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**FOURTH CAPITAL-LEVEL MEETING OF THE
WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY FOCAL
POINTS NETWORK**
18-19 MAY 2022, GENEVA, SWITZERLAND

BACKGROUND NOTES - WORKING GROUPS





Working Group 1: Women's participation in peace processes

The international normative framework on women's full, equal and meaningful participation in peace processes is well developed. In 1995, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action called for increased participation of women in conflict prevention and resolution, and in all levels of decision-making. Five years later, in 2000, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1325, urging all actors to increase the participation of women and incorporate gender perspectives in all United Nations peace and security efforts. In subsequent resolutions, the Security Council and the General Assembly further reiterated the need for women's participation and leadership as well as civil society's inclusion in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peacebuilding.¹

Yet, progress has been slow to materialise.² As peace processes are embedded in current systems, official negotiation tables mirror existing gender inequalities in societies at large. Women's underrepresentation at decision-making levels in politics, diplomacy and in the security sector – the source from which negotiators and mediators are oftentimes drawn – is intrinsically linked to the lack of women's meaningful participation in peace processes.³ Also, the inclusion of women-led civil society organizations and women peacebuilders at different levels and formats in peace processes is fraught with challenges, including lack of resources, limited political will, as well as seemingly opposing value-systems.

The barriers and obstacles to women's participation in peace processes entrench existing gender inequalities. As power-sharing arrangements, socio-economic provisions or transitional justice mechanisms are decided at the negotiation table, the lack of women's inclusion remains a challenge to substantive conflict transformation, sustainable peace and gender-equal societies in the medium- and long-term.

Mediators and Negotiators

Women's participation as mediators or negotiators has been reinforced by various arguments over time. Currently, women's inclusion is predominantly seen not only "as the right thing to do (equality), it is also the smart thing to do (utility)". Equality and utility are linked but also separate. Women's participation is a question of equality and fairness, as they represent half of the population. Yet women's participation is also seen as a question of utility, helping to advance women's interests, including social issues, in peace talks. Women's participation thus tends to produce more gender-sensitive and therefore more societally legitimate and sustainable agreements.⁴ At the same time, the utility argument alone falls short, as not all women will or should be expected to advocate for women's rights and gender-sensitive agreements. Indeed, there are as diverse interests, roles, values and strategies among women as there are among men. While methods to include gender perspectives into a peace agreement need to be strengthened, women should at the same time be able to participate independently of their impact on the legitimacy and sustainability of the agreement. In practice and despite some progress, neither the equality nor the utility argument has effectively normalised women's meaningful participation at formal negotiation tables.

1 S/RES/1325 (2000), S/RES/1889 (2009), S/RES/2122 (2013) and S/RES/2042 (2015); A/RES/65/283 (2011), A/RES/68/303 (2014) and A/RES/70/304 (2016); see also CEDAW, General recommendation No. 30 on women in conflict prevention, conflict and post-conflict situations.

2 According to research by the Council on Foreign Relations, women's participation in major peace processes between 2015–2019 amounted in average to 11 percent of mediators, 14 percent of negotiators and 7 percent of signatories: <https://www.cfr.org/womens-participation-in-peace-processes/>

3 See for example: UN Women, *Women's meaningful participation in negotiating peace and the implementation of peace agreements*, Report of the Expert Group meeting, p. 3, 2018; Karin Aggestam and Isak Svensson, *Where are the women in peace mediation?*, pp. 156-157, 2018

4 For a discussion on these approaches see Catherine Turner, "Soft ways of doing hard things": *women mediators and the question of gender in mediation*, pp. 385-386, 2020



Therefore, instead of essentializing women in peace processes, or relying on normative arguments that are often contested, it is important that current discussions emphasize the need to overcome traditional power structures in society and in peace negotiations and shift the focus to an inclusive and sustainable style of peace leadership, in which both women and men can engage.⁵

Inclusion of Civil Society

Women-led organizations and women peacebuilders are often at the forefront of preventing the outbreak of violent conflict through ongoing peace work, facilitating dialogue at the community-level, and providing humanitarian response. However, they are routinely excluded from formal negotiations from the outset. In the early stages of negotiations, mainly male military and political actors usually negotiate ceasefires as well as the conditions for a formal peace process. The inclusion of a gender perspective at this stage would be vital as it is during this period that initial steps are taken towards the establishment of a negotiation agenda.⁶ Yet, this space is difficult to access for women-led organizations and women peacebuilders - a challenge that carries on as the formal peace process progresses. While there has been an increase in the number of women civil society representatives invited to brief the Security Council and efforts have been undertaken to link informal peace initiatives with formal processes, civil society's meaningful involvement in peace negotiations remains yet to be achieved.⁷ Issues such as confidentiality of the peace talks, risks and threats against women peacebuilders, as well as concerns about increasing the complexity and manageability of a formal negotiation process, are some of the many challenges affecting the inclusion of civil society.

