
ISF Women, Peace and Security Helpdesk

Conflict Prevention, Women, Peace and Security and Feminist Perspectives

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The Women Peace and Security Helpdesk, managed by Saferworld in partnership with Conciliation Resources, GAPS UK, University of Durham and Women International Peace Centre (WIPC), was established in December 2021 to increase capability across the UK Government on WPS policy and programming in order to make its work on conflict and instability more effective. If you work for the UK government and you would like to send a task request, please email us at wpshelpdesk@saferworld.org.uk. If you do not work for the UK government but have an enquiry about the helpdesk or this report, please email us at enquiries.wpshelpdesk@saferworld.org.uk

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Introduction

This briefing paper offers critical reflections on connections between feminism, conflict prevention, and the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda. As the UK government increases its focus on conflict prevention, and looking toward the forthcoming 2025 anniversaries of UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 (25 years) and the Beijing Platform for Action (30 years), this paper aims to:

- Examine feminist approaches to conflict prevention and how this is situated in formal and informal WPS processes and frameworks, and
- Critically reflect on how the WPS agenda could be enhanced to focus more on conflict prevention, and how mainstream conflict prevention efforts could more smartly integrate WPS.

The WPS agenda seeks to cast light on the multitude of direct and indirect consequences of oppression and violent conflict on women and girls. The impacts of conflict on women are high—maternal mortality increases, barriers to education and basic services increase, the risks of gender-based violence are amplified, and gender-based crimes are perpetrated to individually and collectively punish and terrorise civilians.¹ In 2022, the percentage of all women living within 50 kilometres of at least one armed conflict was 15 per cent, or approximately 600 million women, representing a 50 per cent increase in the number of women and girls living in countries impacted by war and violent conflict since 2017.²

Prevention is the least developed pillar of the formal WPS agenda and has been largely conflated with preventing conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) and preventing violent extremism in WPS resolutions. The 2015 Global Study on implementation of the WPS agenda drew considerable attention to this: “*The world has lost sight of some of the key demands of the women’s movement while advocating for the adoption of resolution 1325: reducing military expenditures, controlling the availability of armaments, promoting non-violent forms of conflict resolution, and fostering a culture of peace.*”³

Gendered analysis and women’s representation and participation have become more established in mainstream conflict prevention policy and practice over past decades, yet remain uneven and siloed. There are some promising avenues of progress, including on:

- Early warning and early response,
- Feminist conflict analysis and sense making,

¹ United Nations (2024), Report of the Secretary-General on Conflict Related Sexual Violence, S/2024/292.

² Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security (GIWPS), PRIO Centre on Gender, Peace and Security (2023), Women, Peace and Security Index.

³ Key messages at <https://wps.unwomen.org/preventing/> related to: Coomaraswamy, Radhika (2015), *Preventing conflict, transforming justice, securing the peace: A global study of the implementation of United Nations Security Council resolution 1325*, ‘Chapter 8: Conflict prevention,’ New York, NY: United Nations.

- Sub-national and community-level peace promotion, and
- Better quality funding initiatives for feminist and women-led organisations.

Exactly what conflict prevention is has consumed much academic and policy attention over recent decades.⁴ For the purposes of this paper, we understand it to be actions and policies to address causes of conflict before violence escalates, though this could take place at any point in the conflict cycle (particularly as even within one context there are differential impacts). Feminist conflict prevention explicitly aims to transform the underlying conditions driving conflict and oppression: inequalities, exclusion, structural violence and oppression, colonialism and its legacies, militarism and more. Violence occurs at all levels of society, including transnational and global levels, taking both deep structural and more immediate forms. A feminist approach identifies patriarchy as a system of oppression with invisible (structural and deep) forms as well as more visible (tangible and more obvious) forms.⁵ It also emphasises a continuum of violence and does not distinguish between so-called public and private violence.

This paper begins with 10 recurrent themes observed in the discourse on feminism, conflict prevention, and WPS, followed by a focus on UK policies. It then unpacks how conflict prevention has been included in the WPS agenda, followed by areas of good and promising practice. Notably, the evidence base of 'good examples' is limited. This could be due to a combination of framing, under-reporting, and limited time and funds for organisations to analyse and share insights. The paper concludes with recommendations for how the UK and other actors can advance more determined and integrated feminist approaches, WPS and conflict prevention.

Methods

This research was informed by key informant interviews including people working on WPS, conflict prevention, digital peace promotion, mediators, United Nations (UN) staff, academics, and women's rights peace proponents. An extensive literature review from academic and policy domains from the feminist, WPS, and mainstream conflict prevention and resolution fields was conducted. The major limitations were the short timeline, and limited relevant insights and evidence of practical applications of WPS *and* conflict prevention. The dearth of contemporary analysis is striking. Finally, interviews were difficult to secure for two reasons, related to conducting the research in October 2024: as this is the WPS anniversary month, it has made interviews challenging to arrange in a timely manner; and the reticence of some to be interviewed, citing lack of knowledge of the subject. This too is revealing, especially coming from peace and security practitioners. This is an analysis generated by the WPS Helpdesk and does not constitute UK Government policy.

⁴ Melander, Erik and Pigache, Claire (2006), 'Conflict Prevention: Concepts and Challenges,' Unknown; Kivimäki, Timo (2024), '[Chapter 2: Conflict prevention: what does it really mean?](#)' In *Research Handbook on Conflict Prevention*, Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing; Lund, Michael S (2006), 'Conflict Prevention: Theory in Pursuit of Policy and Practice,' *The SAGE Handbook of Conflict Resolution*, Sage, Chapter 15: 287-321.

⁵ Enloe, Cynthia (2017), *The Big Push: Exposing and challenging the persistence of patriarchy*, Oxford: Myriad.

Findings and Analysis

1

Reflection on the state of conflict prevention, feminism, and WPS

1. Prevention, one of the four pillars of the WPS agenda (alongside protection, participation, and relief and recovery) is unquestionably the most neglected pillar. It has been aptly described as the “weakest P”.⁶ The original vision of UNSCR 1325 was to transcend militarism, prioritise human and environmental security, reframe linear and patriarchal (mis)understanding of ‘conflict’, and privilege the agency and insights of women to contribute to and lead on matters of peace and security.⁷ However, the practice, as well as subsequent WPS resolutions, have morphed understanding and action on ‘prevention’ to being about preventing sexual violence and preventing violent extremism (this is analysed in more detail in Part 3). This is compounded by the waning focus on conflict prevention writ large. The contemporary era of toxic geopolitics, ‘victorious wars’ (such as Sri Lanka), rising authoritarianism and democratic backsliding, diminishing belief in multilateralism, record levels of military spending—and the crisis of people on the move (forced displacement, migration)—have all depleted oxygen for embedding prevention across sectors, systems, and mindsets.

2. The transformative feminist and original WPS agenda, which emphasises the urgency of demilitarisation, disarmament, and reductions in arms spending, has been neglected. The original feminist vision for WPS is about ending war, not “*making war safe for women*”.⁸ Global military expenditure is at an all-time high: in 2023 reaching \$2443 billion (up from \$2240 billion in 2022, a 6.8 per cent increase)⁹ as compared to \$223.7 billion spent on aid.¹⁰ The global context of war and insecurity is what one interviewee called a “*code red*”

⁶ Basu, Soumita and Confortini, Catia C (2017), ‘Weakest “P” in the 1325 pod? Realizing conflict prevention through Security Council Resolution 1325,’ *International Studies Perspectives*, 18(1), 43–63.

⁷ Ruby, Felicity (2014), ‘Security Council Resolution 1325: A Tool for Conflict Prevention?’ In Heathcote, G., Otto, D. (eds) *Rethinking Peacekeeping, Gender Equality and Collective Security. Thinking Gender in Transnational Times*, Palgrave Macmillan, London; Sharoni, Simona (2017), ‘Conflict Resolution: Feminist Perspectives,’ *Oxford Research Encyclopaedia of International Studies*; Basu, Soumita and Shepherd, Laura (2017), ‘Prevention in pieces: representing conflict in the Women, Peace and Security agenda,’ *Global Affairs*, 3(4–5), 441–453; Donovan, Outi (2024), ‘Chapter 3: Women in conflict prevention,’ In *Research Handbook on Conflict Prevention*, Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing; Vincent, Louise (2003), ‘Current discourse on the role of women in conflict prevention and conflict transformation: a critique,’ *Conflict Trends*, Vol. 2003, No. 3, 5–10.

⁸ Weiss, Cora (2011), ‘We must not make war safe for women,’ *Open Democracy*, 24 May. Also see: Kaptan, Senem (2019), *Feminist Perspectives Towards Excessive Military Spending and an Intimate Dialogue with Cynthia Enloe*, Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom.

⁹ Nan Tian., Lopes da Silva, Diego., Xiao Liang and Scarazzato, Lorenzo (2024), ‘Trends in World Military Expenditure, 2023’, SIPRI, Fact Sheet, April.

¹⁰ Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (2024), ‘International aid rises in 2023 with increased support to Ukraine and humanitarian needs,’ Press release, 11 April.

moment.¹¹ There are more active violent conflicts than during any year since World War II,¹² yet multilateralism and human rights inspired norms—such as WPS, the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and the 1995 Beijing Platform—have waning support and financing in this era of democratic backsliding and rollback of women’s rights.¹³ Energy and resources over recent years have been deployed towards ‘holding the space’ for gender equality as opposed to ‘expanding the space’. The recurrent backsliding on sexual and reproductive rights in many countries is indicative. This creates a defensive environment and means there is little bandwidth for reinvigorating lost agendas such as conflict prevention.

3. The WPS protection and participation pillars have overshadowed conflict prevention; a strong conflation of prevention of conflict-related sexual violence as synonymous with conflict prevention persists. This has also led to security-based solutions such as more women peacekeepers or focusing on women’s ‘pacifying influence’ in countering violent extremism.¹⁴ There is of course a strong relationship between women’s safety, women’s participation and involvement, and the inclusion of gender concepts in conflict prevention. However, this remains poorly articulated after nearly 25 years of the formal WPS agenda, including by many in the WPS sector, despite a positive correlation between women’s inclusion in different forms of peace promotion and the sustainability of peace agreements.¹⁵ In 2024, analysis of ways to strengthen the WPS agenda still has little to no focus on conflict prevention.¹⁶ Moving this asymmetrical agenda into action is then further challenged by the fact that mainstream or ‘malestream’ peace and security is heavily siloed, across ‘peacemaking’ and ‘peacebuilding’ and ‘peacekeeping’, with conflict prevention not really pronounced anywhere but theoretically everywhere. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have sparked a more integrated discussion around gender equality and sustained peace, as has the New Agenda for Peace. Building on these and efforts going into measuring progress on WPS,¹⁷ 2025 is a year where more emphasis can be placed on the evidence for gender perspectives and women’s representation and participation in matters of peace and conflict prevention.

4. With so many violent conflicts and resultant crises, those well positioned to advance conflict prevention, including peace and security practitioners, struggle to focus on upstream conflict prevention. Most peace and security efforts are crisis-driven and linked to ‘negative peace’ (the absence of violence) or short-to-medium term conflict resolution. The concept of ‘positive peace’ lies at the heart of the original WPS vision, and focuses on the transformation of root causes of oppression and conflict.¹⁸ This conception of peace is directly linked to ‘upstream’ prevention, or structural or long-term prevention (addressing root causes); they are one and the same. Positive peace, upstream conflict prevention, and gender equality are strongly correlated—societies that have greater gender

¹¹ Interview Anonymous, October 2024.

