
CSSF Women, Peace and Security Helpdesk

Domestic Application of Women, Peace and Security in the UK

Submitted: 08/04/22

Assignment Code: WPS002

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Direct Audience:

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Suggested Internal Distribution:

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Confidentiality Status:

None



Abstract

The scoping paper explores synergies between the women, peace and security agenda, existing domestic police and possible areas of intersection, namely Gendered Structures of Security (VAWG by police and other security bodies), Migration and Refugees, Trafficking in Women and Girls, and Women's Participation in Public Life. These highlight where there is potential ownership of the work across HM Government, and who would benefit from becoming involved. The particular focus on Northern Ireland also serves to highlight the specific needs – and the specific successes – emerging from this context, again providing opportunities to reflect and learn, and to integrate these lessons into a wider strategy. Finally, this paper includes both a tabulated summary of the ways in which the recommendations for the areas of attention connect to the WPS pillars and agenda, and an appendix with case studies of existing NAPs

Summary

The UK is developing its next Women, Peace and Security National Action Plan (WPS NAP) in 2022. As part of a wider process, this scoping paper is intended to outline the potential of the efficacy and effectiveness of a domestic angle to the UK's WPS NAP, reflecting on civil society criticism that the lack of a domestic angle undermines the UK's international WPS objectives. The current NAP, while internationally focussed, does complement domestic strategies such as the Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Strategy, and strategies on transnational priorities such as countering violent extremism, migration, modern slavery and human trafficking, and so on. While these synergies were noted in the previous NAP, there is as yet no articulated strategy on how this complementary approach might be integrated. This scoping paper is intended to outline possible areas of exploration in relation to

- the relevance and connections between national and international practice in relation to WPS policy and objectives
- Areas where WPS might complement existing policy agendas and improve coherence across HMG
- Examples of where lessons from domestic best practice could be applied to strengthen WPS interventions overseas

This scoping paper takes violence against women and girls as the 'keyhole issue' through which to approach ways to apply the WPS framework in a domestic context. It includes specific attention to the particular context of Northern Ireland, as well policy and practice covering England and Wales.

The scoping is divided into four areas of possible attention; Gendered Structures of Security (VAWG by police and other security bodies), Migration and Refugees, Trafficking in Women and Girls, and Women's Participation in Public Life. These sections outline the ways in which issues of VAWG connect the WPS agenda with existing domestic policy, and propose areas for further exploration. These sections include reference to where there is potential ownership of the work across HM Government, and who would benefit from becoming involved.

The particular focus on Northern Ireland also serves to highlight the specific needs – and the specific successes – emerging from this context, again providing opportunities to reflect and learn, and to integrate these lessons into a wider strategy. Connecting the existing strengths of Ireland's WPS NAP, which has included attention to Northern Ireland, also provides a way in to consider how to bring a domestic lens to the WPS agenda.

Lastly, this paper includes both a tabulated summary of the ways in which the recommendations for the areas of attention connect to the WPS pillars and agenda, and an appendix with case studies of existing NAPs where the international focus has been successfully combined with domestic priorities. These case studies are diverse, illustrating a variety of approaches and focus, providing examples of ways in which the work can be integrated.

Findings and Analysis

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Background and Introduction

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Though the UK may not be framed as a post-conflict environment, the realities of the global Covid-19 pandemic have made visible the gendered impacts of a protracted emergency, and the particular consequences for women and girls¹. The work towards gender equality is not complete in the national context, and the implications of these inequalities are relevant across policy domains. National and international policy do not exist separately from one another, and are in constant interaction; bringing a WPS lens, to for example, trafficking, helps to frame domestic policy interventions consistently and to provide entry points into effective intervention. In addition, a demonstrable commitment to national and international coherence in policy reinforces the reputational strength of HMG, strengthening international credibility and trustworthiness. One contributing factor to this may be that the NAP is owned by the FCDO and the MOD, with other government departments less involved. This structural positioning has the potential to exclude the relevance of the domestic policy agenda, and there may be value in including other departments into the ownership of the NAP.

In 2021, the Home Office published the *Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy*², highlighting the Call for Evidence that invited direct testimony from the public in relation to violence against women and girls, and responding to the specific institutional issues revealed through the abduction and murder of Sarah Everard, and the murders of Bibaa Henry and Nicole Smallman. The policy makes explicit a commitment to link national and international practice and to build on the What Works research and evidence portfolio. The strategy does not cover Scotland; Scottish legislative frameworks are not within the scope of this paper

¹ <https://gaps-uk.org/resources/now-and-the-future-pandemics-and-crisis-gender-equality-peace-and-security-in-a-covid-19-world-and-beyond/>

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publication/tackling-violence-against-women-and-girls-strategy>

and it would be helpful to look further into the potential links and synergies that could be developed through a UK-wide WPS agenda.