The exclusivity of formal peace processes is rooted in their fragility and the trade-offs made between the short-term benefits of settling violent conflicts through a negotiated agreement and the long-term benefits of gender-equal societies. Despite the existing normative framework, progress in the inclusion of women remains difficult to achieve. In this regard, to work towards the full, equal and meaningful participation of women also calls for the questioning of the current structures and formats of peace negotiations and peace processes.

Guiding questions for the working group:

1. **Trade-offs:** What trade-offs and dilemmas do Focal Points / States encounter when trying to advance meaningful participation of women negotiators, mediators and civil society in peace processes on the one hand, while pursuing other priorities (e.g. timing, resources, foreign policy priorities etc.) they may have on the other hand?
2. **Experiences:** What practical experiences have States and other stakeholders made in dealing with these trade-offs and dilemmas? What worked, what did not work, and why?
3. **Recommendations:** What do Focal Points recommend so as to better deal with the trade-offs and dilemmas and redefine traditional peace processes into inclusive and integrative processes?

5 CSS Mediation Resources, Anna Hess Sargsyan and Anna Möller-Loswick, [Redefining Peace Leadership, Insights from Track One Women Negotiators and Mediators](#), 2021

6 Christine Bell, *Women, Peace Negotiations, and Peace Agreements: Opportunities and Challenges*, pp. 3 – 4, 2018

7 UN Women, High-level seminar on [Strengthening Women's Participation in Peace Processes: What Roles and Responsibilities for States?](#), pp. 14-15, 2021



Working Group 2: Protection of women's rights and recognizing women's agency

1. Background

Gender-based violence (GBV) has many forms, ranging from domestic and sexual violence to violence in cyber space.⁸ Not only is it a grave violation of a woman's individual rights, it also forces women in the wider community to adhere to restrictive gender roles. Thus, GBV can undermine their ability to engage freely in political and peace processes as well as in the security sector. It can also prevent women from exercising economic, land and property rights which, in post-conflict settings, are critical to relief and recovery.⁹

The proliferation and trafficking of small arms and ammunition drives and exacerbates GBV and thus reinforces gender inequality, in conflict and non-conflict situations. In resolution 2122 (2013), the UN Security Council noted the contribution of the Arms Trade Treaty to reducing violence against women and girls and urged women's full and meaningful participation in addressing the illicit transfer and misuse of small arms and light weapons (SALW). In resolution 2242 (2015), it encouraged women's empowerment in the design and implementation of SALW control. For its part, the 2030 Agenda recognizes that sustainable development requires both gender equality and the empowerment of women, as well as a significant reduction in all forms of violence and in the illicit flow of arms.

Against this background, WPS Focal Points addressed linkages between the WPS agenda, disarmament and SALW in Windhoek in 2019.¹⁰ At that meeting, they emphasized the need to mainstream the WPS agenda into disarmament and concluded that the former could benefit from more gender-responsive disarmament, including through increasing participation of women in disarmament processes or stronger gender-disaggregated data on arms and their impact. They also recommended that discussions on these linkages be taken forward at next Focal Point Network meetings, and for Focal Points to report on progress.

2. Recent developments and avenues for action

National action plans: Harmonizing approaches to WPS, disarmament, and SALW control

National action plans (NAPs), as well as regional action plans, are a key instrument to mainstream WPS commitments into disarmament and arms control, and vice versa. Member States acknowledged this in 2021 at the Seventh Biennial Meeting of States of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects. For the first time, they encouraged the harmonization of national policies, including NAPs, on SALW and the WPS agenda. To date, approximately half of all NAPs on WPS include SALW in some way, while around two thirds of NAPs on SALW refer to gender.¹¹ However, coherence between these two policy arenas is still far from a reality. For example, in countries with NAPs on both WPS and SALW, action points on gender and small arms are not always consistent between the two documents.

8 For a general introductory video, see UNIDIR. 2020. [Connecting the Dots. Arms Control, Disarmament and the Women, Peace and Security Agenda](#).

9 Myrntinen, Henri. 2020. [Connecting the Dots: Arms Control, Disarmament and the Women, Peace and Security Agenda](#). Geneva: UNIDIR, p.20.

10 Meeting of the Women and Peace and Security Focal Points Network, Windhoek, 10 and 11 April 2019. [Joint communiqué by the Focal Points on women and peace and security](#). UN Doc. A/73/912-S/2019/513 of 24 June 2019.

11 Watson, Callum. *Women, Peace and Security and Small Arms Control: opportunities for collaboration*. Geneva: Small Arms Survey (forthcoming).



