FORUM CeSPI

Promoting The "Women, Peace and Security" Agenda for a More Equitable and Inclusive Society

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Twenty-five years after the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) and on the occasion of the launch of Italy's Fifth National Action Plan, CeSPI is inaugurating an online platform for dialogue, exchange, and analysis on the present and future of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda.

The initiative seeks to foster in-depth debate on strategies to strengthen the dissemination and implementation of the WPS agenda – both internationally and within specific country contexts – through the identification of critical challenges, the sharing of replicable best practices, and the promotion of innovative approaches.

The Forum is open to civil society representatives, think tanks, policymakers, mediators, academics, women's rights activists, and humanitarian workers engaged at the international level. Contributions are welcome in Italian, English, French, and Spanish.

Background

On 31 October 2000, the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 1325, placing women at the center of peace and international security. It was the first resolution to explicitly acknowledge both the impact of war on women and their essential role in conflict resolution and the pursuit of lasting peace. The WPS agenda is built upon the pillars of *prevention, participation, protection, relief and recovery*. It calls on the international community to: prevent all forms of violence against women and girls in conflict and post-conflict situations; promote women's equal participation and gender equality in peace and security decision-making processes at all levels; protect women from sexual and gender-based violence and safeguard their rights in conflict and emergency situations; and advance gender-sensitive relief and recovery measures in response to international crises.

Despite nine subsequent resolutions[1] since 2000 have expanded and detailed the scope of the WPS agenda, women remain marginalized in decision-making and reconstruction processes, while continuing to bear the brunt of conflict-related violence. According to the latest UN Secretary-General's report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, civilians – particularly women and children – suffer the gravest consequences of war, including death, torture, and forced displacement. In 2023, more than 600 million women and girls lived in conflict-affected areas, with devastating repercussions for access to health services, including reproductive and mental health care. The percentage of women killed doubled compared to the previous year. In 2024, the UN verified around 4,500 cases of conflict-related sexual violence – though the actual number is likely much higher –

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[1] 1820, 1888, 1889, 1960, 2106, 2122, 2242, 2467 and 2493.

93% of the victims were women and girls. Girls in conflict zones are 2.5 times more likely to be out of school than their peers elsewhere.

Although disproportionately affected by conflict, women continue to be systematically excluded from peace negotiations and mediation. In 2023, only 9.6% of negotiators, 13.7% of mediators, and 26.6% of signatories of peace and ceasefire agreements were women. In several processes – including in Libya and Yemen – delegations did not include a single woman. Similarly, women were excluded from political negotiations before and after the Gaza war and the ceasefire talks following the events of October 7, 2023.

The marginalization of women in decision-making and political life goes hand in hand with persistent social and economic discrimination, undermining their security and limiting their opportunities for leadership. The *Global Gender Gap Report 2025* highlights that none of the 148 economies surveyed has yet achieved full gender parity. Although women's participation in the global workforce rose to 41.2% in 2024, the figure remains far too low, with women's employment still largely concentrated in low-paid sectors.

Equitable access to employment opportunities, public services, and decision-making processes constitutes a cross-cutting issue that is particularly significant from an intergenerational perspective. Younger generations are among the most severely affected by the consequences of economic, social, and political crises, especially in contexts already marked by structural fragilities. These consequences take multiple forms: interrupted educational paths, precarious entry into the labor market without adequate protections, and persistent exclusion from socio-economic development processes. Too often, their role is reduced to that of passive beneficiaries, rather than being recognized as active agents of change. This exclusion not only undermines the capacity to respond to current crises but also jeopardizes the possibility of building sustainable and inclusive development pathways in the long term. Within these dynamics, young women are particularly vulnerable. This holds true also in the face of emerging challenges such as climate change, which threatens human security and access to essential resources such as water, food, and energy.

Twenty-five years after the adoption of Resolution 1325, "despite important normative progress, the implementation of the WPS agenda remains uneven, critically underfunded, and too often excludes the voices and leadership of those most affected by conflict and crisis". Given the slow and fragmented progress in advancing the WPS agenda, it is essential to examine both the underlying causes and the potential solutions to ensure its full implementation – particularly in today's conflict-ridden global context, which further risks undermining women's role in peace and security.

Drawing on CeSPI's experience on this issue in recent years, we have identified several critical challenges in implementation, with the aim of stimulating debate, sharing experiences, and proposing new pathways for the promotion of the WPS agenda[2].

Adopting the Agenda—but how to implement it?

For the realization of the WPS agenda, Security Council Resolutions assign a wide range of responsibilities to UN Member States, including the adoption of National Action Plans (NAPs) that translate the resolutions into concrete measures at both the domestic level[3] and in international

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[2] Although emerging from the analysis of specific country case studies, these issues appear to be replicable across different geographical contexts and have already been the focus of scholarly attention on the subject.
[3] Resolution 1889/2009.

relations with other States. While an increasing number of states (110 in September, 2024) have adopted NAPs, the development of such instruments does not necessarily guarantee effective implementation or tangible improvements in gender equality indicators. As often noted, "the adoption of high legal standards alone is not sufficient to bridge gender gaps".

In practice, in more than one case, the national transposition of the Agenda seems to serve primarily as a means of accreditation vis-à-vis the international community, rather than reflecting a genuine political and social commitment to advancing its principles. A telling indicator is that the Agenda is often underfunded and/or lacks dedicated budgets, raising serious challenges for implementation. As the UN Secretary-General has emphasized, it is essential to "close the gap between expressed policy priorities and commitments on women, peace and security and the funding required to execute them, especially in national budgets."

In many country contexts, critical issues persist regarding the allocation of specific resources for NAP implementation, as well as in the monitoring of objectives and expected results. The risk, in such cases, is that NAPs become little more than theoretical frameworks with limited practical impact.