WPS NAP Briefing

The Security Council adopted resolution 1325 on Women and Peace and Security on 31st October 2000. This resolution reaffirms the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, peace negotiations, peace-building, peace-keeping, humanitarian response and in post-conflict reconstruction, and stresses the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security³. The four pillars of the WPS agenda encompass;

- *Participation*; Increased participation of women at all levels of decision-making including in national, regional, and international institutions; in mechanisms for the prevention, management and resolution of conflict; in peace negotiations; in peace operations
- *Prevention*; Improving intervention strategies in the prevention of violence against women, including by prosecuting those responsible for violations of international law; strengthening women's rights under national law; and supporting local women's peace initiatives and conflict resolution processes
- *Protection*; The protection of women and girls from sexual and gender-based violence, including in emergency and humanitarian situations, such as refugee camps
- *Relief and recovery*; The advancement of relief and recovery measures to address international crises through a gendered lens, including by respecting the civilian and humanitarian nature of protracted crises and emergencies.

After the initial Resolution in 2000, subsequent Resolutions have built out the core agenda, becoming more specific and bringing attention to particular areas⁴;

- [Resolution 1820 \(2008\)](#)
- [Resolution 1888 \(2009\)](#)
- [Resolution 1889 \(2009\)](#)
- [Resolution 1960 \(2010\)](#)
- [Resolution 2106 \(2013\)](#)
- [Resolution 2122 \(2013\)](#)
- [Resolution 2242 \(2015\)](#)
- [Resolution 2467 \(2019\)](#);
- [Resolution 2493 \(2019\)](#)

³ <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/WPS%20SRES1325%20.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.dfa.ie/media/dfa/ourrolepolicies/peaceandsecurity/WPS-Simple-Guide.pdf>

Despite the many normative frameworks to advance gender equality, subsequent resolutions, and countless commitments by member states, words have not been enough to produce commitment to peace and to gender equality, nor have they guaranteed action towards achieving a gender-just world⁵. The scope for the upcoming WPS NAP to apply this lens to the national context is significant, including the recognition of security mechanisms beyond the military (for example, Border Force, Policing, C/PVE and so on), and their relationship to the security of women and girls. This NAP is also an opportunity to bring consideration of particularly vulnerable and marginalised groups of women and girls – refugees, women & girls who have been sexually trafficked, women trying to participate in public life and so on – to the forefront of domestic policy agendas. We have included case studies of NAPs from other countries as examples of how these can be integrated into domestic policy in an appendix. We recognise that a significant aspect of the WPS agenda is the importance of women’s participation and leadership in the conflict, peace and security space. Given the shortness of this tasking, we have agreed that this element will not be in scope.

CASE STUDY: Canada⁶

Canada’s second WPS NAP, covering 2017-2022, includes substantive and comprehensive attention to the importance of human rights and gender equality for the realization of peace, including its domestic challenges in this regard. Specifically, the NAP identifies the on-going problem of intersecting forms of discrimination and violence against Indigenous women and girls as a legacy of colonialism, as well as the residential school system. It also commits to addressing the repercussions for the First Nations, Inuit and Metis.

In addition, the Canadian government recognizes its responsibility as a contributor to overseas military and peacekeeping missions, including its role as an arms exporter. In 2017, Canada adopted a Feminist International Assistance Policy, with the core priority of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

CASE STUDY: Bosnia-Herzegovina⁷

Bosnia-Herzegovina’s third NAP, covering 2018-2022, contextualises the WPS agenda by providing a detailed overview of the country’s domestic legal framework, with particular attention to the legislative policy developments around women’s full participation in public and political life. It includes a detailed gender equality analysis of women’s participation in high-level decision-making positions, such as in the security forces and peacekeeping missions. Lastly, there is a section dedicated to analysing human security through the lens of gender equality, including sections on human trafficking, victims of sexual violence, wartime atrocities and landmines, as well as touching on natural disasters, migration, violent extremism, and small arms and light weapons. The domestic objectives of the three NAPs have been consistently detailed, and directly related to the domestic gender equality framework.

5 UNSCR 1325 At 20 Years; Perspectives From Feminist Peace Activists and Civil Society. Women’s International League for Peace & Freedom.

6 <http://1325naps.peacewomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Canadas-National-Action-Plan-2017-2022.pdf>

7 <https://www.peacewomen.org/sites/default/files/Bosnia-and-Herzegovina-NAP-3-2018-2022-English-translation.pdf>

CASE STUDY: Ireland⁸

Ireland's Third National Action Plan, 2019-2024 includes domestic commitments to "support women and girls affected by the Northern Ireland conflict and the migrant population in Ireland from conflict affected settings." (pg 8) The NAP applies across all four pillars of the WPS agenda, and includes specific commitments on participation - ensuring that the empowerment and meaningful participation of women on the island of Ireland is improved. There is a specific focus on grassroots peacebuilding and promoting women as both agents of change and key sources of knowledge for understanding conflict prevention and fragile states. Substantive provisions on protection and recovery include commitments to work collaboratively to protect victims of human trafficking and to tackle the causes of trafficking, as well as a commitment to provide specialised services for victims of sexual exploitation and abuse, trauma and torture.

