
ISF Women, Peace and Security Helpdesk

Women, Peace and Security Helpdesk in Review: Transnational Threats and Women, Peace and Security

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Assignment Code: WPS102

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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

Direct Audience: ISF GPS team

Suggested Internal Distribution: HMG

Confidentiality Status: None



Task overview

Title of Task: HD in review product and dissemination event

Requesting Officer: Elise Sandbach and Rebecca Ingram, ISF GPS team

Date request submitted: 26/02/2025

Background to assignment

Over the past three and a half years, the WPS Helpdesk has undertaken 91 tasks in support of the UK's WPS objectives and gender equality commitments. In particular, several tasks exploring the links between transnational threats and WPS provided important learning on how to align with the current national action plan on WPS and its Objective 5. These tasks have covered topics such as cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, climate change, and serious and organized crime, among others. The intersection of these issues with WPS remains a relatively new area of research, with significant gaps in evidence, analysis, and programming. The WPS Helpdesk's work contributes valuable knowledge that can help bridge this gap. A compendium of its findings and recommendations will be a valuable resource for HMG and the broader WPS sector.

In addition to the specific experience from the WPS helpdesk, 2025 is a significant year for WPS, with the 25th anniversary of UNSCR 1325 this year. It would likely be beneficial to present the findings from analysis focused on transnational threats in specific, at this time. The profile of WPS during the anniversary year is higher and may affect demand on the coming iteration of the helpdesk, and a reorientation to transnational threats is a UK priority. Such a presentation can also protect the legacy of the current helpdesk, ensuring that valuable learning and analysis generated over the past three and a half years continues to be picked up and used by HMG staff.

Purpose of assignment

To produce a 2-pager summary of WPS Helpdesk tasks evolving around transnational threats and WPS, presenting main findings and recommendations on the intersection of these topics. This summary could have two versions, one internal for HMG including sensitive information and tasks that have not been published in the WPS Helpdesk website; and one redacted version containing only public information that can be accessed by all. The redacted version will be published in the WPS Helpdesk website and included in the WPS HD newsletter released at the end of the March.

To hold an online presentation to internal HMG audience including the 2 pager main findings. This presentation will last 90 minutes, with 20 minutes dedicated to the summary of findings, 15 minutes dedicated to the evaluation findings and 40 minutes for questions and answers.

Task presentation

The presentation will be held online for 90 minutes for HMG personnel. This can be recorded and shared with all HMG. Elise and Rebecca will do a quick intro and they will step in for the Q&A. The 2 pager summary will be finalised and shared ahead of this meeting. The 2 pager summary will be copy-edited by the WPS Helpdesk. It will be presented in a simple word document with no specific design.

Introduction

Over the past three and a half years, the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Helpdesk has completed more than 25 tasks (out of 91), exploring the links between transnational threats, national security, and WPS and providing important learning on how to align with the United Kingdom's (UK) National Action Plan (NAP) on WPS Objective 5. This demonstrates the clear demand for an enhanced understanding of how gender interacts with transnational threats, helping His Majesty's Government (HMG) better understand and address them.

This has also been driven by the focus of the Integrated Security Fund (ISF) in ensuring that all projects meet minimum Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) requirements, which has stimulated analysis in areas that might have otherwise missed gendered insights. These tasks covered topics such as cybersecurity, artificial intelligence (AI), climate change, serious and organised crime (SOC), and state threats.

The intersection of these issues with WPS remains a relatively new area of research, with significant gaps in evidence, analysis, and programming (reported throughout these tasks). The following review includes tasks focusing on specific identified threats as well as broader thematic debates on WPS related to national security, defence, and conflict prevention. Grouped by theme, it points to the Helpdesk's top-line findings, providing links to public tasks. Confidential tasks are covered in brief. It concludes with a short reflection on what the tasks tell us as a whole.