¹² Rustad, Siri Aas (2024), ‘Conflict Trends: A Global Overview, 1946–2023,’ *PRIO Paper*, Oslo: PRIO.

¹³ Taylor, Sarah and Baldwin, Gretchen (2019), ‘The Global Pushback on Women’s Rights: The State of the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda,’ New York: International Peace Institute.

¹⁴ Shepherd, Laura J (2020), ‘The paradox of prevention in the Women, Peace and Security agenda,’ *European Journal of International Security*, 5(3):315-331.

¹⁵ Coomaraswamy (2015).

¹⁶ As exemplified in this opinion piece - Olsson, Louise (2024), ‘Time to Push for Next Step on Women, Peace and Security: Ensuring Positive Impact for Women in Conflict,’ Blog, Global Observatory, 16 October.

¹⁷ Georgetown and PRIO (2023).

¹⁸ As pioneered by Johan Galtung. Also see <https://positivepeace.org/what-is-positive-peace>

equality (political, economic, and social) are less likely to use military force in inter-state conflicts, and conversely, states with less gender equality (and high rates of violence against women) tend to be more likely to use violence to assert power and address conflicts.¹⁹

5. Cogent feminist analysis questions forms and types of power, particularly exposes invisible oppression and influence, and recognises intersectionality.²⁰ Such analysis should explore women's and men's agency, both in participating in and encouraging violence *and* promoting peace from different experiences and dimensions. The domination of the WPS and gender equality spaces by white middle class women such as ourselves is being challenged, leading to more emphasis on intersectionality and multiple identities alongside gender, such as race, class, ethnicity, sexuality, or religion to understand how individuals and groups might be differently affected by oppression and violent conflict, and how these intersecting forces shape systemic drivers of conflict and levers for peace.²¹

6. Mainstream peace and security processes still consistently side-line gender-based violence as separate from war-related violence, erroneously framed as a 'women's issue' and conflated to conflict-related sexual violence. The concept of a 'continuum of violence' is a central contribution from feminist analysts to account for the pervasive slippery realities of violence forms, types, and experiences.²² Feminists reject the misnomer of public and private violence, especially as experienced by women and girls.

7. Early warning systems that take gendered power seriously highlight that increases in gender-based violence can be predictive of wider social and political insecurity.²³ Feminist and masculinities analyses have urged understanding of the construction of gender, how it evolves, morphs, and restricts.²⁴ Expectations and perceptions of gender, femininities, and masculinities underwrite armed conflict and oppression. This has implications for understanding the localised causes and drivers of conflict (e.g., increases in

¹⁹ Various studies in Crespo-Sancho, Catalina (2017), 'Conflict Prevention and Gender.' Background paper for the United Nations–World Bank Flagship Study, 'Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict,' World Bank, Washington, DC. Also see: Melander, Erik (2005), 'Gender Equality and Intrastate Armed Conflict', *International Studies Quarterly*, 49 (4), 695–714; Caprioli, Mary (2005), 'Primed for Violence: The Role of Gender Inequality in Predicting Internal Conflict', *International Studies Quarterly*, 49 (2), 161–178.

²⁰ Koester, Diana (2015), 'Gender and power, Brief 4,' Development Leadership Program; McLeod, Laura and Maria O'Reilly (2019), 'Critical peace and conflict studies: feminist interventions,' *Peacebuilding* 7(2):127–145; Quay, I (2019), 'Rapid Gender Analysis and its use in crises: from zero to fifty in five years,' *Gender & Development*, 27:2, 221-236; Haines, Rebecca and Buchanan, Cate (2023), 'Making inclusive analysis a reality – strengthening political analysis in Myanmar, Practice Note,' Singapore: Reimagining Conflict Sensitivity, January.

²¹ Magendane, Kiza and Goris, Yannicke (2020), 'A hard look in the mirror: reflecting on racism and whiteness in the development sector,' *The Broker Online*, 24 September; Nagarajan, Chitra and Hagen, Jamie J. (2024), 'What is a Queer Feminist Analysis of Peace and Security?' briefing paper, Centre for Gender in Politics, Queen's University Belfast; Peace Direct, Adeso, the Alliance for Peacebuilding, and Women of Color Advancing Peace and Security (2021), *Time to decolonise aid – Insights and lessons from a global consultation*; Crenshaw, Kimberle (1991), 'Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color,' *Stanford Law Review* 43, 1241–99; Smith, Sarah and Stavrevska, Elena (2022), '[Intersectionality in the UN Women, Peace and Security agenda](#)', Blog, Transforming Society.

²² Cockburn, Cynthia (2004), 'The continuum of violence: a gender perspective on war and peace,' In Winona Giles and Jennifer Hyndman (eds), *Sites of Violence: Gender and Conflict Zones*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, pp. 24–44.

²³ Coomaraswamy (2015).

²⁴ Wright, Hannah (2014), *Masculinities, conflict and peacebuilding: Perspectives on men through a gender lens*, Saferworld; Breines, Ingeborg et al (2000), *Male roles, masculinities and violence: A culture of peace perspective*, UNCSO Publishing; MenEngage (2014), *Men, masculinities and changing power. A discussion paper on engaging men in gender equality from Beijing 1995 to 2015*, Washington DC: MenEngage; IDS Bulletin, (2014), *Undressing patriarchy: men and structural violence* 45 (1).

'bride price' due to the commercialisation of cattle herding and other factors, resulting in cycles of violent cattle raiding in South Sudan),²⁵ as well as global causes (e.g., the burgeoning global arms trade linked to hyper-militarised masculinities).

8. Gender remains conflated to being about women, which means avoiding discussion on militarised masculinities and the male domination of peace and security processes. Whilst there has been some research on masculinities in peace and security matters, this issue is yet to break through persistently. The onus falls on feminist analysts and advocates to research and raise these issues, by and large, and comes with the significant risk of appropriation by men who see this focus as a shortcut to 'working on gender' without having to do very much. Integrating a solid focus on types of masculinities and associated expectations, social political codes, and cultural norms into political and conflict analysis is a key starting point.

9. Participation and representation remain as vital as ever, yet the gap between rhetoric and action is large. In an era of organised global pushback against gender equality, backsliding on women's rights, and increased hostility and violence towards women in public life, more political action is needed to agree proven interventions such as quotas and other Temporary Special Measures. Closed male networks prevail—whether armed groups, or the foreign ministers who are typically selected to be envoys and mediators.²⁶ Women consistently 'add value' in tracks 2, 3, and 4 of peace processes, yet their marginalisation from track 1 and the elite nature of these deals, often focused on sharing power between men with guns, persists; a model that rarely results in sustainable peace.²⁷ Gender quotas (Temporary Special Measures permissible under international law, CEDAW, Article 4) are identified as an effective ways to fast-track women's representation.²⁸ Peace and security practitioners continue to avoid quotas. If there is a focus, it is in provisions about future electoral reform.²⁹ This reinforces a problematic position on incrementalism and leaving gender inclusion to later. This also has implications for feminist analysis in different spaces—parliaments, think tanks, etc. Despite gains in women's numerical representation, it has not led to concomitant gains in feminist perspectives and outcomes. Simply: not all women are feminists, even fewer men are, and feminists in such processes often self-silence or are effectively marginalised.³⁰ This has major implications for analysis that

²⁵ Wright, Hannah (2014), *Masculinities, conflict and peacebuilding: Perspectives on men through a gender lens*, Saferworld.

²⁶ Kreutz, Joakim and Lorena Cardenas, Magda (2024), 'The women and men that make peace: Introducing the Mediating Individuals (M-IND) dataset,' *Journal of Peace Research*, 0(0), 1-11. Also see: United Nations (2023), *Women and peace and security: Report of the Secretary-General (S/2023/725)*. This highlights the decline in women's participation in UN-led peace processes.

²⁷ Donovan (2024).

²⁸ Dahlerup, D., et al (2014), *Atlas of Electoral Gender Quotas*, Stockholm: International IDEA, Inter-Parliamentary Union, and Stockholm University; Haider, Huma (2011), *Helpdesk Research Report: Effects of political quotas for women*, UK: Governance and Social Development Resource Centre; Dahlerup, D., (ed.) *Women, Quotas and Politics*, London: Routledge, 2006; Krook, Mona (2009), *Quota for women in politics: gender and candidate selection reform worldwide*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

²⁹ Anderson, Miram and Swiss, Liam (2014), '[Peace Accords and the Adoption of Electoral Quotas for Women in the Developing World, 1990–2006](#),' *Politics and Gender*. 10(1): 33-61. Related, see Shair-Rosenfield, S and Wood, R (2017), '[Governing well after War: How Improving Female Representation Prolongs Post-Conflict Peace](#),' *Journal of Politics*. 79(3): 995-1009.

³⁰ A damaging simplicity that equates increasing the number of women in positions of power with gender equality as opposed to systemic transformation of structural and political-socio-cultural barriers. See Dharmapuri, Sahana (2011), '[Just Add Women and Stir?](#)' *Parameters*, pp. 56-70. Also see Salmela, Katarina., Manion, Megan., and Buchanan, Cate (2018), '[Experts Group report on women's meaningful participation in peace processes and gender-inclusive peace agreements](#),' UN Women: New York; Ellerby, Kara (2016), 'A seat at the table is not enough: Understanding women's substantive representation in peace processes,' *Peacebuilding*, 4(2): 136-50; Klot, Jennifer and

provides data, ideas, and contacts for decision-makers, donors, journalists, and others. More feminists involved in ‘sense-making’ is crucial as men overwhelmingly populate those cited as experts and are the central protagonists in news stories and articles, whether they are ministers of state, heads of militaries, armed group combatants, or leaders of business.³¹ They also dominate peace and security briefings, conferences, and discussions that influence ideas and policy directions. This perversely affects who is identified, rightly or wrongly, as an ‘expert’.

10. Funding quality and quantity for WPS implementation and conflict prevention, especially feminist approaches, is inadequate.³² In 2022, only 4 per cent of total Official Development Assistance contributed to conflict prevention³³ and less than 1 per cent of development aid reached women’s rights, women-led, and feminist organisations directly.³⁴ In war and conflict affected states also referred to as ‘fragile’, this counted for 0.3 per cent of bilateral aid in 2021, well short of the 1 per cent UN recommended target.³⁵ This under-resourcing has a direct impact on the ability of civil society organisations to work on the longer-term issues that can promote resilience, systems change, cross-sectoral linkages, or whatever is most needed at national and sub-national levels to prevent conflict.³⁶ The growth of bespoke pooled funds targeting women-led and women’s rights organisations (WROs) is welcome. So too is the development of the Women’s Humanitarian and Peace Fund, though more reforms are required to ensure the UN is providing flexible, far more risk tolerant, and

Seckinelgin, Hakan (2014), ‘[From Global Policy to Local Knowledge: What is the Link between Women’s Formal Political Participation and Gender Equality in Conflict-affected Contexts?](#)’ *Global Policy*, Vol. 5, Issue 1, pp. 36–46.