⁸ <https://www.dfa.ie/media/dfa/ourrolepolicies/womenpeaceandsecurity/Third-National-Action-Plan.pdf>

WPS in the UK, including Northern Ireland

Our Approach

During the period known as ‘the Troubles’ from 1969-1998 the UK’s Armed Forces were deployed as part of efforts to maintain law and order in support of a civil power in Northern Ireland. For this reason, UNSCR 1325 does not apply specifically in this context. This is a gap that has consistently been highlighted by the Women’s Sector. It also stands in contrast to the approach of the Irish NAP which explicitly refers to the ‘Northern Ireland conflict.’

The UK government does, however, support the [participation of women from Northern Ireland](#) in networks such as Women Mediators Across the Commonwealth, and promotes the impact of women’s meaningful participation in the Northern Ireland peace process. They also support women’s participation in peacebuilding in Northern Ireland through the [Women in Conflict Transformation \(WICT\)](#) programme delivered through the NI department for Communities. In light of this potential scope for application, Northern Ireland is included in this review to indicate where a WPS lens could meaningfully enhance gender sensitive policy making in Northern Ireland.

There are three potential approaches to the application of the UK NAP to Northern Ireland:

1. UK-wide policy areas include reference to Northern Ireland, for example, immigration and asylum;
2. Northern Ireland-specific issues are included in the NAP, in particular WPS issues arising from the Troubles, conflict legacy and peacebuilding;
3. A combination of 1. and 2., which recognises both shared challenges across the UK, as well as dynamics specific to Northern Ireland.

We suggest that the third approach is most likely to respond to policy needs and to secure political consensus. This third approach informs the structure of this paper, with the UK-wide policy areas outlined, followed by an articulation of the WPS issues specific to Northern Ireland. Following this approach, the review includes both specific recommendations on Northern Ireland, as well as examples of where Northern Ireland would benefit from domestic application of the NAP to other areas of policy. As such, the report provides a UK-wide frame of reference, with the specific relevance to the Northern Ireland context highlighted in each thematic area.

Despite the official non-application of 1325 in NI, there is ‘shadow’ infrastructure that deals with the relevant themes. For example, there is an [All-Party Group on Women, Peace and Security in the Northern Ireland Assembly](#), which includes MLAs from across Northern Ireland’s political spectrum. The Northern Ireland Women’s European Platform (NIWEP) provides the Secretariat to the APG. The [Northern Ireland Gender Equality Strategy](#) (which expired in 2016 and has not yet been renewed) includes reference to

UNSCR1325 in its appendix as an international standard of relevance, but there is no specific discussion of objectives and commitments regarding its implementation in Northern Ireland.

Northern Ireland has a robust, diverse and highly-experienced sector of women's organisations operating at local and regional level ('women's sector'). Implementation of UNSCR1325 has been a prominent demand of the women's sector since its adoption in 2000, for example in successive 'Women's Manifestos' in which the sector agrees key demands for political parties contesting NI Assembly elections, in [shadow reports](#) to the CEDAW Committee and in the (successful) pursuit of an All-Party Group on WPS at the Northern Ireland Assembly, including the holding of a '[1325 Inquiry](#)'. A further important initiative from the women's sector was the development of a '[WPS Strategic Guide and Toolkit](#)' for local and regional government departments in the application of UNSCR1325. The Toolkit was developed collaboratively, with significant input from relevant policymakers. Together, these civil society initiatives paint a compelling picture of the women's sector's view that implementation of UNSCR1325 in Northern Ireland would add significant value to gender policymaking and implementation.

The [current](#) and [previous](#) Irish National Action Plans on WPS reference Northern Ireland and have historically been highly inclusive of Northern Ireland civil society in their drafting and monitoring. For example, the Oversight Group of the Irish NAP held a meeting in Belfast in 2017, in which the Group met with women's organisations to enhance their understanding of WPS challenges. Since 2019 an informal Consultative Group on WPS in Northern Ireland has been hosted by the Irish Secretariat in Belfast, and includes women from across civil society and academia.

We identify the Northern Ireland Office as key agents for the domestication of WPS in Northern Ireland through their capacity to offer similar support for both political and civil society initiatives.

Northern Ireland Policy Areas of WPS Relevance

The period of 'the Troubles' and its legacy has significant implications for the daily lives of women and girls, across all areas of social, economic and political life, including security, education and workforce participation. For the purpose of this short scoping exercise, we identify four of the most pertinent policy areas where we identify significant scope for a WPS framework to enhance current policy-making.