Strengthening the participation pillar: From representation to more meaningful participation

WPS national action plans relate to SALW control and disarmament mostly in connection with participation. While these fields remain largely male-dominated, there have been promising initiatives to ensure that women are represented on national small arms commissions and to recruit more women in the security sector. There has also been a steady increase in the number of women involved in diplomatic efforts on SALW control and disarmament.¹² Gradual increases in women's *representation* in these processes, however, do not automatically result in significant advances in women's *meaningful participation*.¹³ Important barriers persist from leadership to working culture and technical expertise.¹⁴ In addition, the contribution of women and civil society organizations to arms control and disarmament at the community level is often not recognized.¹⁵

Further to representing women's interests with knowledge and confidence, meaningful participation in arms control and disarmament has several other elements. This includes the ability of women to demonstrate agency and influence over policies on access to and ownership of weapons, the design and implementation of arms control and disarmament programmes, and decisions on a state's budget allocation for military spending. Ensuring that the voices, knowledge and expertise of women and community-level civil society organizations influence decisions at the local and national level is key to strengthening policymaking and implementation activities to reduce small arms-related violence.

Strengthening the protection pillar: Use of latest research on small arms-related GBV

By comparison, NAPs on WPS contain fewer references to disarmament and SALW control in connection with protection. Consequently, they do not always incorporate the latest evidence on more nuanced patterns of violence. For example, killings or injuries are now known to be only the tip of the iceberg for small arms-related GBV. In many cases, perpetrators are able to commit violence simply because their victims know that they are armed or own a weapon.¹⁶ In addition, when the overall numbers of small arms-related deaths decrease due to conflict de-escalation, the number of women killed does not decrease at the same rate.¹⁷

A strong evidence base on the gendered impacts of small arms-related violence is critical for policies and interventions to address women's protection needs effectively. Similarly, GBV prevention strategies should include evidence-based SALW control and disarmament interventions. Research challenges remain, as Member States do not always provide gender-disaggregated data. Alternatively, the way data is collected and recorded does not always allow for a gender analysis of the impact of small arms; data adequacy for arms-related policymaking and implementation is therefore limited. For example, national export licencing authorities often lack the evidence needed to assess the risk of small arms-related GBV in fulfilment of their obligations under article 7(4) of the

12 Hessmann Dalaqua, Renata, Kjølsv Egeland and Torbjørn Graff Hugo. 2019. [Still Behind the Curve: Gender Balance in Arms Control, Non-proliferation and Disarmament Diplomacy](#). Geneva: UNIDIR, pp.17-20.

13 For definitions, see Salmela, Katarina and Megan Manion. 2018. [Women's Meaningful Participation in Negotiating Peace and the Implementation of Peace Agreements](#). New York: UN.

14 See for example, Salama, Hana and Emma Bjertén-Günther. 2022. [How Weapons and Ammunition Management Can Enhance Women, Peace and Security](#). IPI Global Observatory.

15 See for example, Butegwa, Christine. 2020. [Gender Perspectives in Arms Control and Disarmament: Views from Africa](#). Geneva: UNIDIR, pp.16-18.

16 See Božanić, Dragan. 2016. [Gender and SALW in South East Europe: Main Concerns and Policy Response](#). Belgrade: UNDP-SEESAC, p.15.

17 Hideg, Gergely and Anna Alvazzi del Frate. 2021. [Still Not There: Global Violent Death Scenarios, 2019-30](#). Geneva: Small Arms Survey, pp. 8-9.



Arms Trade Treaty.¹⁸

3. Guiding questions for the working group

1. What lessons can Focal Points draw from recent practice at the local, national and regional level to harmonize approaches to WPS, arms control and disarmament, especially in national and regional action plans?
2. What suggestions can Focal Points make to national governments and their counterparts to address barriers to the *meaningful* participation of women, including from local and national civil society organizations, in arms control and disarmament policymaking and implementation?
3. How could the contribution of women's grassroots organizations in local arms control and disarmament activities be further recognized, such organizations empowered, and their access to national policymaking strengthened?
4. What actions can Focal Points recommend to ensure that arms control and disarmament policies and implementation better contribute to the protection of women's rights and the prevention of GBV? How could context-specific evidence on small arms-related GBV better inform protection and prevention efforts?

¹⁸ This article obliges States to “take into account the risk of [exported] conventional arms [...] being used to commit or facilitate serious acts of gender-based violence or serious acts of violence against women and children.”