³¹ Fröhlich, Romy (2016), ‘[Gender, media and security](#).’ In *Handbook of Media, Conflict and Security*, Routledge, pp. 22-34; Towns, Ann and Niklasson, Brigitta (2016), ‘Gender, international status, and ambassador appointments.’ *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 13(3): 521-540; Barnes, Tiffany and O’Brien, Diana (2018), ‘Defending the realm: The appointment of female defence ministers worldwide,’ *American Journal of Political Science*, 62(2): 355-368; Stephenson, Elise (2022), ‘Why Do Women Remain Under-Represented in International Affairs? The Case of Australia,’ *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 68(2):242–263; Conley Tyler, Melissa, Blizzard Emily, and Crane, Bridget (2014), ‘Is International Affairs Too ‘Hard’ for Women? Explaining the Missing Women in Australia’s International Affairs,’ *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 68(2): 156–76.

³² Coomaraswamy (2015). Also see: Davies, Sara and True, Jacqui (2022), ‘Follow the money: Assessing Women, Peace, and Security through financing for gender-inclusive peace,’ *Review of International Studies*, 48, 668 – 688; Douglas, Sarah and Mazzacurati, Cecile (2017), ‘Financing for Gender-Responsive Peacebuilding: Setting Financial Targets as a Tool for Increasing Women’s Participation in Post-Conflict Recovery, Gender, Development and Social Change, In Zohra K and N Burn (Editors), *Financing for Gender Equality*, chapter 10, Palgrave Macmillan, 227-246.

³³ OECD (2023), ‘Peace and Official Development Assistance,’ *OECD Development Perspectives*, No. 37, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/fccfbffc-en> and OECD (2022), *States of Fragility 2022*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/c7fedf5e-en>.

³⁴ Association for Women in Development (2020), [Where is the money for feminist organising? New analysis finds that the answer is alarming](#); and (2021), *Where Is The Money for Feminist Organizing?*

³⁵ Ibid. Also see United Nations, ‘Our Common Agenda policy brief 9,’ p. 20.

³⁶ Arutyunova, Angelika and Clark, Cindy (2013), *Watering the Leaves, Starving the Roots: The Status of Financing for Women’s Rights Organizing and Gender Equality*, Association for Women in Development; Association for Women in Development (2020), [Where is the money for feminist organising? New analysis finds that the answer is alarming](#); CARE (2021), [Time for a better bargain: how the aid system shortchanges women and girls in crisis](#); Global Network of Women Peacebuilders (2020), [Financing for women’s organizations: the billion-dollar question](#); Global Network of Women Peacebuilders (2021), [Fund us like you want us to win: Feminist Solutions for more Impactful Financing for Peacebuilding](#); Koester, Diana et al (2016), ‘How can donors improve their support to gender equality in fragile settings? Findings from OECD research,’ *Gender and Development*, 24(3): 353–373. Also see: Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development Development Assistance Committee, Network on Gender Equality (2017), *Gender equality and women’s empowerment in fragile and conflict-affected situations: A review of donor support*, Policy paper, Number 8, October; OECD (2021), *Development for gender equality and women’s empowerment: A 2021 snapshot*; OECD (2023), *Development for gender equality and women’s empowerment: A 2023 snapshot*, 1 March; OECD (2023), [Development for gender equality and women’s empowerment: A 2023 snapshot](#), 1 March.

longer-term funding. Funding to international nongovernmental organisations-led (INGO) consortiums who sub-grant is another area where attention is required to ensure the equitable sharing of administrative costs, risk sharing, and genuinely co-designed processes.

2

UK approaches

The UK attempts to recognise and embed the link between preventing conflict and promoting WPS in its policies; however, the connection is inconsistent. The 2021 Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy call on the UK to “*reduce the frequency and intensity of conflict and instability*”, including through addressing vulnerabilities through resilience, and counter both state threats and transnational security challenges.³⁷ The Integrated Review also includes the promotion of gender equality as a priority area; however, this is not explicitly reaffirmed in the 2023 Integrated Review Refresh.

Led by the Office for Conflict, Stabilisation and Mediation, the UK is working to increase its focus and capability on conflict prevention and strengthen international approaches to support this. The Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) recognises different forms of conflict prevention, including:

- ‘direct’ (immediate interventions),
- ‘structural’ (addressing the root causes of conflict), and
- ‘systemic’ prevention (addressing global conflict drivers like the arms trade, climate, organised crime, etc.).

It organises related activity in terms of a four-step process:

- anticipate (analyse and identify risks),
- strategise (generate a prevention approach),
- act (respond), and
- learn and adjust (adapt).

This is informed by several principles, one of which is to “*incorporate the needs & contributions of women, girls & other side-lined groups.*”³⁸

The UK Approach to Stabilisation (2019) references conflict prevention aims, and includes a focus on understanding the gendered drivers of conflict, cross-references the UK National Action Plan (NAP) on WPS, and highlights the importance of gender equality in promoting peace.³⁹

³⁷ HM Government (2021), ‘Global Britain in a Competitive Age: The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy’.

³⁸ HM Government (2023), ‘Conflict Prevention: Approach Paper,’ Office for Conflict, Stabilisation and Mediation.

³⁹ HM Government (2019), ‘The UK Government’s Approach to Stabilisation: A guide for policy makers and practitioners,’ Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office.

Box 1: UK WPS NAP 2023-27

Civil society has observed that ‘prevention’ in the UK NAP has shifted over its various iterations, away from ‘prevention’ as preventing conflict (articulated in the third NAP) to ‘prevention’ as preventing violence against women and girls and preventing violent extremism.¹ The fifth and latest UK NAP has addressed some of the critiques. There is a domestic focus, as well as mention of commitments on international arms transfers and small arms.¹ It has five strategic objectives which are all likely to contribute to conflict prevention in diffuse ways, though conflict prevention itself is not explicitly defined as an objective:

1. Decision-Making: Increasing women’s meaningful participation, leadership, and representation in decision-making processes.
2. Gender-Based Violence: Preventing gender-based violence, including conflict-related sexual violence, and supporting survivors to cope, recover, and seek justice.
3. Humanitarian and Crisis Response: Supporting the needs of women and girls in crises and ensuring they can participate and lead in responses.
4. Security and Justice: Increasing the accountability of security and justice actors to women and girls and ensuring they are responsive to their rights and needs.¹
5. Transnational Threats: Ensuring the UK responds to the needs of women and girls as part of its approach to transnational threats, including preventing climate related insecurity.¹

There remain opportunities to advance long-term or upstream conflict prevention in the latest NAP. The greater focus on Northern Ireland could potentially expand to include a more explicit reference to conflict prevention. Objective 1 includes a commitment to “*promote conflict prevention efforts as well as conflict reduction and resolution, through involvement in the early stages of ceasefire negotiations and humanitarian responses, to formal peace negotiations and political settlements.*” This can be regarded as ‘direct’ conflict prevention—focusing on the short- and medium-term efforts to end war and violence. However, the capacity to strike a clearer set of commitments on upstream (or long term/structural) conflict prevention in the next NAP, or an addendum to mark the 2025 anniversary year, is well within reach.

Box 2: Key resources

- WPS Index (PRIO and Georgetown, 2023) for existing data on WPS implementation (against security, justice, and peace-focused indicators)
- Global Study on the Implementation of UNSCR 1325 (Coomaraswamy, 2015)
- Women’s Peace and Humanitarian Fund (2023), *Women’s Transformational Roles in Local Conflict Prevention: Case Study of WPHF-Supported Civil Society Organizations in Burundi, Iraq, Palestine, Philippines, and Uganda.*
- Karayi, Laureen and Eva Tabbasam (2024), [Funding for Women’s Rights Organisations in Humanitarian Crises](#), Report. Women, Peace and Security Helpdesk.

3

Review

It is standard to read or hear that the WPS agenda ‘began’ in October 2000, but this is more accurately the start of the 10-resolution formal UN Security Council process. To get to that point—a remarkable recognition of women’s needs and rights, roles and contributions in matters of peace and security—women had been mobilising for peace and conflict prevention for hundreds of years around the world. It was the first time the Council had seriously, officially, considered both the gendered impacts of violent conflict and ways to start promoting more gender inclusion in conflict prevention and resolution. Feminist anti-war and pacifist campaigns were the bedrock of this movement, which gathered pace when the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action was agreed. Twelve priority areas were finalised to accelerate implementation of CEDAW and remedy numerous omissions including attention to women and armed conflict, and gender equality and the media, amongst others. General Recommendations (GR) such as GR30 have further promoted the women and armed conflict dimension and sought to build a clearer link between CEDAW and WPS. Arguably, this is the most pronounced articulation of prevention in the WPS agenda to date. The dedicated section on conflict prevention is included in Annex 2.⁴⁰ There are many other GRs of relevance including more recently on climate change.⁴¹

Building on the momentum of the Beijing process, a time of considerable optimism for advancing women’s rights and gender equality, and global human rights normative development more broadly, in 2000, the seminal UNSCR 1325 on WPS was agreed. A further nine resolutions have been generated. Four ‘pillars’ define the WPS agenda: conflict prevention, women’s participation, protection, and relief and recovery. These include a focus on women’s representation and participation in peace and security processes; humanitarian action and women’s needs and inclusion; the differential impacts of insecurity, human rights abuse, and conflict on women and men, and sexual and gender minorities; and the critical need for gendered data and analysis, policymaking, and programming. Over the many themes, the resolutions have focused more on responding to and preventing CRSV, which, though vitally important, tends to be framed in terms of military/security focused protection.⁴² There are five resolutions devoted to addressing CRSV: SCR 1820 (2008); SCR 1888 (2009); SCR 1960 (2010); SCR 2106 (2013); and SCR 2467 (2019).

Across the other resolutions, SCR 1889 (2009) focuses again on women’s meaningful participation in peace processes. SCR 2122 (2013) aimed to be a corrective to the extensive focus on protection thus far and to lay the groundwork for the 2015 Global Study. It does include the need to address the root causes of conflict and women’s insecurity but fails to provide directions on what this can encompass. Operative paragraph 7 states: “*Recognizes the continuing need to increase women’s participation and the consideration of gender-related issues in all discussions pertinent to the prevention and resolution of armed conflict,*

⁴⁰ UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (2013), General recommendation No. 30 on women in conflict prevention, conflict and post-conflict situations CEDAW/C/GC/30, Section 4, Part A: Conflict prevention. Also see, Swaine, Aisling and O’Rourke, Catherine (2015), [Guidebook on CEDAW general recommendation no. 30 and the UN Security Council resolutions on women, peace and security](#), New York: UN Women.

⁴¹ UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (2018), [General Recommendation No. 37 on Gender related dimensions of disaster risk reduction in the context of climate change](#) CEDAW/C/GC/37.

⁴² Coomaraswamy (2015).

the maintenance of peace and security, and post-conflict peacebuilding.” It lays out some actions but does not outline a dedicated follow up point on prevention. Instead it outlines actions on the other areas mentioned in the paragraph. This SCR (2122) does mention the Arms Trade Treaty (2013), which is relevant to WPS commitments on disarmament and linked to prevention.