4. **Gender Sensitive Policy Making:** The Belfast/Good Friday Agreement (1998) established a public sector equality duty, requiring all public bodies to consider adverse equality outcomes on grounds of gender, race, age, parental status, linguistic preference, religion, political opinion. In practice, this provision has underpinned the adoption of '[gender-neutral](#)' [policy making in Northern Ireland](#) (see especially Chapter 8 of this report), in which structural gender inequalities are obscured from public policymaking, on the grounds that all policies must treat men and women in the same way. Application of the NAP to Northern Ireland would help to counter-balance this practice.
5. **Tackling Paramilitarism:** This is a policy area of very substantial public funding and political priority. To date, any consideration of gender and women's security in this area has been confined to one-off siloed 'women's projects', without significant consideration to all gender implications of strategies to support men exiting paramilitarism and to divert young men at risk of recruitment from paramilitarism.
6. **Victims' Issues / Dealing with the Past:** Mechanisms set up to deal with the legacy of the conflict, such as the [Consultative Group on the Past](#), continue to be composed mainly of men with no recognition that women should be equally represented. The [Haass / O'Sullivan talks](#), which began in the autumn of 2013, were tasked to deal with the legacy of the past and ongoing issues such as flags and parades.

The [draft report](#), published following the failure of the talks to reach agreement in December 2013, mentions gender only once. The Stormont House Agreement of December 2015, which finally agreed mechanisms and processes to deal with the past, was likewise silent on gender, with no commitments around women's participation.

7. Peacebuilding and community relations: Women remain seriously [under-represented in public appointments](#) in Northern Ireland.⁹ For example, only one woman in twelve members was appointed to the [Maze Long Kesh Development Corporation Board](#), established in 2011 to oversee the development of a peace centre at the former paramilitary prison. The Commission on Identity, Culture and Tradition, composed of 16 members, included one woman. The absence of women on key mechanisms is symptomatic of a much broader failure to understand and address gendered needs and priorities in peacebuilding and community relations.

WPS & VAWG

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) remains one of the most significant causes and consequences of gender inequality globally, with profound consequences for their security, through conflicts, crises, emergencies, and post-conflict. It also connects the 4 pillars of the WPS agenda, underpinning the need for protection, the focus of prevention, the need for relief and recovery, and as the most powerful obstacle to women's participation in public life. Violence against women and girls in conflict emerges from pre-conflict, existing prior to crises and emergencies, and continuing long afterwards.

The threat and reality of VAWG is the mechanism through which gender inequality is maintained, acting as the 'teaching tool' to define the limits of women's access to resources, opportunities and power. The dimensions of VAWG are economic, physical, sexual and emotional, constraining women's spaces to act; these dynamics operate at systems and structural/ institutional levels as well as interpersonal and community levels, reinforced through social norms and discourses.

In the context of WPS, VAWG acts as a 'keyhole issue', providing both a lens and an entry point through which to explore the links between domestic and international domains, at the same time as connecting policy areas across domains more usually siloed. VAWG also helps to find a way into aligning and applying the UK NAP to the context of Northern Ireland, and connecting the national and international agendas. Bringing a focus to VAWG in this scoping paper allows attention to areas of domestic policy which connect to the WPS agenda, in particular through the impact on women's security.

Connecting the Home Office Policy & commitments in the *Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy 2021* to the WPS policy agenda opens up the possibility of more cohesive, consistent work, linking the national and international focus, and bringing the WPS frame into national policy. While the Strategy focus on crime, policing and justice apply to both England and Wales, the elements relating to social care, health, and education are devolved to Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland, meaning the Strategy in these areas applies to England only. Bringing a WPS focus through the NAP also, therefore, has the potential to support consistency & cohesion, and to connect with the specific context of Northern Ireland.

⁹ Michael Potter, 'Who Runs Northern Ireland? A Summary of Statistics Relating to Gender and Power in 2020' Northern Ireland Assembly, January 2020.

Gendered Structures of Security (VAWG by police & other security bodies)

UK Policy Platforms:

The overarching policy framework is the 2021 *Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls*¹⁰, which explicitly recognises the direct and indirect impacts of violence against women and girls by serving police officers in its introduction; the murders of Sarah Everard, Bibaa Henry and Nicole Smallman brought to public attention severe shortcomings in the culture of policing, and the recognition of deeply entrenched misogyny and sexism at every level. While these issues originated in the London Met, reports of similar issues across other constabularies came to light through the public conversations. To date, attention has largely been focussed on the misogyny impacting on public trust and confidence, and it is also important to recognise the impact of such misogyny and sexism on women serving in the police force, their opportunities to influence practice, and the scope for their appointment to more senior roles.

Project Bluestone, funded by the Home Office Police, Science, Tech and Research Board¹¹, was recognised in the Ministry of Justice End-to-End Rape Review¹² as pioneering, with a recommendation for a Gold Standard framework to inform the investigation of allegations of sexual offences. The aim of this Gold Standard framework is to drive up standards, increasing the levels of prosecutions and convictions, which are recognised to have decreased sharply since 2016/17. In addition, the End-to-End Rape Review recognises the need to attend to the intersections of vulnerability and exposure to sexual violence of women with disabilities, in minoritized communities, and who are lesbian or bisexual. Alongside this review, the CPS Strategy *Closing The Gap*¹³ sets out a commitment to increasing the levels of prosecution and convictions in relation to sexual violence. [Within the context of WPS, Project Bluestone provides the foundation for best practice in working around sexual violence, including the ethics and conduct expected of police officers involved in the work. As such, this work has a significant contribution to make to both the Protection and Prevention pillars of WPS in a domestic context.](#)