In this perspective, the dissemination of the agenda proves to be particularly significant. At the international level, numerous networks – including women mediators' networks – are actively engaged in advocacy and in raising awareness of women's role in peace and security. However, in many national contexts, knowledge of National Action Plans, their functioning, and their objectives remains limited and largely confined to sector-specific actors, both within institutions and civil society. A more widespread dissemination – through advocacy campaigns at national, regional, and local levels, as well as through exchange and networking among different civil society organizations operating on the ground – could help raise broader public awareness of the core principles of the Agenda, thereby reaching a wider spectrum of beneficiaries. In this regard, new technologies may play a crucial role. Both in terms of awareness-raising and mobilization, social networks and audio-visual channels on major digital platforms have become increasingly relevant over the past decades. Analysing how to promote a participatory and inclusive dissemination strategy across different territorial contexts could serve as a meaningful starting point for the emergence of new themes for discussion and further exploration.

From Global to Local: Translating the Agenda Across Different Contexts

Over the past decade, there has been a wave of popular mobilizations, often marked by the active participation of women and younger generations. In particular, movements in the Middle East and North Africa – where the proportion of youth in the population is significantly higher than the global average – have pushed both established regimes and newly formed governments to launch reform processes that, at least formally, included gender-related rights. Although in many cases these reforms were largely symbolic or superficial, they nevertheless signalled change, opening space for attention and debate on previously marginalized or new issues. Among these, the adoption of National Action Plans on the Women, Peace and Security agenda has posed several challenges, particularly regarding the difficulty of effectively translating and adapting its broad principles to diverse local contexts. Given the cultural, religious, political, and social differences that coexist within a single national setting, it becomes essential to clarify which women are being addressed, in which territories, under which authorities, and in relation to which civil society actors. Indeed, while certain principles have universal value, it is not uncommon for them to be interpreted differently according to local particularities – especially in contexts where urban-rural divides are more pronounced.

In this regard, a perspective has increasingly emerged that countries of the so-called Global South should not be treated as passive recipients of agendas formulated in the Global North, but rather as central actors in their definition and implementation. The frequently raised concern is that these agendas are often imposed from above in contexts profoundly different from those in which they were originally conceived, thereby reproducing logics and approaches that some scholars describe as neo-colonial.

In many countries, implementation proves problematic because the values and rights underpinning the agenda are received and interpreted through diverse cultural and political lenses. In Tunisia, for example, several civil society organizations have pointed out that the first NAP of 2018 – despite being based on broad institutional and civil society consultations – did not incorporate the perspectives of women living in rural areas, border zones, or disadvantaged regions, who are among the most exposed to discrimination, violence, terrorism, and radicalization. Moreover, despite the existence of an advanced legal framework, particularly between 2011 and 2021, social norms have not evolved uniformly across the country: women in coastal regions have generally embraced legal innovations, while this has not been the case for women in rural or interior areas.

The translation of universal principles into national contexts therefore requires a process of exchange, dialogue, and debate among diverse institutional actors, both national and local, as well as with civil society organizations active at all levels, including grassroots groups. Ensuring that this approach effectively takes into account the voices of all women – including those living in marginalized, impoverished, rural, or peripheral contexts – could facilitate a more appropriate localization of the general principles of the Women, Peace and Security agenda and promote more effective implementation.

Rethinking and Broadening the Concept of Security

Although security is often equated with the absence of armed conflict, such a definition is today largely inadequate to capture its complexity. Contemporary challenges that threaten the lives and well-being of millions extend far beyond the realm of conventional warfare. The Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda underscore this point, highlighting access to essential services, the availability of primary resources, and attention to climate-related dynamics as central elements for building inclusive, resilient, sustainable, and peaceful societies.

While the range of security challenges facing women has progressively expanded beyond armed conflict alone, many National Action Plans have retained a 'militarized' understanding of the Agenda. In particular, some countries that adopted a NAP without experiencing active conflict have tended to view women's 'participation' in peace or conflict prevention mainly as a means to enhance traditional security operations, emphasizing the recruitment of women into national armed forces or peacekeeping missions.

On the one hand, it is true that the number of armed conflicts has risen again, forcefully restoring the use of military means to the center of international dispute resolution. On the other hand, the threats to 'security' are increasingly diverse and now include, among others, pandemics and climate change – whose disproportionate impact on women remains insufficiently addressed within many National Action Plans. Moreover, this approach does not adequately address the root causes of 'conflict,' such as socioeconomic inequalities and poverty.

The intersection of these factors calls for a redefinition of the very concept of security, which can no longer be understood primarily in military terms or as the mere absence of conflict. A stronger investment in a holistic perspective is required – one that gives priority within the security framework to equitable and guaranteed access to vital resources, quality public services, and economic and social opportunities.

This approach is particularly relevant in countries of the so-called Global South, where, alongside cases of armed conflict, socioeconomic crises erode basic services, restrict access to essential resources, and limit participation in the labor market, especially for women. The implementation of the WPS agenda must therefore prioritize the concept of *human security*, placing women at the center of diplomacy, peacebuilding policies, community reconstruction, economic recovery, assistance, and social integration, ensuring that all these processes are gender-sensitive from the outset.

We invite participants to reflect on the issues raised here and to put forward concrete proposals for more decisive action by institutional actors and civil society at different levels in advancing the Women, Peace and Security agenda.

The texts, of maximum 15,000 characters (including spaces), may be written in Italian, Spanish, English or Franch and must be sent to barbara.debenedictis@cespi.it and cespi@cespi.it, including, where applicable, bibliographic references directly in the body of the text. The articles will be published on the CeSPI website in their original version. They will then be translated into Italian and collected in a volume published by Donzelli Editore, one of Italy's leading publishers, in the "Quaderni CeSPI" series.