Tasks related to specific transnational threats

Cyber and Artificial Intelligence

Two relevant Helpdesk tasks focused on cyber and AI. First, **WPS003 Understanding the Role of Gender-based Online Hate Speech in Exacerbating Conflict and Violence** (2022) provided an evidence review of gender-based online hate speech in conflict contexts, looking at India, Nigeria, Myanmar, and Sri Lanka. It finds that while there is strong evidence of gender-based violence (GBV) and online hate speech and for conflict and online hate speech, the intersection and linkages between these aren't strong in available literature. It observed that the fluidity of offline–online spaces has allowed gender hierarchies and power dynamics to permeate the digital sphere. It finds that cyberspace amplifies sexist, racist, and caste-ist disinformation, resulting in offline and online violence against vulnerable minority groups with women, girls, and LGBTQI groups disproportionately impacted. It recommends leveraging social media for a gender-sensitive analysis of a conflict-affected context; using gender-responsive social media for communication purposes (which includes understanding and responding to conflict parties' use of social media); and finally understanding and addressing social media as a source of mis- and disinformation.

Second, **WPS065 Beyond the Binary: Dynamics of Gender, Serious and Organised Crime and Artificial Intelligence** (2024) examines the dynamics of AI, SOC, and gender, particularly to understand potential impacts on gender issues in relation to the emergence of AI-facilitated organised crime. It finds that AI tools are used increasingly in both enabling and combatting gender-based crime. Women are most often involved in drug trafficking, extortion and money laundering, and human trafficking, both as victims and as perpetrators. It has also been used in several novel virtual crimes—such as non-consensual deepfake pornography, extortion and psychological manipulation, impersonation and identity theft, doxing and stalking—where women and girls, especially those from marginalised groups, are disproportionately affected. Journalists, women in public life, and women human rights defenders have been targeted regularly by cyber-enabled crime, with the intent of silencing them. AI algorithm poisoning can increase bias in AI systems, leading to outputs that foster gender stereotypes or misogyny. AI has also been used in many instances to combat trafficking and the physical exploitation of women, as well as protect women from virtual exploitation. Policy recommendations include integrating gender considerations in AI governance, auditing AI used in policing, and investing in responsible AI tools to combat gender-based victimisation. Technical recommendations urge generative AI companies to eliminate discrimination in their tools, conduct gender impact assessments, and improve safeguards for women's protection.

Recommendations

- Understand the role of gender and social media in promoting or countering dis and misinformation, and train women in digital literacy.
- Integrate gender considerations into AI governance,
- Use AI tools to combat gender-based victimisation and improve safeguards.
- Work with AI companies to eliminate gender discrimination in their tools.

Serious and Organised Crime

The Helpdesk completed four relevant tasks focused on SOC, two of which had thematic overlaps with the climate and cyber themes respectively, while the other two focused on specific contexts. First, **WPS008 Understanding Gendered Implications of SOC in Pakistan** (2022) seeks to understand the gendered implications of SOC and enhance discussions around gender-sensitive SOC programming in Pakistan. It focuses on the gendered impacts of different types of SOC in Pakistan, including: illicit drugs; trafficking, kidnapping, and extortion; arms trafficking; money laundering; cybercrime; and SOC as a driver of conflict. It also identifies gaps and entry points in legislation, policy, and other national initiatives on combatting SOC to integrate gender considerations. Recommendations include analysing the gendered dynamics of access to security and justice and drivers of SOC. Second, while not exclusively focused on organised crime, **WPS026 Masculinities and Criminal Violence in Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago** (2023) looked at research by the Caribbean Male Action Network focused on incarcerated men's attitudes to gender equality, gender role expectations, GBV, and gun ownership, as well as their own family relationships. Recommendations include using findings to develop holistic approaches to gender-norm change and violence prevention, building on successful approaches from the two countries and elsewhere in the region.

On broader themes related to SOC, we have SOC and AI (covered above), as well as **WPS054 Intersections between Climate Change, Serious and Organised Crime and Gender** (2023), which considers the relationship between climate change, gender, and SOC. It covers five case studies unpacking how the effects of climate change increase the gendered vulnerabilities of women, girls, men, and boys to SOC. The findings reveal patterns pointing at the intersection between climate change, the exacerbation of pre-existing inequalities, and the capacity of SOC to thrive, as a new gap in the literature and in policymaking. People's vulnerabilities are aggravated

as a result of climate change, resulting in them becoming less resilient and experiencing a higher risk of participating in or being victims of SOC. The climate–gender–SOC nexus undermines the conditions for gender equality, climate security, and the rule of law necessary for sustainable development and long-lasting peace. Conversely, the evidence suggests that integrating a gender equality perspective to climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies has the potential to break the vicious cycle between environmental degradation, inequality, and crime by improving individuals’ resilience in a sustainable manner.