The subsequent publication of the NPCC National Framework for Delivery *Policing Violence Against Women and Girls*¹⁴ in December 2021 explicitly articulates requirements around responding to allegations of police-perpetrated abuse, and around challenging and addressing sexism and misogyny within policing. It also requires engagement and involvement with VAWG organisations, including those supporting Black and minoritized women. The priorities of the NPCC Framework are: Improving trust and confidence in policing;

10 ibid

11 https://www.avonandsomerset-pcc.gov.uk/news/2021/06/_trashed-5_trashed/

12 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/end-to-end-rape-review-report-on-findings-and-actions>

13 <https://www.cps.gov.uk/publication/closing-gap-how-cps-working-reduce-disparity-between-reported-rapes-and-charges>

14 <https://assets.college.police.uk/s3fs-public/2021-12/Policing-VAWG-national-framework-for-delivery.pdf>

Relentlessly pursuing perpetrators, and; Creating safer spaces. Northern Ireland offers a useful example of measures that have been taken to improve confidence in policing. While there are not significant levels of documented police violence against women, significant progress has been made in improving the [response to domestic violence and sexual violence](#). However, there are still low numbers of women in leadership positions in the PSNI.

In Northern Ireland a WPS lens could usefully highlight some of the risks of the Tackling Paramilitarism Strategy to women's security. This strategy provides funding for groups to transition from paramilitary activity into community development work. Some of this work has included engaging in restorative justice which, in some communities, limits women's access to justice. There is scope for exploring further how a WPS approach could counter-balance these risks by requiring a gender sensitive approach to tackling paramilitarism in communities in transition, in line with the government's commitment to the WICT project.

WPS Pillars; Prevention, Protect

Recommendations to explore in relation to VAWG and security services:

8. Commitments to nurturing police and security services cultures that are safe and supportive for women to thrive, to influence practice in gender-sensitive ways, and to be promoted to more senior roles
9. Commitments to supporting & nurturing relationships with existing third sector and civil society women's organisations to enable safe systems for reporting and whistleblowing on sexual violence perpetrated by police and security services
10. Commitments to working with groups of minoritized women to better understand the nuanced intersections in their relationships with police and other security services, towards building safer spaces for them to report
11. Investigation/ research with the Women's Movement (NI) into the ways in which restorative justice approaches can limit women's access to justice, and the ways in which a gender-sensitive approach might counter-balance those risks.

Migration & Refugees

UK Policy Platforms:

The *Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy*¹⁵ makes little mention of the needs of migrant and asylum-seeking women, though there is evidence that refugee and asylum-seeking women have experienced high levels of sexual violence prior to migration, during transit, and after their arrival in the UK^{16,17}. In addition, the suite of policies known collectively as the “Hostile Environment” (Theresa May, 2010: “The aim is to create, here, a really hostile environment for illegal migrants”) have had specific impacts on survivors of VAWG in having access to services, including instilling a fear of the police, fear of health and support services, and fear around being asked to confirm immigration status before support can be provided¹⁸.

The processes towards refugee status are lengthy and complex, and many women are left without recourse to public funds¹⁹ while their applications are processed, or confined to immigration detention centres. This leaves women and girls sustaining trauma from their previous experiences, in a situation of precarity and insecurity, while also leaving them exposed to further sexual exploitation, abuse and violence. They also have limited access to support services around domestic violence. There is, currently, no specialist strategy in place to respond to these survivors, nor dedicated funding to support specialist services. In addition, while support is limited within the asylum system, it is almost non-existent when a woman has left this system; she may be destitute, she may be very isolated, and she will almost certainly be traumatised²⁰. A further consideration – discussed in more detail in the section on women and girls who have been trafficked – are the threats to family members in other countries, which may be a powerful disincentive to seek help. Lastly, the processes of asylum-seeking are sub-contracted to private providers, few of whom have specialist experience or skills in trauma-informed service provision. There is a visible disconnect between the UK championing the rights of women and girls internationally, while at the same time actively undermining those rights for women and girls seeking asylum in the UK.

A further consideration is towards the specific needs of women and girls who are in transit, including a recognition of their vulnerability to sexual violence prior to leaving, in their journeys, and after arrival. This too is an area where national and international policy intersect, and where there is the potential for coordinated inter-agency approaches.

In Northern Ireland migrant women **face additional barriers** because of the ongoing structures of paramilitarism. For example, there are high levels of hate crime directed at migrant communities, with families facing intimidation and attacks on their homes by paramilitary organisations. A UK wide approach to supporting women migrants and refugees would address a specific gap in the policy and funding

15 *ibid*

16 https://www.euro.who.int/_data/assets/pdf_file/0018/319311/9-Sexual-violence-refugee-women.pdf

17 https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Safe_from_violence_in_the_UK_ASAP-RC_report.pdf

18 <https://www.jcwi.org.uk/the-hostile-environment-explained>

19 <https://www.project17.org.uk/resources/factsheets-for-advisers/>

20 https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Safe_from_violence_in_the_UK_ASAP-RC_report.pdf

framework which does not currently prioritise migrant communities. NI does not have a specialist strategy in place for responding to the needs of migrant victims of gender-based violence. This is a feature of Ireland's Third National Action Plan, which includes commitments to protect migrant women in Ireland from conflict affected states and provides a useful comparator for the UK.