SCR 2242 (2015) is considered by some to bring a revitalised focus on prevention. Indeed, paragraph 13, in a rare move for a WPS resolution, “...welcomes the increasing focus on inclusive upstream prevention efforts”. However, this relates to the inclusion of women in preventing violent extremism, an agenda that created concern (and still does) about the instrumentalisation of women, setting women up as de facto intelligence gatherers within their communities, and reinforcing damaging stereotypes, including but not limited to women’s “maternal pacifist nature”.⁴³ The operational paragraphs focus on ‘countering’ violent extremism, rather than a broader prevention approach.⁴⁴ This resolution also calls for the establishment of the Informal Expert Group on Women, Peace and Security, which serves as a bridge between the Security Council and the implementation of the WPS agenda. This is yet to have a dedicated discussion on conflict prevention. Doing so in 2025 could assist with bringing the issue up an agenda of competing concerns. Finally, SCR 2493 (2019) urges implementation of the previous resolutions and misses a focus on conflict prevention.

The role of women in preventing conflict and building peace is recognised in the ‘Sustaining Peace’ agenda,⁴⁵ but otherwise has seen limited inclusion in ‘mainstream’ conflict prevention resolutions.⁴⁶ The UN Secretary General’s New Agenda for Peace also sets out to address gender inequality in the context of peace and security and calls to dismantle patriarchal and oppressive power structures.⁴⁷ This, as well as the recently agreed Pact for the Future, are discussed in Part 4.

A lack of clarity and neglect of conflict prevention in WPS led one analyst to observe: “...prevention is constituted as something other than (military) security but it is governed by the dominant logics of security and militarism...Feminists and other critical scholars, of course, have worked to challenge and undermine this narrow envisioning of security for many decades, arguing for a much more expansive conceptualisation that recognised the many ways in which security – and insecurity – functions and manifests.”⁴⁸ The prevention agenda is under-resourced, under-researched, and an under-emphasised part of the WPS agenda.

⁴³ Giscard d’Estaing, Sophie (2017), ‘Engaging women in countering violent extremism: Avoiding instrumentalisation and furthering agency,’ *Gender & Development*, 25:1, 103–18; Idris, Iffat with Abdelaziz, Ayat (2017), ‘Women and countering violent extremism,’ Helpdesk report, GSDRC; Möller-Loswick, Anna (2017), ‘[The Countering Violent Extremism Agenda Risks Undermining Women Who Need Greater Support](#),’ Post, London: Saferworld.

⁴⁴ Shepherd (2020).

⁴⁵ United Nations (2016), [A/RES/70/262](#) and [S/RES/2282](#).

⁴⁶ Analysts note that there is “...little evidence of ... [WPS resolutions] being used in official mandates of the Security Council to invest in and engage with women’s groups and local actors as partners in conflict prevention.” See, Basu and Confortini C (2017), p. 55.

⁴⁷ United Nations Executive Office of the Secretary-General (2023), [A New Agenda for Peace: Our Common Agenda](#), Policy Brief 9.

⁴⁸ Shepherd (2020), p.2 and p. 5.

WPS National Action Plans

The most prominent articulation of national (and regional) approaches to WPS are NAPs. In some countries these are participatory, with government choosing to involve civil society (e.g., in Canada, civil society is a formal partner).⁴⁹ In many contexts, these are not funded, often top-down affairs with limited involvement of civil society, or with UN Women drafting such plans for governments, often leading to an ownership deficit. Nonetheless, these plans have become an important vehicle for elevating WPS and gender equality in many countries. They can represent opportunities and openings for policy advancement, especially in the context of roll-back and the persistent challenges undermining progress—primarily patriarchal pressure, weak political will, and limited funding—to fully realise the WPS agenda.⁵⁰

Some 108 states have NAPs, though 30 per cent are outdated, having expired in 2022 or earlier.⁵¹ A cursory review of NAPs reveals a low level of emphasis on conflict prevention, reflecting the limited attention accorded to the topic beyond preambles and declaratory statements. There have been some key reminders about the need for more focus on *all* four pillars.⁵² The core strategic omission of prevention across NAPs is curious because NAPs could logically crystallise around the four ‘P’s’, yet most are not organised that way, which further diminishes attention to prevention. Conversely, a pillars approach is regarded as constricting for planning and analysis given the interconnected nature of the concerns, and this could be why most NAPs do not follow this format as this can lead to superficiality and repetition. Regardless of the format of the NAP, the central point here is that what is needed is a clear theory of change and tangible commitments in how NAPs will contribute to prevention.

Indicators on WPS

In 2010 the UN Secretary General issued a set of 26 indicators in response to SCR 1889.⁵³ These aimed to better measure, track, and document implementation of the WPS agenda and have been widely used to shape policies and programme design. Per the goal, “Provisions addressing the specific needs and issues of women and girls are included in early warning systems and conflict prevention mechanisms and their implementation is monitored”, there are two dedicated indicators:

- Indicator 6 - Number and type of actions taken by the Security Council related to Resolution 1325 (2000). Responsibility: UN Women/DPA, and

⁴⁹ In Canada, the Women, Peace and Security Network-Canada (WPSN-C) co-chairs the national action plan advisory group.

⁵⁰ Many of the challenges were detailed in Coomaraswamy (2015). Also see Salmela, Katarina., Manion, Megan., and Buchanan, Cate (2018), *Experts Group report on women’s meaningful participation in peace processes and gender-inclusive peace agreements*. UN Women: New York; Buchanan, Cate (2021), *Gender-inclusive peacemaking: strategies for mediation practitioners*, Mediation Practice Series, Geneva: Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue.

⁵¹ <http://1325naps.peacewomen.org/> Accessed 8 October 2024. For more background on NAPs, see Hamilton, Caitlin et al. (2020), *Twenty Years of Women, Peace and Security National Action Plans: Analysis and Lessons Learned*, LSE WPS Centre and University of Sydney.

⁵² Coomaraswamy (2015).

⁵³ Annex 2 - Comprehensive indicators in United Nations (2010), *Women and peace and security: Report of the Secretary-General S/2010/498*.

- Indicator 7 - Number and percentage of women in executive positions of relevant regional and sub-regional organisations involved in preventing conflict.
Responsibility: UN Women/DPA.

Additionally, there are also indicators related to peacemaking and other pillars that have consequences (if implemented) for women's representation and participation in political processes. The indicators writ large need to be updated with contemporary security challenges such as online misogyny and hate, climate change, risks for women activists and parliamentarians, localisation, and much more.

Box 3: Key resources

Peace Women project (WILPF) www.peacewomen.org

Swaine, Aisling and O'Rourke, Catherine (2015), [*Guidebook on CEDAW general recommendation no. 30 and the UN Security Council resolutions on women, peace and security*](#), New York: UN Women.

4

Policy and practice

This section comes with the caveat that there is a significant need to boost insights and sharing of good practice on contemporary conflict prevention, let alone more explicitly gendered conflict prevention. Here we focus on indicative areas of action and direct and indirect contributions to conflict prevention with WPS and feminist elements.

National policies and multilateralism

Some states have been moving forward different contributions to conflict prevention and WPS, through NAPs (discussed above). Another way in which this occurs is through political party commitment whilst in government to ‘feminist foreign policy’. This has included, but is not limited to, the governments of Sweden (2014 – since withdrawn following a change in government in 2022), Canada (2017), France (2019), Mexico (2020), Spain (2021), Luxembourg (2021), Germany (2021), Chile (2022), and the Netherlands (2022). Their commitments to gender equality, including in their aid spending, present significant potential for furthering a WPS and a revitalised conflict prevention agenda. Despite the feminist foreign policy commitments, there are still considerable shortfalls in this funding reaching women-led, WROs, and feminist organisations.⁵⁴ The literature review and interviews highlighted the inconsistency in the application of feminist foreign policy and action on disarmament and demilitarisation, even more pressing and possible as many of these states are major arms exporters. Like WPS NAPs, and despite the inconsistencies, these policies create another entry point for different forms of engagement and framing of policy concerns.

In terms of ‘mainstream’ conflict prevention policies, the US government launched its Global Fragility Act (2019) and Global Fragility Strategy (2020). This was followed up with the Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability (2022), which explicitly set out a link to the WPS agenda, alongside 10-year country plans for preventing conflict, some of which have strong elements of WPS thinking. For example, the country plan for Papua New Guinea, which has very high rates of violence and is one of the most gender unequal countries in the world, includes a focus on partnerships to advance gender equality, support women peacebuilders, and prevent and respond to gender-based violence.⁵⁵ This will be a space to watch for the impact of these strategies on national and sub-national efforts on conflict prevention and WPS, and any lessons about the process of developing and implementing these strategies. There are likely to be questions about how these interact with issues of national sovereignty as well.

At the UN level, considerable data and analysis, not to mention effort, was fed into the development of the SDGs. The potential of SDG16 on peaceful, inclusive societies and SDG5 on gender (referred to as SDG16+) for conflict prevention remains. However, the UN Secretary General has referred to implementation as “...*alarmingly insufficient*”.⁵⁶ The Secretary General has demonstrated top-down leadership in this area, for example,

⁵⁴ Association for Women in Development (2021).

⁵⁵ Yayboke, E, Rice, B, Nzuki, C. and Strouboulis, A. (2022), [Addressing Fragility in Papua New Guinea](#). Centre for Strategic and International Studies.

⁵⁶ United Nations (2024), [2024 SDG Report: Global Progress Alarmingly Insufficient](#).

including disarmament as one of his WPS priorities.⁵⁷ In addition, his New Agenda for Peace included a call to dismantle patriarchal and oppressive power structures.⁵⁸ Whilst some of this was confirmed in the 2024 Pact for the Future, unsurprisingly, the call to dismantle patriarchal power structures did not make it through due to push-back from states hostile to gender equality as a collective goal. The final non-binding document, reflective of the current state of multilateralism, reiterates previous commitments to WPS, implementing the SDGs, building peace, and disarmament.⁵⁹

National violence prevention strategies with the support of the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) were introduced in the New Agenda for Peace and confirmed in the Pact for the Future. This represents an opportunity to embed upstream conflict prevention into the work and funding of the PBC and to ensure multisectoral approaches, with strong WPS linkages, are understood as a minimum starting point for such strategies. Social cohesion, resilience, people-centred governance and security, addressing inequalities (and more) all become far more obvious to address in a holistic manner. Seven essential elements have been posed for more effective violence prevention strategies:

1. Political and social will,
2. Evidence-based approaches,
3. Disaggregated approaches to groups and geographical regions,
4. Integrated approach to addressing multiple root causes,
5. Sustainability,
6. Flexibility to adapt, and
7. Violence sensitivity of policies and initiatives.⁶⁰

Inclusion is the vital and missing eighth principle that would stimulate a focus on WPS, and intersectionality more broadly. This builds on past decades of work in this area.⁶¹ Women's long mobilisation against gender-based violence across the world is also an asset to this revamped focus. An opportunity is present to ensure women's substantive leadership and contributions are not side-lined or siloed. A feminist distillation of 'how to' ensure national strategies are inclusive seems timely.

Other global policy pathways include the World Bank, which sets out the link between gender equality and conflict both in its latest gender strategy (2024-2030)⁶² and in its

⁵⁷ United Nations (2020), *Women and peace and security: Report of the Secretary-General* (S/2020/946), para 113.

⁵⁸ United Nations Executive Office of the Secretary-General (2023), [A New Agenda for Peace: Our Common Agenda](#), Policy Brief 9.

⁵⁹ United Nations (2024), [Summit of the Future Outcome Documents: Pact for the Future, Global Digital Compact, and Declaration on Future Generations](#).