Recommendations

- Gendered analysis of drivers of SOC and access to security and justice is needed, as is taking holistic approaches to gender-norm transformation and violence prevention.
- Integrate a gender equality perspective into climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies.

Climate and Environment

Speaking to increased demand, the Helpdesk carried out six tasks focused on the intersection of climate and WPS. Three are confidential, one overlaps with the SOC theme (WPS054 above), and two are amongst the very last tasks for the current phase of the Helpdesk, currently pending sign off.

Two tasks focused on the British Overseas Territories (OTs): **WPS036 Environmental Sustainability and Climate Change Programme Review** (2023) [confidential] and **WPS085 Climate Security and Gender in the OTs** (2024) [confidential]. The former (WPS036) focuses on the gendered impacts of climate change on the British OTs in the Caribbean—Anguilla, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Montserrat, and Turks and Caicos Islands, as well as Bermuda. It summarises the connections between gender and climate change and these relationships in the Caribbean OTs. It provides an assessment of Environmental Sustainability and Climate Change projects in the Caribbean OTs and Bermuda, with a strong focus on how gender has or has not been integrated. It concludes with recommendations on how to better integrate gender into ‘technical’ and community-oriented projects, such as through participatory analysis and analysis of the relationships between gender, climate change, and security from a WPS perspective in future programming. This report is annexed with a literature review of gender and climate in the Caribbean, which may be useful reading.

The latter (WPS085) builds on this engagement with the Helpdesk, this time supporting the Climate Security Programme team to integrate GESI into climate security assessments (CSAs) in 12 British OTs. This includes a gender review of the six areas of focus for the CSAs: food security, water security, energy security, migration risk, environmental crime, and exposure to natural disasters. The report provides an overview of important GESI and climate risk issues identified across these six areas for each of the OTs. It finds that climate, gender, and security continue to be siloed, that approaches need to be tailored to each OT context, and that each have vastly differing abilities to respond to gender and climate security issues.

WPS056 WPS and Climate Change Policy and Programming (2024) [confidential] provides analysis and recommendations for a) integrating WPS considerations and commitments within climate security policy, and b) integrating climate security within the WPS agenda. The Helpdesk piloted in-context participatory analysis to explore the linkages and outline lessons for programming (in Fiji and Nigeria). Programme findings included that the links between gender, conflict, and climate are complex and require in-depth context specific analysis to inform programming and policy, as well as clear leadership to avoid silos.

The final remaining task: **WPS086 Gender, the Environment and Security in Ukraine** (2024) proposes ways to further integrate efforts to tackle climate change and environmental harm into efforts to implement the WPS agenda as part of recovery in Ukraine. It finds that the impacts of the Russian invasion of Ukraine on women have exacerbated pre-existing gendered inequalities. The environmental impacts also intertwine with pre-existing environmental challenges, including climate change, further deepening women's insecurity. It makes recommendations for a 'green recovery' and how this can support WPS, focused on the Ukrainian and British governments. **SRRecommendations**

- Understand the gendered impacts and dynamics of climate phenomena by conducting an intersectional gendered analysis to inform project design.
- Tailor approaches to each context, as the gender–conflict–climate nexus is complex and specific.

Counter-terrorism

The interaction between counter-terrorism (CT) and gender/WPS featured in three (confidential) tasks. For **WPS057** (2024) [confidential], the WPS Helpdesk delivered a teach-in seminar for embassy staff. It highlighted the risks of instrumentalisation and the importance of gendered analysis. This was followed by another task **WPS074** (2024) [confidential]. This gender analysis of a national CT and Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) sector found that gender analysis of online radicalisation required strengthening, particularly as women were 'pre-identified' as vulnerable rather than this analysis being assessed more deeply. The integration of the CT/CVE response with organised crime understanding and response was recommended. The report notes that greater gender balance in the policing response to CT/CVE might improve the response. Finally, for **WPS073 Gender and CT toolkit** (2024) [confidential], the Helpdesk worked with the task commissioners to develop a gender sensitivity toolkit for integrating gender into CT and P/CVE Programming. It encourages practitioners to contribute to strengthening gender integration through consistently using gender sensitivity tools across government, with international, national, and local counterparts and partners.

Recommendations

- Integrate gender analysis into approaches and be responsive.
- Carefully avoid instrumentalisation of women and seek a greater gender balance in policing.