WPS Pillars; Protection, Prevention, Relief and Recovery

Recommendations to explore:

12. Commitment to the national provision of specialist, trauma-informed services around CRSV and VAWG, for asylum-seeking and migrant women & girls, with resourcing to support language needs, childcare, and safety planning
13. Dedicated safeguarding policy commitments to ensure that women and girls are not further exposed to sexual exploitation, abuse and/or violence, or DV, through adequate safe provision of accommodation, resources, and access to services
14. Integration of trauma-informed practice standards into all contracts with service providers working with potential survivors, and monitoring mechanisms to ensure full implementation in practice, including working with specialist civil society services
15. Dedicated resources and commitments to public and community outreach, with the explicit aim of reducing targeted hate crime, and ensuring a robust response

Trafficking in Women & Girls

UK Policy Platforms:

“We know that prostitution and sex work can lead to the exploitation of women and involve sex trafficking and modern slavery” states the Home Office *‘Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy’*²¹. The Strategy acknowledges that there is limited information on the prevalence of prostitution and sex work, recognising that estimates are highly likely to underestimate the number of people involved given the reality that many trafficked and exploited people will not be visible or counted. The child sexual exploitation rings exposed in some UK towns have been involved in ‘trafficking’ girls between towns and between men, for the profit of those rings.

The Modern Slavery Act 2015²² defines “travel” as “within any country”, and therefore this can be taken to cover travel within the UK. This Act also defines human trafficking for sexual exploitation with specific relation to the Sexual Offences Act 2003. It is recognised that it is extremely difficult for victims of sex trafficking to seek support, and it is particularly so when women and girls have been trafficked across borders. They may not have control of their passports and documentation, they may also be threatened and coerced with threats to their family and friends in their home country, and they may be realistically afraid of immigration systems. There is increasing anecdotal evidence that the “county lines” gangs are involved in both sexual violence and sex trafficking^{23,24}, indicating the need for multi-agency responses, including specialist services beyond the criminal justice systems.

It is acknowledged that trafficking in women and girls is a growing problem in Northern Ireland. While data on responsibility for trafficking is difficult to find, there is [anecdotal evidence](#) of extensive paramilitary involvement in the running of brothels and in trafficking. In 2019 the Department of Justice launched an updated [Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking Strategy](#) ‘to raise awareness of modern slavery offences and so to reduce the threat from, the vulnerability to, and the prevalence of, modern slavery in Northern Ireland.’ This strategy is produced by the Organised Crime Task Force, and promotes an inter-agency approach to disrupting modern slavery. This is primarily a law enforcement approach to tackling organised crime, and would benefit from supplemental attention to support for victims and addressing institutional barriers for victims seeking help.

A further consideration concerns the role of trafficking in P/CVE. As a core policy area, bringing a WPS lens, and a focus on VAWG opens up the possibility of a more gendered and nuanced understanding of the significance of online grooming and trafficking of women and adolescent girls *out of* the UK, into conflicts and extremist organisations. This is, in addition, a core area where domestic and international policy intersect, and where the national interests are strongly correlated with international policy. It is also essential to bring a more complex analysis of the ways in which women and adolescent girls are victimised

21 *ibid*

22 <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2015/30/section/2/enacted>

23 <https://www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/what-we-do/crime-threats/drug-trafficking/county-lines>

24 <https://www.local.gov.uk/about/news/lga-more-girls-being-recruited-and-horribly-abused-county-lines-drug-gangs>

and sexually groomed and abused before being trafficked as part of their recruitment into extremist groups, and the sexual violence they experience within those groups. Bringing a WPS lens may also support the development of more appropriate rehabilitation programmes for women and girls who are returned to the UK, with attention to the sexual violence underpinning their recruitment. As such, this is a policy area across the Ministry of Defence as well as within UK policing and security work.

WPS Pillars: Protection, Relief and Recovery

Recommendations to explore:

16. Framing sex trafficking and sexual slavery in terms of human rights violations and situating these within a human rights framework
17. Commitment to specialist, holistic and comprehensive restorative assistance to the survivors of sex trafficking and sexual slavery
18. Commitment to developing multi-agency, victim-centred pathways for reporting, safety planning and entry into services, in particular with specialist civil society women's organisations
19. Extend the scope of criminal justice work around paramilitary organisations in Northern Ireland and "county lines" gangs in the UK to include attention to sex trafficking & sexual slavery

Women's Participation in political life

UK Policy Platforms:

The ' *Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls*' Strategy does not explicitly recognise the levels of violence, and particularly sexual violence, against women in public life. While the Strategy speaks to online offending, stalking and non-contact offending, it does not specifically recognise women in public life as targets. The Inter-Parliamentary Union²⁵, however, fully acknowledges the particular issues facing women in Parliament globally, and has carried out research to try to establish entry points for address the issues²⁶. There is a consistency between countries in the kinds of issues that women in political life are confronted with, along a spectrum of 'low-level' relentless sexism in remarks and resistance to the issues women want to raise, to threats of rape and death via social media, using profane misogynist language^{27,28,29}. The misogyny and sexism are intersected with other dimensions of oppression and discrimination; it is well-documented that Black women MPs in the UK are targeted with more violence, and with racialised sexist violence, than white women³⁰. Women are also significantly under-represented in politics and in public appointments in Northern Ireland. As in other parts of the UK there is a significant problem of misogynist abuse which deters women from entering politics. The legacy of paramilitary control or 'gate-keeping' can also have a chilling effect on women's participation in civil society, with many [fearing harm if they speak out on political issues](#). Online abuse and harassment are a particular and growing problem, with women experiencing threats and harassment on a regular basis.

While this issue is well-documented in relation to parliamentarians, it is also the experience of many women in public life; social media, the internet, multiple communications platforms mean that there are many mechanisms through which women can be harassed and stalked, as well as threatened. This kind of relentless abuse is a significant barrier to women's participation in civil and political life, and while many of the actions fall within the scope of the criminal, the ubiquity and the relentlessness of the offences make them almost impossible to prosecute. Most women are the targets of multiple offenders simultaneously and the removal of one doesn't end the abuse.

WPS Pillars; Participation, Protection

²⁵ <https://www.ipu.org/our-impact/gender-equality/womens-rights/combating-violence-against-women/violence-against-women-in-parliament>

²⁶ <https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/issue-briefs/2016-10/sexism-harassment-and-violence-against-women-parliamentarians>

²⁷ <https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/issue-briefs/2018-10/sexism-harassment-and-violence-against-women-in-parliaments-in-europe>

²⁸ https://www.alignplatform.org/sites/default/files/2021-12/challenging_violence_against_women_in_public_0.pdf

²⁹ <https://www.uk-cpa.org/media/4282/cpa-uk-guide-to-addressing-online-abuse.pdf>

³⁰ <https://www.politicshome.com/thehouse/article/sexist-insults-abuse-death-threats-expect-all-this-and-more-as-a-female-mp>

Recommendations to explore:

20. Work across institutions, including Parliamentary Affairs, to map the scale and types of violence confronting women in political and public life, both directly and indirectly
21. Research with women in public and political life, and with women's organisations around interventions and mechanisms that would concretely improve their security
22. Advocate for relevant priorities to enable women to participate and thrive in public and political life, including mechanisms for safe reporting
23. Commit to significantly increasing the numbers of women in public and political life over the span of the NAP

Conclusion

Bringing a VAWG lens to legislation and policy across the UK, including Northern Ireland, opens up the possibility for a domestic component to the forthcoming WPS NAP development process.

Taking a perspective that recognises the shared challenges across the UK, as well as the dynamics specific to Northern Ireland is most like to build commitment and political momentum, and the examples outlined in this paper offer entry points for a process through which the WPS NAP might draw together policy frameworks and reinforce existing commitments.

The suggestions outlined above indicate ways in which the 4 Pillars of the WPS can be used as a means through which to challenge some of the most egregious violence against some of the most marginalised and powerless women, including through changes to the attitudes and practices of security services and enabling greater participation in public and political life.

The table in Annex 1 summarises the potential outlined in this paper, in the framework of the WPS. This is not, and is not intended to be, an exhaustive model of how a domestic component could support existing work, but rather an example to prompt further discussion. Examples specific to the Northern Ireland context are included in italics.