⁶⁰ Monnier, Céline (2023), *Seven Questions to Consider in Designing, Implementing, and Supporting Effective Nationally Led Violence Prevention Strategies*, Centre on International Cooperation, NYU.

⁶¹ Whitzman, Caroline (2008), *The Handbook of Community Safety Gender and Violence Prevention: Practical Planning Tools* (1st ed.), Routledge; World Health Organization (2002), *World report on violence and health*, Geneva: WHO; World Health Organization (2014), [Global status report on violence prevention 2014](#), Geneva: WHO.

⁶² World Bank (2024), *World Bank Group Gender Strategy (2024-30) 'Accelerate Gender Equality To End Poverty On A Livable Planet'*, Washington, DC: World Bank.

fragility, conflict, and violence strategy, which is up for renewal in 2025.⁶³ While the potential of the World Bank to reinforce gender inequality and conflict insensitivity in practice is significant, and there are constraints in its ability to act politically, its extensive resources and leverage make it a powerful body to engage on an integrated WPS and conflict prevention agenda. Another opportunity lies in the review of the UN Peacebuilding Architecture in 2025, which is an important process in which to ensure feminist conflict prevention is included.

Sub-national conflict prevention and peacebuilding

There is growing impact information on investing in women's leadership and participation in conflict prevention at the sub-national level. There was clear consensus in interviews that there needs to be action from the ground up to make more progress on prevention, alongside efforts from the top-down. It is challenging to connect the two in dynamic and politically effective ways, even more so because women's marginalisation is compounded by men's dominance of decision-making and access to those spaces. Without sustained funding, conflict prevention work, which is incremental, is hard to build momentum on. Working at scale, effectively documenting and communicating impact, cross-fertilising diverse constituencies, all requires flexible and long-term funding.

Notably, a 2024 study concludes that where women are most prominent in conflict prevention and resolution roles is at the sub-national level: "...local NGOs involve women to a much greater degree than states and INGOs, which follows the suggested correlation between women peacemakers and local civil society."⁶⁴ This is not a new finding and is well established, but this study also finds that women involved in peace promotion focus more than men on "...identifying consensus solutions rather than enforcing outside settlements", raising points on durability, compromise, and inclusion.⁶⁵

Significant effort has gone into localising the WPS agenda.⁶⁶ For example, in northern Kenya women have been making an impact to encourage peaceful resolution of disputes through policy and community dialogue, linked to the localisation of Kenya's NAP, at national, sub-national, county, and local level.⁶⁷ Interviews also highlighted the transformative vehicle that the WPS agenda presented for women's participation in peace promotion in Colombia, linking this to their ability to promote dialogue to prevent and resolve conflict. At the time of writing, Colombia was due to release its first NAP.⁶⁸ It will be interesting to see how conflict prevention is articulated in the plan. Liberia was also cited as

⁶³ World Bank (2020), *World Bank Group Strategy for Fragility, Conflict, and Violence 2020–2025*, Washington, DC: World Bank.

⁶⁴ Kreutz and Lorena Cardenas (2024), p. 6.

⁶⁵ Kreutz and Lorena Cardenas (2024), p. 6. For more on different approaches taken by some women see Buchanan, Cate (2021), *Gender-inclusive peacemaking: strategies for mediation practitioners*, Mediation Practice Series, Geneva: Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue; Dayal, Anjali (2018), *Connecting Informal and Formal Peace Talks: From Movements To Mediators*, Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security, Policy Brief, GIWPS: Washington DC; Turner, Catherine (2020), 'Soft ways of doing hard things: women mediators and the question of gender in mediation,' *Peacebuilding*, 8(4), 383–401.

⁶⁶ See Global Network of Women Peacebuilders (2019), *From Best Practice to Standard Practice: A toolkit on the Localization of the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women and Peace and Security*.

⁶⁷ UN Women (2023), 'Cooling Northern Kenya's conflict hotspots,' <https://africa.unwomen.org/en/stories/feature-story/2023/07/cooling-northern-kenyas-conflict-hotspots>.

⁶⁸ Interview with Rosa Emilia Salamanca, October 2024.

an example of women's peace networks demonstrating resilience and ability to keep a stable trajectory and respond to conflict threats.⁶⁹

The UN Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund has drawn attention to the potential of sub-national conflict prevention through supporting WROs in Burundi, Iraq, Palestine, Philippines, and Uganda.⁷⁰ Elsewhere within the UN, efforts to emphasise WPS through the Joint UN Development Programme/Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA) programme on building national capacities for conflict prevention continues.⁷¹ Greater attention by the UN to the diversity of 'national capacity' is critical, especially in contexts where ethnicity, class, and religious identity drive oppressive dynamics, and when the UN and international organisations have a poor grasp of conflict-sensitive programme design, including staffing profiles and contenders for their training, which are 'resources' that can create division and fuel elitism. There is also an increasing focus on gender and inclusion in mainstream peacebuilding programming; for example, a UN Peacebuilding Fund funded programme in Yemen, which required a representation rate of 50 per cent for women's participation in water dispute mechanisms, which were then able to mitigate 15 water conflicts.⁷²

Another trend in conflict prevention and WPS is around preventing election violence through Women's Situation Rooms, originating in West Africa, and which have been picked up in additional countries throughout Africa and championed by the African Union.⁷³ However, some interviewees noted that these have gone out of favour, as they are resource intensive, ad hoc, and potentially put women in danger.⁷⁴ Elections are inherently episodic, but Women's Situation Rooms could be developed and maintained as a more sustainable peace mechanism. What is required is to leverage these temporal mechanisms (linked to an event every 3-5 years typically) to conflict prevention writ large on every other day aside from election day. For example, these could be developed into a mechanism or entity to quickly counter dis-and-misinformation that imperils social cohesion and undermines faith in governance arrangements, media, and public officials. This is consistent with the concept of 'insider mediation' and enabling national and sub-national trusted credible actors, particularly women, to prevent conflict.

Peace promotion and mediation

Feminists and some peace advocates are shifting the framing of conflict mediation towards 'peace mediation' to bring back in the focus on conflict prevention as core to effective mediation not just as response to existing conflicts. Whilst most mediation falls into the more operational, short-to-medium term end of conflict prevention, it is important to focus on

⁶⁹ See work on women's 'peace huts' in Liberia: UN Women (2019), '[National peace huts in Liberia – an account of support provided by UN Women](#)'.

⁷⁰ Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund (2023), 'Women's Transformational Roles in Local Conflict Prevention: Case Study of WPHF-Supported Civil Society Organizations in Burundi, Iraq, Palestine, Philippines, and Uganda'.

⁷¹ United Nations Development Programme and Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (2023), '[Joint UNDP-DPPA Programme on Building National Capacities for Conflict Prevention: 2023 Annual Report](#)'.

⁷² UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, UN Department of Peace Operations, UN Women (2024), 'How the UN System Can Advance Tangible Results on Women's Participation in Peacemaking, Peacekeeping, and Peacebuilding by 2030,' [dppa-dpo-unw-options-paperfinal.pdf](#).

⁷³ Drumond, Paula, Prügl, Elisabeth, and Consolata Spano, Maria (2022), '[Mobilizing gender for conflict prevention: Women's Situation Rooms](#),' *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, 16 (3): 249-268.

⁷⁴ Interview, Anonymous, October 2024.

ensuring longer-term presence and preparedness at national, sub-national, and regional levels. This also represents one pathway for greater representation and participation of women in public life. The participation pillar is strongly linked to more progress on effective conflict prevention, so looking at participation as a crucial principle of prevention is needed at all levels including in non-violent movements.

Women's involvement and leadership in non-violent movements matters.⁷⁵ Evidence indicates:

- The substantive involvement of women in political resistance processes correlate with nonviolent approaches even in highly repressive situations.
- Nonviolent political resistance with significant frontline women's participation is more likely to foster defections and 'loyalty shifts' from militaries, police, and the like.
- Political resistance processes with gender equality commitments are more likely to succeed than those without.

However, women who have been key actors in non-violent civilian movements against authoritarianism then tend to be marginalised in and/or excluded from political negotiations to reach power sharing agreements or other types of political settlements. For example, despite Sudanese women's central role in the revolution and the civilian effort to transform Sudan in the post-Bashir era, they were marginalised in a separate track in recent peace talks in Geneva. Interviews highlighted that as peace processes move outside of the UN system, there is less adherence to good practice around women's participation and inclusion.⁷⁶ As most processes are happening outside the UN, the need to revitalise stale and stuck approaches to women's direct involvement in conflict prevention and peace mediation is more urgent than ever.

One response that requires an honest examination are the women's mediation networks that in recent years have proliferated, including at regional level (e.g., the African Union's FemWise). These were heralded as a new strategy in transforming men's dominance of envoy, mediator, and facilitator roles. The efficacy of these networks has yet to be established. Indeed, a 2024 dataset exploring mediation support revealed that "*... women more commonly are appointed as mediators by nongovernmental organisations than by states and international organisations...the presence of more mediators in the [conflict prevention or resolution] effort, and when this is more gender equal, are associated with greater likelihoods that peace agreement is concluded*".⁷⁷ Cautiously noting here that a peace agreement is overemphasised as the outcome in such processes, it nonetheless presents an indicator of conflict party engagement. Change in this area require states that routinely agitate for their nationals to be in such roles—Germany, Norway, Sweden, Finland, the UK, Switzerland, amongst others—to be transparent about how women from these networks have been advanced for such roles and backed by relevant state machinery to be selected.

⁷⁵ Chenoweth, Erica (2019), *Women's participation and the fate of nonviolent resistance campaigns: A report on the Women in Resistance (WIRE) dataset*. Broomfield, CO: One Earth Future Foundation.

⁷⁶ Interview, Anonymous, October 2024.

⁷⁷ Kreutz and Lorena Cardenas (2024), p. 1, p.2.

Table 1. 2024 data on appointment of mediators

	Women	Men	% women
States	77	812	9%
IGOs	30	530	5%
International NGO	8	54	13%
Local NGO	49	135	27%
Other	27	109	20%
Total	191	1,640	10%

Source: Kreutz, Joakim and Lorena Cardenas, Magda (2024), 'The women and men that make peace: Introducing the Mediating Individuals (M-IND) dataset,' *Journal of Peace Research*, 0(0), 1-11.

Another theme across interviews was concern about the trajectory of these networks and how sustainable a two-track approach is if there is not clear evidence of states and international organisations selecting—*preferencing, fast tracking, parachuting*—women from these networks into a range of roles. One view posits that these networks are yet another parallel process that separates women and the WPS logic of these networks from the 'main game'.⁷⁸ Put another way: The longer these networks exist and are busy with their own conferences, workshops, and seminars, the less pressure there is on the 'malestream' to change the status quo.

Feminist funding

There are several innovative approaches being piloted at different levels to address the gaps in quality funding for women-led, feminist, and WROs. Recent analysis from the WPS Helpdesk unpacks feminist funding, outlining additional emerging good practice and recommendations.⁷⁹ Longer-term and quality funding has the potential to provide organisations with the necessary fuel to set longer term goals, innovate and work across sectors, and build momentum on more political and sensitive issues. For example, the UK-funded pilot project 'Resourcing Change' is providing core and flexible funding and movement building support to WROs in Nigeria, South Sudan, and Yemen.⁸⁰ At a larger scale, the French government has set up the Support Fund for Feminist Organizations (FSOF), which includes both pooled consortium funds managed by INGOs as well as smaller funds to reach local WROs.⁸¹ Likewise, the Equality Fund, which was initiated by Canada and now receives support from the UK government and others, represents an

⁷⁸ Interviews with Nina Tsikhistavi-Khutsishvili, International Center on Conflict and Negotiation, Georgia; Miriam Coronel Ferrer, South-East Asian Women Peace Mediators; Helena Puig Larrauri, Co-Founder and Strategy Lead, Build Up, October 2024.