Economic Security

As a newer, emerging area, economic security featured in one, confidential task, **WPS083 ISF Economic Security and GESI thematic research** (2024) [confidential]. It found that economic hostility is a feature of specific state-driven and general competitive threats that can have national security implications. However, deterrence can often harm women, girls, and excluded groups. This report provides detailed case-specific evidence of this in the case of sanctions on targeted countries. In some cases, sanctions generated further transnational effects, including forced displacement. The promotion of economic security holds out the prospect for better GESI outcomes, however the evidence base beyond sanctions is weak. There is some case study evidence from Scandinavia, Australia, and Canada on how excluded groups were specifically included to benefit from key minerals mining as part of economic security efforts.

Recommendations

- Further investigate GESI implications related to collective, multilateral economic security measures.
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Tasks on broader thematic issues related to national security and WPS

The Helpdesk completed a number of tasks that are focused on the broader WPS themes and capabilities relevant to addressing transnational threats. These cover the broad categories of policing and defence (covered together), national security, and global thematic reviews of WPS.

Policing and defence

The Helpdesk completed at least four relevant tasks related to policing/security and defence, and four are covered here. **WPS004 Women in Policing in Turks and Caicos: Key Barriers and Lessons** (2022) provides a summary of the women in policing situation in Turks and Caicos, exploring key risks and barriers, including social and political factors (such as stereotypes around women as mothers), which inhibit women, including those from vulnerable groups, in their career development and progression within the police. It provides brief recommendations including increasing women's representation at all levels, mentoring, gender sensitive bullying and harassment policies, inclusive facilities and infrastructure, and engaging policemen to shift norms.

WPS019 WPS and the Defence Sector (2022) finds that the WPS agenda has significant relevance to defence, yet tensions remain between defence and the normative foundations of the agenda drawn from the activism of anti-militarist civil society, who sought to end war, rather than 'making war safe for women'. This report highlights the scope for defence and WPS in a way which is sensitive to such concerns; notably, through a focus on diversity and inclusion, engaging civil society as knowledge brokers of WPS, training and education, leadership and the role of gender advisors. For **WPS100 NUOTC Curriculum Review** (2025) [confidential], the Helpdesk undertook a gender analysis of the leadership training included in the Northumbrian Universities Officers' Training Corps curriculum to identify how cadets (both women and men) are being equipped for leadership. This review will aid the UK Ministry of Defence with their ambition for 30 per cent intake of women into the armed forces by 2030, also reflected in the NAP.

Finally, **WPS098 Literature Review: Women in Decision Making in Security Spaces** (2025) highlights the value of gender diversity, in particular women's inclusion, for effective decision-making in defence and security contexts. It finds that studies across various fields show that women's participation often leads to more collaborative, less confrontational decision-making, reducing escalation in crisis situations. However, military culture and gender biases present barriers to fully integrating women's voices and limit the potential to realise women's positive influence on decision-making. To address this, research indicates that prioritising women in

leadership roles can enhance team dynamics and reduce gender penalties, contributing to improved decision-making.

Recommendations

- Increasing women's representation in policing, defence, and security decision-making roles requires prioritising women in leadership roles, challenging restrictive gender norms, and creating a more conducive environment for their participation.

National security

One task tackled broader national security dynamics and WPS. **WPS022 Understanding WPS Through A National Security Lens** (2022) examines how gender and national security are and can be linked, drawing on case studies in Afghanistan and Ukraine. It focuses specifically on the utility of the WPS agenda for the UK's national security orientation and argues that paying attention to gender issues is important for a holistic understanding of peace and security. It finds there are tensions inherent in defining 'national security' (a human security approach is more consistent with WPS than a state security one), thus problematising the link between gender and national security.

Recommendations

- Include gender analysis in all efforts towards national security.
- Integrate international and domestic approaches to WPS.
- Prioritise WPS in responses to transnational threats (cyber, SOC).
- Consolidate and elevate the role of gender champions in the national security architecture.