APPENDIX 1

Recommendations Tabulated against the WPS Agenda

	VAWG by police & security services	Migrant & refugee women	Women trafficked	Women in public & political life
Pillar 1; Participation	Commitments to nurturing police and security services cultures that are safe and supportive for women to thrive, to influence practice in gender-sensitive ways, and to be promoted to more senior roles			Commit to significantly increasing the numbers of women in public and political life over the span of the NAP
Pillar 2; Prevention	Commitments to working with groups of minoritized women to better understand the nuanced intersections in their relationships with police and other security services, towards building safer spaces for them to report	Dedicated resources and commitments to public and community outreach, with the explicit aim of reducing targeted hate crime, and ensuring a robust response	Extend the scope of criminal justice work around paramilitary organisations in Northern Ireland and “county lines” gangs in the UK to include attention to sex trafficking & sexual slavery	Research with women in public and political life, and with women’s organisations around interventions and mechanisms that would concretely improve their security
Pillar 3; Protection	Commitments to supporting & nurturing relationships with existing third sector and civil society women’s organisations to enable safe systems for reporting and whistleblowing on sexual violence perpetrated by police and security services Investigation/ research with the Women’s Movement (NI) into the ways in which restorative justice approaches can limit women’s access to justice, and the ways in which a gender-sensitive approach might counter-balance those risks.	Dedicated safeguarding policy commitments to ensure that women and girls are not further exposed to sexual exploitation, abuse and/or violence, or DV, through adequate safe provision of accommodation, resources, and access to services	Framing sex trafficking and sexual slavery in terms of human rights violations and situating these within a human rights framework Bring attention to the role of sexual grooming and trafficking within the recruitment of women & adolescent girls into violent extremist groups & connect policy implementation between national & international activity, including the role of on-line grooming.	Work across institutions, including Parliamentary Affairs, to map the scale and types of violence confronting women in political and public life, both directly and indirectly Advocate for relevant priorities to enable women to participate and thrive in public and political life, including mechanisms for safe reporting
Pillar 4; Relief & Recovery		Commitment to the national provision of specialist, trauma-informed services around CRSV and VAWG, for asylum-seeking and migrant women & girls, with resourcing to support language needs, childcare, and safety planning Integration of trauma informed practice standards into all contracts with service providers working with potential survivors, and monitoring mechanisms to ensure full	Commitment to specialist, holistic and comprehensive restorative assistance to the survivors of sex trafficking and sexual slavery Commitment to developing multi-agency, victim-centred pathways for reporting, safety planning and entry into services, in particular	

		implementation in practice, including working with specialist civil society services	with specialist civil society women's organisations	
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APPENDIX 2

Case Studies

1. Gendered Structures of Security (VAWG by police & other security bodies)

CASE STUDY: South Africa³¹

Under Pillar 1: Participation, the South Africa NAP (2020-2025) includes a strategic objective for Govt Depts to institute measures to ensure an environment in which women are able to thrive in security sector institutions (police, defence, corrections, intelligence, home affairs, justice), and a commitment to appoint more women to senior positions within those institutions. It further includes the development of an infrastructure drawing on the expertise of existing women's organisations.

Under Pillar 2: Prevention, the NAP includes a strategic objective around building a safer society for women and girls, including the creation and utilization of community early warning systems, stronger community policing forums, and the end to impunity for security sector transgressors, with harsher sentences for those tasked with the responsibility to protect

Under Pillar 3: Protection, the NAP includes a strategic objective around inculcating the norms and values associated with protection against sexual violence and providing incentives for whistleblowing on SGBV, including in community organisations, in the workplace and in security services.

CASE STUDY: Jordan³²

Jordan developed its first WPS NAP covering 2018-2021, and is currently in the process of articulating its subsequent commitments.

The NAP gave particular attention to the needs and vulnerabilities of women and girls seeking asylum, and as refugees from Syria. While Jordan has not been directly involved in the conflict, it has hosted significant numbers of refugees, and has included attention to their needs as central policy planks within their NAP.

The Govt of Jordan focus primarily on the WPS Pillars of Protection and Relief and Recovery in their NAP, and have explicit commitments to specialist, dedicated services for women and girls in host communities as well as in refugee camps. A further strategic commitment includes dedicated resources to outreach and communications, ensuring that survivors know where services are, how to have access to them, and some assurances around safety. There is also provision made for public communications campaigns through media to ensure that there is sympathetic community understanding of the issues women and girls are facing. Lastly, there is a commitment to training and resourcing gender-sensitive services specifically covering issues concerning CRSV, the associated trauma and social stigma, and the long-term consequences.

³¹ http://1325naps.peacewomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/sa_national_action_plan_women_peace_security_2020-2025.pdf

³² <http://1325naps.peacewomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Jordan-NAP-2018-2021.pdf>

2. Trafficking in Women and Girls

CASE STUDY: GUATEMALA³³

Guatemala developed their first WPS NAP in 2017, and within the NAP, there is recognition of the importance of legislation around Sexual Violence, Exploitation, and Trafficking in Persons, enacted in 2009. The aim of this legislation is to prevent, punish and eradicate sexual violence, the exploitation and trafficking of persons, with – importantly – care and protection of its victims and compensation for the damage and losses caused.

Pillar 5 of the NAP is concerned with the “dignified and transformational reparation of human rights violations for women in conflict and post-conflict situations”, directs its actions towards acts of violence that have taken place, and ensures a dignified and transformative reparation for women who are victims of acts of violence. While the NAP frames this around the violations in conflict and post-conflict situations, it also includes the framing of sexual exploitation, trafficking and slavery as human rights violations, with dedicated resources to initiatives providing comprehensive assistance, reparations and recovery, and a commitment to the pursuit of perpetrators.

3. Women's Participation in Public Life

CASE STUDY; South Africa³⁴

Under Pillar 1: Participation, the South Africa NAP (2020-2025) includes a strategic objective for Govt Depts to institute measures to ensure an environment in which women are able to thrive in security sector institutions (police, defence, corrections, intelligence, home affairs, justice), and a commitment to appoint more women to senior positions within those institutions. It further includes the development of an infrastructure drawing on the expertise of existing women's organisations.

³³ <http://1325naps.peacewomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Guatemala-NAP-2017.pdf>

³⁴ *ibid*