⁷⁹ Karayi, Laureen and Eva Tabbasam (2024), [Funding for Women's rights Organisations in Humanitarian Crises](#), Report. Women, Peace and Security Helpdesk.

⁸⁰ Saferworld, Women for Women International and WILPF (2023), [Localising Women, Peace and Security](#).

⁸¹ Agence Française de Développement (AFD), (2021), [AFD and the Fund for Feminist Organisations \(FSOF\)](#).

innovative approach to supporting WROs and feminist activism. In terms of mainstream peace funds, we also see an increasing focus on gender equality; for example, in the UN Peacebuilding Fund, which has exceeded its targets on gender equality,⁸² as well as a WPS funding window through the DPPA extra-budgetary funding.⁸³ Consortium mechanisms often come with power differentials between Northern and Southern entities,⁸⁴ ways of working, and localisation commitments on paper and in practice. Donor support for equitable partnerships and shifting power, ensuring funding reaches WROs directly, is one starting point.

Early warning and analysis

At all stages, conflict prevention benefits from gender-sensitive early warning indicators. On paper, developing context-specific early warning indicators in partnership with a range of civil society actors, analysts, WROs, and others should be standard good practice.⁸⁵ There is also evidence of good practice programming focused on gender and early warning. Some examples of promising programming include by Cordaid in South Sudan, which through its WPS Barometer project gathers data on women's security needs at a local level, and also provides economic empowerment support and learning opportunities under the South Sudan Empowerment project.⁸⁶ Another is a project in Somalia by Saferworld, which trained women and developed a Violence Observatory System to gather data on violence against women activists and journalists, evidence which they then brought to authorities to promote change.⁸⁷ This also had the added benefit of increasing referrals to relevant services, and was complemented by micro-grants to women journalists to document their experiences and build their evidence base for advocacy.

Gender early warning data also feeds into regional early warning systems, such as, for example, CEWARN in East Africa under the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, which includes gender-related indicators. In practice however, effective early warning ultimately needs deft response and political will. This requires advocacy capacity and support, as WROs may lack high-level connections needed to communicate their concerns around impending violence in rapidly shifting contexts. There also needs to be willingness to listen and political will to act; for example, one interview highlighted how Afghan women had been warning about strict gender codes in the run-up to the Taliban take-over in 2021, but they were not taken seriously.⁸⁸

It is not just that indicators on gender-based violence can signify a range of disturbing patterns, or that changes in women's perceptions of safety matter, or that a rising bride price

⁸² UN General Assembly, (2022), *Financing for peacebuilding: resolution / adopted by the General Assembly, A/RES/76/305 (OP6)*.

⁸³ UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (2023), [2023 Factsheet: Women, peace and security](#).

⁸⁴ See summary evaluation findings from AFD's FSOE, which unpack some of these dynamics and how they can be addressed: Agence Française de Développement (2022), [Intermediate evaluation of Fonds de Soutien aux Organisations Féministes \(Support Fund for Feminist Organisations - FSOE\) 2020-2022 Summary of the final report – December 2022](#).

⁸⁵ See Schmeidl, Susanne and Piza-Lopez, Eugenia (2002), *Gender and Conflict Early Warning: A Framework for Action*, International Alert, June; Basu and Confortini (2017).

⁸⁶ Cordaid (2022), [Women, Peace and Security: Barometer Report South Sudan](#).

⁸⁷ Saferworld (2023), [Addressing gender-based violence against women activists in Somalia: Violence Observatory Systems](#). This is entering into a new phase, establishing an early warning and early response system and training local women monitors.

⁸⁸ Interview with Eva Tabbasam, October 2024.

may be indicative of deeper shifts; it is that women need to be taken seriously as senior analysts, leaders, and innovators in the many early warning systems around the world. Reviewing the status of both the content of indicators and women's representation in these systems is likely to reveal a range of areas for action as it should not be assumed that such systems have fully internalised the 'why' and the 'how' of gendered conflict analysis.⁸⁹

More and better focus on masculinities

Interviews highlighted how masculinity is a neglected lens in the formal WPS agenda, which tends to be outward looking and focused on poor, marginalised young men of colour with little power in the global South, as opposed to wider dynamics around militarised masculinities, including in the peace and security industry of the global North. One interviewee argued that the UN-based WPS agenda "*doesn't deal with the blokes in the room*"⁹⁰ who benefit from and promote patriarchal power structures linked to militarisation.

A central focus to date has been on engaging men to prevent violence against women through programming to address harmful gender norms, or using so-called 'good men' campaigns.⁹¹ These initiatives mostly take place at the sub-national and national level through organisations like Equipundo's Programme P (formerly Promundo), CARE's Role Model Men approach, International Rescue Committee's Engaging Men through Accountable Practice, and others.⁹² There is also some thinking on how to incorporate masculinities into peacebuilding work.⁹³ This nascent area needs a strategic lift but must be carefully designed to avoid instrumentalisation, backlash, reification of 'good men', and nil outcomes. It also must be co-designed with women, and then implemented mainly by the men in the peace and security sector otherwise it is more of the same. Focusing on masculinities means getting uncomfortable and tackling men's dominance as gatekeepers, authorities, negotiators, armed actors, analysts, envoys, and more.

Emerging concerns and overlooked gendered risks

Here we focus on three concerns that could be intensified in UK programming and policy efforts, particularly in new partnerships, funding calls, UN Security Council-related processes, and more.

Heightened risks to feminists and women peace promoters

The evidence of increased risks to civil society actors across the world engaging in non-violent political movements and protests, parliamentarians and staff, environmental defenders, media workers conducting investigations and casting light on oppression, and many others, is clear, including in digital domains. The differential impacts on women are particularly stark, even more so if they have other intersecting identities and they are

⁸⁹ Conciliation Resources and Saferworld (2020), [Facilitation guide: Gender-sensitive conflict analysis](#).

⁹⁰ Interview with David Duriesmith, September 2024.

⁹¹ Duriesmith, David (2017), [Engaging Men and Boys in the WPS Agenda: Beyond the "Good Men" Industry](#), LSE.

⁹² See Myrtilinen, Henri (2023), *Men, masculinities and humanitarian settings: A mapping of the state of research and practice-based evidence*. UN Women.

⁹³ See Conciliation Resources (2021), [Integrating masculinities in peacebuilding: shifting harmful norms and transforming relationships](#).

perceived to be from minority communities.⁹⁴ A digital peacebuilding specialist noted that the online hate speech and negative targeting she and colleagues track is disproportionately experienced by women.⁹⁵

The proliferation in recent years of authoritarian and deeply patriarchal de-facto authorities—Myanmar, Afghanistan, Sudan, Yemen and pursuit of ‘military victory’ has emboldened regimes which is heavily associated with danger for women and their contributions to public life. In Afghanistan, this has extended to what some WROs refer to as ‘gender apartheid’ and the erasure of women’s voices and presence from public.⁹⁶ This was recognised in SCR 2493, which calls on member states to protect women leaders and peacebuilders. While some guidance has been produced to support their protection, growing threats to women’s political space and ability to engage in conflict prevention abound.⁹⁷ Donors of all kinds—states, pooled funds, consortiums, INGOs, philanthropies—need to re-evaluate approaches to risk and shift to more dedicated risk sharing and tolerance. Many pooled funds, which are designed to be more flexible, are squarely in the business of risk transfer and operate on outdated notions of mitigation.

Climate security

Climate change is a conflict risk multiplier. Feminists have observed that “...the rules of the game continue to prioritise very specific notions of governance and security and masculine conceptions of climate prevention”.⁹⁸ Better understanding the links between WPS and inclusive climate action and security, and conflict-sensitive responses to climate and environmental insecurity, needs to be firmly situated in the coming decade of elevated WPS efforts.⁹⁹ Stimulating more connections across and between environmental and gender justice groups and movements is ripe with possibility. As noted by one specialist: “Environmental rights groups and women’s rights groups often have many common aims and objectives and face many similar challenges and yet are seen as working on separate agendas.”¹⁰⁰ Climate action financing schemes are increasingly coming into play, yet conflict sensitivity and women’s leadership are yet to be firmly established in principle and practice. Green energy transition in contexts at risk and/or in conflict is where feminism and conflict prevention can be powerful. This is significant as many violent conflicts and much inequality

⁹⁴ UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights website, [Women’s Human Rights and Gender-Related Concerns in Situations of Conflict and Stability](#); United Nations (2023), *Women and peace and security: Report of the Secretary-General (S/2023/725)*; UN (2022), *Women and peace and security: Report of the Secretary-General (S/2022/740)*; UN (2021), *Women and peace and security: Report of the Secretary-General (S/2021/827)*; (2020), *Women and peace and security: Report of the Secretary-General (S/2020/946)*; Zulver, Julia Margaret (2019), ‘[Learning from High-Risk Feminism: Emergent Lessons about Women’s Agency in Conflict Contexts](#),’ *Genocide Studies and Prevention: An International Journal*, 13(3): 21-43.

⁹⁵ Interview with Maude Morrison, Deputy Director, Social media and peace team, HD Centre, October 2024.

⁹⁶ UN Women (2024), *Resolve of Afghan Women in the Face of Erasure: Three Years Since the Taliban Takeover*, Policy Brief, New York: UNW.

⁹⁷ See for example, Holmes, Melinda (2020), [Protecting Women Peacebuilders: The Front Lines of Sustainable Peace](#), International Civil Society Action Network.

⁹⁸ Yoshida, Keina et al (2021), p. 23.

⁹⁹ Detraz, N (2009), ‘Environmental Security and Gender: Necessary Shifts in an Evolving Debate,’ *Security Studies* 18 (2), 345–69; Kronsell, Annica (2018), ‘WPS and Climate Change,’ In *The Oxford Handbook of Women, Peace, and Security*, Davies, Sara and True, Jacqui (Eds), Oxford: Oxford University Press: 726-37; Yoshida, Keina et al (2021) [Defending the future: Gender, conflict and environmental peace](#), LSE Centre for WPS, GAPS UK and Women’s International Peace Centre; Yoshida, Keina (2020), ‘The Protection of the Environment: A Gendered Analysis,’ *Gottingen Journal of International Law*, Vol 10, No 1: 285-305; Smith et al (2021).

¹⁰⁰ Yoshida, Keina et al (2021), p. 6.

hinges on land (removal or non-recognition of rights, lack of access, theft, environmental damage, etc.) and natural resource concerns.¹⁰¹ Renewable energy can be linked to catalysing conflict and exclusion.¹⁰² As many women and girls are excluded from land ownership, they are even less likely to be engaged in consultations. For example, a proactive feminist approach would recognise this exclusion and remedy it. Alternative conceptions of security and political engagement as envisaged by feminism and with attention to connectors and dividers per a classic conflict sensitivity approach can contribute to conflict prevention. An astute feminist lens would also identify intersectional and differential impacts of climate change and how these may or may not exacerbate conflict dynamics.