Global WPS reviews

Rounding out the tasks related to transnational threats are the broader more reflective pieces that take in the state of play on WPS, with relevance to WPS and national security. **WPS025 State of the Evidence on Gender in Fragile and Conflict-Affected States** (2023) provides a review of the situation on gender in fragile and conflict-affected states, pulling out highlights across themes and examples of best practice. And lastly, **WPS090 Examining Feminist Approaches in Conflict Prevention** (2024) provides a review of the links between feminism, conflict prevention, and WPS. It finds that prevention is the weakest pillar in the formal WPS agenda, with the feminist vision for preventing conflict largely neglected in favour of protection. This report identifies opportunities for reinforcing the link between conflict prevention and WPS, including better documenting best practice on conflict prevention, supporting/protecting/amplifying women peacebuilders and activists, better integrating gender in early warning, integrating transnational threats like cybercrime and climate in WPS indicators, and options for pushing out an increased focus on conflict prevention in the WPS 25th anniversary year.

Recommendations

- Document best practice on WPS and conflict prevention.
- Promote thought leadership in 25th anniversary year.
- Include more women and marginalised groups in mainstream peace and security analysis and commentary.
- Include transnational threats in WPS indicators.

Summary and recommendations

Reflecting across tasks, the interconnection between various transnational threats and their gendered implications becomes clear – and a gendered analysis provides a significantly enriched analysis and understanding of how to address them. For example, SOC, gender, and climate change are strongly connected, such as in the case of Guatemala, where climate impacts and drug trafficking are driving migration and associated human trafficking, resulting in a very high prevalence of GBV and other gendered impacts (outlined in task WPS 054). Nearly all tasks identified the gendered use of technology as a factor, mostly the use of online abuse or online-offline violence as a tool for silencing women. Harmful masculinities too feature prominently across threats, particularly when it comes to cyber, CT, and state threats. Importantly, women were not only victims but also perpetrators (with AI, for example, opening opportunities for women to increase their participation in SOC and human trafficking), highlighting more broadly the importance of understanding the gendered elements and dynamics around these threats to effectively address them. This should ensure that women's rights and principles of peacebuilding are not compromised or undermined and be mindful of the risks of instrumentalisation, as highlighted in the CT tasks.

The scope of commissioned tasks in this area shows there is a clear and significant demand from across HMG departments in identifying gendered threats and risks, and in taking action to address them. This is critical for the UK, both from the perspective of meeting commitments under SO5 of the NAP, but also in improving practice. The tasks also show, however, that the national security system is not generally collecting or understanding gendered evidence when deciding on an approach and is not using the full range of HMG analytical capability and tools.. HMG can make a relatively small investment in gender equality which would improve national security practice. This also has implications for domestic application, for example, through the Safer Streets agenda which sets out the ambition to work domestically with police to address sexual assault, abuse and stalking in the UK Demonstrating leadership in this area is also a role the UK could take as penholder on United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325. Actionable recommendations include:

Gender informed programming

- Integrate gendered analysis into policy and programming development from the outset and throughout. This includes using a gendered approach to Joint Analysis of Conflict and Stability, Serious and Organised Crime Joint Analysis, threat assessments, and intelligence products. Invest in developing the necessary analytical capacity to do so.
- Recognise the relationship between climate, gender, and other transnational threats.
- A. Continue to use and apply ISF GESI minimum standards to all ISF programming, and expand this best practice to other teams across government.

Capability

- Continue to support a diverse range of teams to develop their capacity and capability in commissioning and applying gendered evidence across a range of transnational threats.

Thought leadership

- Promote creative partnerships as part of addressing transnational threats, bringing together 'mainstream' analysts with gender specialists, and engage women's rights organisations in both threat analysis and programming.
- Consider how intersectional data can be gathered or supported through programming, research, and analysis to address evidence gaps.

Policy integration

- Include a clearer set of transnational threat monitoring metrics in the UK NAP and focus attention on NAP priority countries to deliver these.
- Use the UK's role of penholder on UNSCR 1325 to support the update of the global WPS indicators to better account for transnational threats, such as climate and cyber.
- Promote the application of gendered analysis to normative and regulatory frameworks meant to address these threats (i.e., AI).

Reporting Requirements and Quality Assurance

Submission date:

17/03/2025

Sign off date:

26/03/2025

Time taken/billed:

Name	Organisation	Category of Expert (1,2 or 3)	Hours to be billed (expected)	Hours to be billed (actual)
Shelagh Daley	Saferworld	1	26	26
Claire Devlin	Saferworld	1	4	4
Julia Poch	Saferworld	2	2	2

Description of expense	Currency	Date	Receipt Y/N
Copy-editing	120 GBP	03/04/2025	Yes