provide mutual support, incorporating financial and human resources, and collaborating to promote the exchange of experiences and the dissemination of UNSCR 1325. Similarly, Nepal's National Action Plan involved significant participation from civil society organisations (CSOs) and international agencies, and included specific support for widows as one of the most vulnerable groups (Owen, 2011: 617).

Some Action Plans have been developed through consultations with civil society organisations in conflict-affected countries that receive development aid. The Netherlands, for example, included women's organisations from Afghanistan, Burundi, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan, and countries in the Middle East and North Africa in the development of its Third Action Plan (2016–2019). A collaboration platform was also established between the government and 50 civil society organisations (WO-MEN), who worked together on developing and monitoring the action plan. Similar initiatives have been promoted by Norway and Finland.

The process of developing national action plans, as well as defining their content, monitoring and evaluation, has provided an extraordinary opportunity for CSOs to participate and to highlight the need to involve women and include a gender perspective in peace negotiation and peacebuilding processes.

One of the issues highlighted is that the National Action Plans of Global North countries have often focused on development cooperation and their role as donors in promoting gender equality in conflict-affected countries, while overlooking the potential of the Women Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda at the domestic level in their own countries. This was the case in Spain during Mariano Rajoy's term in government (2011–2015). Although the Spanish government declared the importance of the resolution and gender equality at the international level, supporting the gender agenda in countries in conflict such as Colombia and Palestine, women's rights were in fact curtailed in Spain. Institutional support for feminist organisations was reduced, and the UN Women office in Spain — a significant achievement — was closed. The closure of this office meant a loss of opportunities to internationalise the Spanish agenda on gender and peacebuilding (Mesa, 2015).

The National Action Plans have been periodically updated in response to changes at national and international levels. Some countries are already on their third or fourth plan. Over the years, some civil society organisations (CSOs) and regional networks have monitored their implementation and provided ongoing recommendations, while also highlighting the remaining challenges.

For several years, the organisation Global Women Peace Builders (GNWP) has published the report *Women Count: The UNSCR 1325 Civil Society Monitoring Report* provides an overview of the action plans and the degree to which they have been implemented. The European Peacebuilding Liaison Office (EPLO), which coordinates research centres and NGOs interested in this area, has monitored the action plans in the European context for several years and presented various monitoring reports containing recommendations for the European Union.

The various bodies agree that National Action Plans should not be an end in themselves, but rather a means of implementing this agenda. They must therefore be accompanied by the necessary material and human resources. Furthermore, implementation must align fully with established international standards on gender equality and respect for human rights, and seek synergies with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Beijing +20 Platform for Action (Villellas, 2015). Finally, regional organisations such as the African Union and military alliances such as NATO have also drawn up action plans setting out their commitments to the WPS agenda.

Developing National Action Plans and defining their content, as well as the monitoring and evaluation processes, has provided CSOs with an extraordinary opportunity to participate and highlight the need to involve women and include a gender perspective in peace negotiations and peacebuilding processes.

Studies by the organisation Cordaid and the international network Global Network of Women Peacebuilders (GNWP) have highlighted the persistent lack of funding for the Women Peace and Security (WPS) agenda (Cabrera and Surulaga, 2011; Cordaid/GNWP, 2014; Fal, Dutra and Cabrera, 2017). They have also recommended that Action Plans have a specific, adequate, medium-term budgetary framework adapted to the actions to be carried out. Resources should primarily be channelled through women's organisations, international networks, and human rights defenders. The studies also emphasise the importance of establishing a transparent financial management system that provides clarity on the resources allocated to implementing the Action Plans. Funding implies a commitment to the agenda that goes beyond a mere declaration of good intentions.

Finally, a good National Action Plan should provide a strategic roadmap for promoting the implementation of the State's policy on women, peace and security. It should also ensure that actors are held accountable for their commitments. A National Action Plan does not replace substantive policy objectives and implementation initiatives; rather, it is a planning and strategy tool. Governments, multilateral institutions and civil society can use a National Action Plan to coordinate actions and monitor results. Political will is essential for this. This means that the relevant ministries and government agencies must commit to implementing the plan, adopting a concerted top-down approach, and taking action. This requires negotiating priorities, responsibilities, funding, and visions of peace and security (Hamilton, Naam, & Shepherd, 2020, pp. 27–28).

One of the recommendations to advance the implementation of this agenda is to institutionalise the proposals so that they form part of the core action, making them less dependent on personal will and more mandatory. Often, there is little or no link between policy documents and the actions carried out on the ground.

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