Digital insecurity and cyber peace promotion

Women activists, peacebuilders, and women in public life face extreme levels of online misogyny with real world consequences. Online misogyny and technology-facilitated gender-based violence is increasingly documented and mapped. As defined by UN Women and the World Health Organisation in 2022: *“Technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV) is any act that is committed, assisted, aggravated, or amplified by the use of information communication technologies or other digital tools, that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual, psychological, social, political, or economic harm, or other infringements of rights and freedoms.”*¹⁰³ Women are acting to protect themselves. For example, women’s hubs in Yemen have worked with local authorities to develop laws on cyber-crime targeting women.¹⁰⁴ This was made possible through core and direct flexible funding, which allowed these groups to decide what issues should be prioritised and take actions to address them. Online hate and misogyny should not overshadow the untapped potential of digital peace promotion. Positively, women are mobilising around what feminism and digital peacebuilding can and does involve.¹⁰⁵ This requires amplification and serious integration into the many social media and digital peacebuilding teams popping up in peace and security organisations, otherwise this will be yet another area that becomes siloed.

¹⁰¹ For example, see Stork, Adrienne, Travis, Cassidy, and Halle, Silja (2015), [‘Gender-Sensitivity in Natural Resource Management in Côte d’Ivoire and Sudan,’](#) *Peace Review*, 27.

¹⁰² For example, Lomax, Jake, Mirumachi, Naho, and Hautsch, Marine (2023), [‘Does renewable energy affect violent conflict? Exploring social opposition and injustice in the struggle over the Lake Turkana Wind Farm, Kenya,’](#) *Energy Research & Social Science*, Vol 100.

¹⁰³ UN Women and World Health Organisation (2023), [‘Expert Group Meeting report: Technology-facilitated violence against women: Towards a common definition,’](#) UNW: New York.

¹⁰⁴ Work carried out by women’s hubs in Aden, under the UK’s Resourcing Change programme, providing core and flexible funding to WROs.

¹⁰⁵ Build Up (2023), *Sealing the Cracks – An Intersectional Feminist Perspective on Digital Peacebuilding*, Policy Paper. Berghof Foundation and Platform Peaceful Conflict Transformation; Buzatu, Anne-Marie (2021), [‘Women, Peace, and Security and Human Rights in the Digital Age: Opportunities and risks to advance women’s meaningful participation and protect their rights,’](#) New York: GNWP.

Box 5: Key resources

Buzatu, Anne-Marie (2021), [*Women, Peace, and Security and Human Rights in the Digital Age: Opportunities and risks to advance women's meaningful participation and protect their rights*](#). New York: GNWP.

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[Gender, Natural Resources, Climate, and Peace](https://www.gender-nr-peace.org/) portal <https://www.gender-nr-peace.org/>

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5

Recommendations

The paper concludes with suggestions for various levels of analysis and action. As noted, feminist conflict prevention aims to transform the underlying conditions driving conflict and oppression: inequalities, exclusion, structural violence and oppression, colonialism and its legacies, militarism and more. These suggestions are organised around five themes, and a shortlist of priority recommendations based on innovation and leadership is listed here.

Engagement and diplomacy

- 1.1. Deploy the UK's convening power in the UNSC and penholder on WPS to revitalise action on gender and conflict prevention.
- 1.2. Champion the multilateral sustaining peace agenda and feminist conflict prevention.

UK policies and thought leadership

- 2.1. Consider an addendum to the UK NAP WPS on feminist conflict prevention to mark the 2025 anniversary year.
- 2.2. Explore national level options on gender and conflict prevention.

Quality funding and programming

- 3.1. Dedicate a UK funding round to WPS, feminism, and conflict prevention as a UK contribution to the anniversary year.
- 3.2. Press the Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund to dedicate a 2025 call to conflict prevention, in four-year grants, and prioritise core and direct funding to WROs.

Safeguard and expand space for feminist movements and women in public life

- 4.1. Amplify women's experiences and perspectives.
- 4.2. Increase the safety of women journalists and feminist analysts and advocates.

Elevate feminist and gender perspectives in data collection, analysis, and exchange

- 5.1. Support learning, evidence-collation, and exchange on WPS and conflict prevention.
- 5.2. Activate a global review of early warning systems.

Engagement and diplomacy

Priority - 1.1. Deploy the UK's convening power in the UNSC and penholder on WPS to revitalise action on gender and conflict prevention.

- Reiterating the UK's commitment to CEDAW sends a strong message of support on WPS and conflict prevention. In relation, to mark the 30th anniversary of the Beijing processes (designed to accelerate CEDAW implementation), press on the conflict prevention focus in the 'Women and Armed Conflict' priority area. This is also where agreement could be cemented to update the Secretary General's WPS indicators (2010) in response to SCR 1889, with contemporary security challenges such as tech-facilitated gender-based violence, online hate, climate change, and more. There has never been a thematic meeting of the Informal Experts Group on WPS on conflict prevention. Whilst the Group provides important space for discussing country situations, the UK is well positioned to propose a meeting in the early part of 2025 to frame the diminution of conflict prevention in the WPS agenda and contribute to generating more attention to this in the lead up to October 2025. Invite civil society peace promoters, violence prevention specialists, women activists, and more to provide their perspectives.

Priority - 1.2. Champion the multilateral sustaining peace agenda and feminist conflict prevention.

- Invest resources and political capital in galvanising support for the implementation of SDG16+ (SDGs 5, 16, and 10). Engage the respective communities of action working on conflict prevention, feminist approaches, gender equality action, and youth peace and security to better guide SDG 16+ implementation and support for different levels of WROs working on peace.
- Support the process to develop national violence prevention strategies (as proposed under the New Agenda for Peace and the Pact for the Future) to include feminist approaches to prevention. The Pact for the Future will guide a focus on national violence prevention. Getting ahead on practical guidance to make sure this is gender-transformative and linked to WPS and CEDAW is critical. The PBC and other entities providing support for such strategies would benefit from clear criteria and evidence to ensure efforts are gendered from the start. Civil society, including women peacebuilders, youth peacebuilders, and human rights defenders, should inform and support the work of the UN Peacebuilding Commission on this agenda. Another opportunity lies in the review of the UN Peacebuilding Architecture in 2025, which is an important process in which to ensure feminist conflict prevention is included.
- Finally, insist on a strong focus on WPS and conflict prevention in the next iteration of the World Bank's Strategy for Fragility, Conflict, and Violence. This is due to expire in 2025. While further thinking is needed on the appropriate role of the World Bank, which is less able to act politically, their size and budgets in fragile contexts represents a huge amount of power that could support gender and conflict prevention. This is another process where more contemporary indicators of gendered risks and insecurity can be integrated.

Priority 1.3. Accelerate implementation of gender and arms control commitments.

- The 2013 UN Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) includes a provision on arms flows that may be used to perpetrate gender-based violence.¹⁰⁶ In 2023, Argentina produced a Working Paper for the Ninth Conference of States Parties to the ATT proposing the development of a ‘Guide to Good Practices for arms control for the prevention of gender-based violence’.¹⁰⁷ As a major arms supplier, the UK could build support for this initiative and ways in which arms exporting states can further operationalise this focus of the ATT.

UK policies and thought leadership

Priority - 2.1. Consider an addendum to the UK NAP WPS on feminist conflict prevention to mark the 2025 anniversary year.

- This would set the UK as a leader in this area. This could be integrated into the next iteration of the NAP, which could strike a clearer set of commitments and articulate a clear theory of change on conflict prevention. While there are several aspects of the current NAP that contribute to conflict prevention, for example, on security and justice, an explicit group of commitments could help to shore up this focus. This should be developed in coordination with civil society, and could build on commitments to support grassroots women peacebuilders, include gender early warning indicators and gender analysis, and a more explicit outline of actions around arms control.

Priority - 2.2. Explore national level options on gender and conflict prevention.

- The UK could convene like-minded donors in two countries where FCDO is active to provide insights on approaches to WPS and conflict prevention. These should vary in context, including a country with experience of violent conflict (e.g., Nepal, Ethiopia¹⁰⁸), and with less pronounced underlying conflict dynamics (e.g., Cameroon, Georgia). Commission a facilitator to guide donor colleagues including FCDO to identify if and how current development assistance and peace promotion efforts contribute to conflict prevention and in what forms (and whether these support WPS). Forward looking analysis could then be developed about where and what types of support and investments could lift the substance and emphasis on upstream conflict prevention. The point of the exercise is to explore and test how FCDO could provide leadership at the country level to reframe and intensify its focus on WPS and conflict prevention. Through a guided process and discussion on contemporary and country-specific needs and opportunities, this could assist FCDO and other donor colleagues in determining more specific contributions. Thinking about alternative framing seems important too. It may make more sense to development practitioners and more palatable to national governments if framed as social cohesion and resilience.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ UN Arms Trade Treaty (2013), Article 7(4) Requires that countries consider the risk of weapons being used to commit or facilitate gender-based violence when assessing export licenses.

¹⁰⁷ Control Arms (2024), [Monitoring progress on the implementation of Gender and Gender-based considerations adopted by the fifth conference of State Parties to the ATT](#), p.10.

¹⁰⁸ UK NAP 2023-27 focus country.

¹⁰⁹ Aggestam, Karin and Eitrem Holmgren, Linda (2022), [‘The gender-resilience nexus in peacebuilding: the quest for sustainable peace,’](#) *Journal of International Relations and Development*, 25, 880–901;

2.3. Urge greater uptake of upstream conflict prevention in WPS NAPs.

- Fund a practitioner-policymaker oriented guidance note on how to increase and strengthen conflict prevention in such plans and how to distinguish between operational and structural or upstream conflict prevention more clearly. This is a significant area of weakness across NAPs including the UK NAP. As many INGOs and UN entities take their cues from NAPs, this could stimulate these entities to engage in more detail on upstream conflict prevention. Convening a small number of diverse states (through the UN Mission, for example) could yield greater commitment to strengthening NAPs in 2025, including domestically, not just framing prevention as a foreign policy issue. This also presents a vital opportunity to spur focus on climate change, digital safety and peacebuilding, and greater practical support for women in public life working across a range of issues.

2.4. Integrate gender equality and feminist principles and approaches in any update to the UK's Approach to Stabilisation.

- This should also include a dedicated substantive section on upstream conflict prevention inclusive of feminist approaches. This should include gender conflict analysis as a standard requirement to inform Joint Analysis of Conflict and Stability and country strategies, developing early warning indicators in partnership with feminists at different levels of society to include in stability trackers, and good practices around quality engagement with feminist analysts. Couple this with a short guide on gender, feminism, and conflict prevention, providing more detail to stimulate thinking and engagement.

Quality funding and programming

Priority - 3.1. Dedicate a UK funding round to WPS, feminism, and conflict prevention as a UK contribution to the anniversary year.

- Drive the process with a mix of open possibilities (applicants identify scope) and specific concerns (FCDO sets the scope). This ideally would result in dedicated feminist analysis organisations stepping forward but also mainstream organisations to systematically apply feminist methodologies, elevate the roles of women in their organisations, boost the quality of their partnerships with WROs, and much more. Funding for feminist organisations could be catalytic and enable entering the playing field and competing more widely for funding based on a successful grant from FCDO. Emphasise funding to build more accessible evidence and insights on 'what works' to link feminist approaches and conflict prevention in substance.