Working Group 3: WPS action plans - responding to conflict and crisis situations

Background:

National Action Plans on Women, Peace, and Security (hereafter NAP) are the most common strategy used by States to demonstrate and operationalize their commitment to the WPS agenda. Since 2004, through presidential statements and resolutions, the Security Council has urged Member States to develop and adopt national action plans to advance the WPS agenda and to regularly refresh these plans, fund them fully, ensure broad consultations, including with civil society - in particular women's organizations, and strengthen monitoring, evaluation and coordination mechanisms. The increased adoption of NAPs in recent years showcases a significant rise in governmental commitments to the WPS agenda, with 100 UN Member States and territories¹⁹ having adopted a NAP and many on their second, third or fourth iteration. Moreover, 90 percent of WPS Focal Points Network Member States have adopted NAPs and more are in development. At regional level, twelve organizations have adopted regional WPS action plans, strategies and monitoring frameworks to support States and regional implementation of the WPS agenda.

More than 20 years after the adoption of UN Security Council resolution 1325, NAPs have evolved to become better structured with 88 percent of recent NAPs including a monitoring framework with indicators. They remain an important institutional tool for governments to outline policy commitments and action vital to long-term realization of the WPS agenda.²⁰ In addition, NAPs usually identify specific actions that various ministries, agencies, and institutions will undertake to fulfil commitments and achieve change, as well as their coordination across these governmental bodies, and the role and contributions of civil society. Also essential for NAPs are specifications of human, technical, and financial resources needed for implementation and clarifying reporting and accountability measures.

As evidence suggests, NAPs are critical in reducing a country's gender gap, which in turn generates increased stability and fosters long-term peace. Importantly, as some of the key peace and security indices indicate (Global Peace Index; Positive Peace Index, Internal Violence Index, WPS Index), the adoption and implementation of a NAP makes it more likely that a country will increasingly be ranked as more peaceful and less violent.²¹

However, questions remain on how to best to translate WPS commitments into achievable, time-bound, and measurable policies at the regional, national and local levels.

Recent developments and avenues for action

Since its inception, the WPS Focal Points Network (FPN) has had a dedicated focus on supporting its members in developing, implementing, and monitoring their respective NAPs. This remains its crucial mission – to allow FPN members to share and incorporate best practices and lessons learned from action plans in different countries and regions to ensure that gender equality and women's

¹⁹ WPS Focal Points Network website compilation of most recent NAPs adopted by States and territories: <https://wpsfocalpointsnetwork.org/resources/>

²⁰ For more analysis : Henri Myrtilinen, Laura J Shepherd, and Hannah Wright, [Implementing the Women, Peace and Security Agenda in the OSCE Region](#)

²¹ Jacevic, Mirsad Miki. "WPS, States, and the National Action Plans." *The Oxford Handbook of Women, Peace, and Security*, 2018, pp. 272–290., doi:10.1093/oxford/9780190638276.013.32



rights have a central role in sustainable peace efforts. The Network continues to find ways to assist Member States and regional organizations to translate WPS commitments into practical action at the national level and remains a space for frank discussion and innovative solutions to address WPS challenges. In past meetings, Focal Points have highlighted a number of important considerations on action plans, including the following²²: the need to develop action plans even in regions and countries where there is no armed conflict; the requirement that regional and national action plans should be forward thinking and flexible to address emerging issues, conflicts and concerns; action plans ought to be both inward-looking and outward-facing; plans should have clear budget allocations and realistically achievable results; how the leadership role of WPS special envoys, ambassadors and high-level advisers on gender equality can improve coordination and implementation of national and regional action plans; and ways in which supporting and investing in participatory processes and localization initiatives can strengthen NAP impact.

New and ongoing conflicts and humanitarian crises, growing concerns arising from extremism and climate insecurity, and the challenges posed by COVID-19 have shown both the need for strengthening the global implementation of the Women, Peace and Security agenda and the importance of making it more relevant to national and local contexts. A commonly identified weakness of recent NAPs is that they seek to cover the breadth of the WPS agenda while only dedicating limited financial, human and technical capacity to approach each issue comprehensively. Moreover, national and regional action plans and the WPS agenda continue to be siloed and require stronger integration in national strategic security and development priorities.

Guiding questions for the working group:

1. What lessons can Focal Points and partners draw from recent practice at the local, national, and regional levels, to develop more strategic context-specific NAPs? How does such contextual analysis create a Plan that is relevant at the strategic level, yet can also be put into operational practice by various Ministries, Departments, and Agencies?
2. What suggestions can Focal Points make to national governments and their counterparts to ensure that NAPs are inclusive, but also strike a balance with available resources (technical, financial, and human) and are complementary to broader national security and development efforts?
3. What actions can Focal Points recommend to ensure that NAPs remain 'living documents' with the flexibility to align with contemporary issues and incorporate lessons learned from different contexts over the life-time of the Plan?
4. What best practices and opportunities can Focal Points recommend to support accountability for NAP and WPS implementation, including through legislation and parliamentary bodies, regional monitoring mechanisms, CEDAW reporting, civil society shadow reporting, the [Compact on Women, Peace and Security and Humanitarian Action](#), etc.

²² Forthcoming publication of WPS Focal Points Network Recommendations on the WPS Agenda