Priority - 3.2. Press the Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund to dedicate a 2025 call to conflict prevention in four-year grants, and prioritise core and direct funding to WROs.

- Longer grants are consistently called for by civil society actors and would provide a powerful threshold for the many other UN pooled funds to follow suit. The

Féron Élise and Svop Jensen, Cæcilie (2021) 'Conflict Prevention, Dialogue and Resilience: Exploring Links and Synergies,' Chapter 9, Unknown, 261-283.

Equality Fund could also undertake a similar call. Building on the momentum generated by donors seeking to support WROs directly, and the success of the Resourcing Change pilot, commit to support to informal feminist movements and WROs through direct and core funding. Think about sustainability and how support can be further localised through direct support to WROs—give them the breathing space they need to act politically through core and direct funding.

- Ensure UN pooled funds, which are designed to be more flexible, take more concrete actions to address risk transfer and outdated notions of mitigation (e.g., short funding terms to reduce risk) to enable more WROs and others to operate more safely and sustainably.

3.3. Promote a focus on programmes that sit at the intersection of conflict prevention and WPS.

- Support projects which have both gender equality and peace as a primary objective (and develop any guidance needed to support this). The UK's ISF has recently introduced gender markers¹¹⁰ to identify which projects have a principal focus on gender equality. Combining this with peace as a primary objective (and if not already a practice, consider introducing a peace and security marker) will help to promote projects that sit at the intersection of conflict prevention and WPS. This could incentivise the peace and security sector to focus more on WPS and conflict prevention. Finding ways to better track this spend, for example, issuing guidance on the use of CRS codes focusing on conflict prevention and WPS may also help better understand what funding is focused on this theme.

Safeguard and expand space for feminist movements and women in public life

Priority - 4.1. Amplify women's experiences and perspectives.

- In practice, women working in the realm of conflict prevention often lack access to decision makers or are exposed to risks when speaking up. Finding ways to first listen to and then amplify women's peace perspectives, including through providing dedicated funding to document evidence and engage in advocacy, and action to bring their concerns into political spaces (such as by envoys, ambassadors) is an important contribution to turning early warning into early response. Include feminist activists (based on a risk assessment) in high-level discussions on peace and security. Positive impact can be made on sub-national and national conflict and gender dynamics, but once this starts identifying deeper structural or systemic issues, political backing is important not only to support risk-exposed women peace promoters but also for states to make good on commitments to WPS and gender equality. This also means attention to serious integration of gender and senior women into the many social media and digital peacebuilding teams popping up in peace and security organisations, otherwise this will be yet another area that becomes siloed.

¹¹⁰ The OECD-DAC gender equality policy marker has three categories: principal (score 2), significant (score 1), not targeted (score 0). The ISF uses a Gender Equality and Social Inclusion marker to complement this.

Priority - 4.2. Increase the safety of women journalists and feminist analysts and advocates.

- Shrinking civic space and increasing threats to press freedom and media workers safety has come with gendered risks. Support for journalist safety through providing scholarships to seek respite from targeting could also benefit from training on peacebuilding and conflict prevention. This can be an effective contribution to improving public knowledge on these issues. Likewise, we have seen the importance of having data and evidence for women activists to advocate for legal changes and other protections with authorities, so supporting initiatives like Violence Observatory Systems and other locally owned data generation on violence can help support their initiatives for change.¹¹¹

4.3. Elevate an active focus on participation.

- Incrementalist approaches are inadequate for the problems at hand. There has been a steady decline in women's representation and participation in both UN-led processes and those supported by other states (i.e., on Afghanistan, Sudan), when what is needed is higher level political amplification and access supported by envoys and others, and more women appointed into mediation teams and into envoy roles. This also involves insisting more on gender quotas to fast-track representation. Participation as a contribution to prevention should be recognised at all levels—from analysis to programming to diplomatic action.

Elevate feminist and gender perspectives in data collection, analysis, and exchange**Priority - 5.1. Support learning, evidence-collation, and exchange on WPS and conflict prevention.**

- Feminist approaches and women's efforts to promote peace requires an investment in clearer policy-relevant analysis on 'what works', 'what is promising', and 'what is to be avoided' to catalyse better integration into the literature and practice on conflict prevention. This would necessitate dogged outreach to NGOs and CSOs who have information but have not been able to share it, or haven't thought about their work as conflict prevention. Commission the convening of a conference series over 2025-27, two per year in a range of low-, middle-, and high-income settings, creating a groundswell of interest in conflict prevention with gender fully integrated. Moving locations enables more people to be involved, including HMG colleagues, and to draw out good and emerging practice that is simply not documented, or that might be restricted by language barriers, and more clearly unpacking what different contributions to conflict prevention might look like. With social media and communications, these gatherings could smartly stimulate media coverage and profile what gender inclusion means when done seriously. This could also include a focus on climate action and identification of good form in financing schemes and green transition initiatives that are serious about conflict sensitivity and women's participation.

¹¹¹ See Saferworld (2023).

Priority - 5.2. Activate a global review of early warning systems.

- This would include all systems and datasets funded by the UK (e.g., via CRAF'd) as well as within FCDO systems. Such a review would catalyse many early warning systems to improve their performance, especially if it was tied to funding. This could also help to identify blockages, including the need for greater support for women's access to political spaces where their warnings will be heard and heeded. Contemporary gendered early warning indicators are scattered across dozens of WPS reports and papers. Scraping the best of these into a dynamic platform (e.g., multilingual website linked to proactive social media) could shift the needle and stimulate the industry of conflict analysts and observatories to take gendered insights and risks seriously in their data collection and analytical processes. But this needs to go beyond indicators to a stronger grasp of root causes and acceptance that patriarchy is a highly organised adaptive system of oppressive power that not only affects women and girls disproportionately but also limits the potential of men and boys, and sexual and gender minorities in profound ways. This should also include focus on climate change, digital insecurity, and tech-facilitated gender-based violence, amongst other concerns.

5.3. Make peace newsworthy and stimulate uptake of WPS and conflict prevention in news media.

- Peace journalism and constructive journalism are clear alternatives to the status quo, though they are perceived as niche and poorly supported. Peace journalism emphasises attention to underlying causes of marginalisation and recourse to conflict and war. It presents an ideal investment area to boost the roles of women media workers and feminist perspectives. This form of journalism values the promotion of peace, conflict and violence prevention as newsworthy. In doing so, it renders visible civilians mobilising against violence and conflict, the role of social protection, health and education, land rights, and more in nurturing the conditions for social cohesion and peace promotion. Constructive or solutions journalism is another overlooked alternative that could enable more focus on feminist approaches to conflict prevention.¹¹² Related, since 2000 there is no obvious guidance on WPS and news media.¹¹³ This means that producers searching or researching stories, journalists, fixers, and the like do not have a steer on gendered indicators and early warning signs of conflict, radicalisation, or atrocities. Given the vast volume of WPS guidance, toolkits, briefing papers, projects, and programming over the past +20 years, including with considerable duplication and superficiality, this represents a missed opportunity to influence the framing of peace and security issues and more attention to the benefits of conflict prevention.

5.4. Increase the policy debate on WPS and conflict prevention through dedicated grants to research organisations and think tanks.

¹¹² For example, see <https://constructiveinstitute.org/> Listen to the *Journo* podcast by Nick Bryant, Season 2, Episode 8, If it bleeds, bin it – Will your tired news audience click on a constructive new story? <https://institute.org/journo/>

¹¹³ The few examples include: UN Women Ukraine (2019), [Guidelines for Gender and Conflict-Sensitive Reporting](#), UN Women: New York; Kvinna til Kvinna Foundation (2015), [Gender and Conflict Journalism Handbook](#). Kvinna til Kvinna: Stockholm; UN Women Ethiopia and the African Union (2016), [Practicing Gender-Responsive Reporting in Conflict Affected Countries in Africa](#).

- These discussions should be cross-context and multilingual to capture the rich diversity of knowledge that feminist peace actors have accumulated. There is a need to create momentum (again) on conflict prevention in policy-generating spaces and bring in gendered concerns, including critically assessing the role of militarised masculinities. Convening existing FCDO partners is one starting point to stimulate debate. Who is making, debating, influencing, and shaping policy are critical 'ingredients' of nuanced policymaking and debate. The state of conflict and war globally demands greater competition of ideas, theories, and policy directions. This means more feminists, more women, people of colour, marginalised identity groups, and those who do not see themselves represented in 'international relations' bringing forward ideas. Lack of expert diversity in research organisations and think tanks flows into foreign affairs briefings for states, international organisations, and media reporting. With the pressure of the 24-hour news cycle and diminishing budgets for research, some journalists repeatedly turn to the same staff in male-dominated think tanks and academia as sources of expertise and 'sense-making'. The same applies to those in international organisations and foreign ministries. This leads to an overuse of the same men as experts and missed perspectives on complex problems.

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Conflict prevention

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Annex 2: General Recommendation 30 and conflict prevention

Section 4, Part A: Women and conflict prevention

29. Obligations under the Convention require States parties to focus on the prevention of conflict and all forms of violence. Such conflict prevention includes effective early warning systems to collect and analyse open-source information, preventive diplomacy and mediation, and prevention efforts that tackle the root causes of conflict. It also includes robust and effective regulation of the arms trade, in addition to appropriate control over the circulation of existing and often illicit conventional arms, including small arms, to prevent their use to commit or facilitate serious acts of gender-based violence. There is a correlation between the increased prevalence of gender-based violence and discrimination and the outbreak of conflict. For example, rapid increases in the prevalence of sexual violence can serve as an early warning of conflict. Accordingly, efforts to eliminate gender-based violations also contribute in the long term to preventing conflict, its escalation and the recurrence of violence in the post-conflict phase.

30. The importance of conflict prevention for women's rights notwithstanding, conflict prevention efforts often exclude women's experiences as not relevant for predicting conflict, and women's participation in conflict prevention is low. The Committee has previously noted the low participation of women in institutions working on preventative diplomacy and on global issues such as military expenditure and nuclear disarmament. In addition to falling short of the Convention, such gender-blind conflict prevention measures cannot adequately predict and prevent conflict. It is only by including female stakeholders and using a gendered analysis of conflict that States parties can design appropriate responses.

31. The Convention requires that prevention policies be non-discriminatory and that efforts to prevent or mitigate conflict neither voluntarily or inadvertently harm women nor create or reinforce gender inequality. Interventions by centralized Governments or third-party States in local peace processes should respect rather than undermine women's leadership and peacekeeping roles at the local level.

32. The Committee has previously noted that the proliferation of conventional arms, especially small arms, including diverted arms from the legal trade, can have a direct or indirect effect on women as victims of conflict-related gender-based violence, as victims of domestic violence and as protestors or actors in resistance movements.

33. The Committee recommends that States parties:

(a) efforts; Reinforce and support women's formal and informal conflict prevention

- (b) Ensure women's equal participation in national, regional and international organizations, as well as in informal, local or community-based processes charged with preventive diplomacy;
- (c) Establish early warning systems and adopt gender-specific security measures to prevent the escalation of gender-based violence and other violations of women's rights;
- (d) Include gender-related indicators and benchmarks in the early warning system's result management framework;
- (e) Address the gendered impact of international transfers of arms, especially small and illicit arms including through the ratification and implementation of the Arms Trade Treaty (2013).