

The Future of the UK's Women, Peace and Security Policy

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This briefing evaluates the UK's contribution to the Women, Peace and Security agenda over the last fifteen years. Addressing strengths and limitations, it analyses successive thematic priorities, maps WPS spending, and considers common criticism. It draws out recommendations for future plans on infrastructure and monitoring, domestic applications and policy ambition.

Introduction

Since October 2000, the international community has pursued gender equality in war- and peace making through the 'Women, Peace and Security' – or WPS – framework. Beginning with a landmark resolution drafted by feminist activists within and beyond the United Nations, the agenda has grown to include nine further UN Security Council resolutions (UNSCRs), 94 national plans, dozens of regional institution strategies, a formal set of dedicated offices and envoys, and a complex supporting universe of civil society and research networks.¹ As the UK government prepares its fifth National Action Plan (NAP), this policy brief presents an analysis of fifteen years of policy, mapping previous priorities, spending, and shortcomings, and identifying opportunities for the next stage of strategy and implementation. Though WPS is a significant and in many respects growing area of UK policy focus, and though many UK projects are potentially transformative, there remain significant gaps in ensuring effective delivery, applying a gender perspective internally, and addressing the full breadth of the agenda.

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¹ Our count is of current or operative action plans. Including past editions, the total is at least 162, though some remain unpublished.

A Brief History of UK WPS

In policy productivity terms, the UK is at the forefront of WPS, with four NAPs in hand and another in development. It was only the second country to issue a national plan and is one of only four with as many (the others being Denmark, Norway, and Switzerland). This leadership role is reflected in an array of positions: as a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council and 'penholder' on WPS resolutions; as a founding member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, which today champions WPS; in a series of dedicated initiatives on conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV); in providing resources for major WPS entities like UN Women; in the prominent public campaigns of several Foreign Secretaries; and as a leading funder of activities of special relevance to the agenda, such as peacekeeping. The UK is also home to a vibrant network of civil society and academic engagement, and to a system of policy scrutiny exercised through Parliamentary committees and in efforts like the 'Women, Peace and Security Bill' recently introduced in the House of Lords.



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Date	Event
2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> First UK National Action Plan on WPS All-Party Parliamentary Group on Women, Peace and Security founded
2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Second UK National Action Plan on WPS
2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Updated second UK National Action Plan on WPS Launch of the Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative
2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> UNSCR 2106, the sixth in the WPS series, passes; an initiative of the UK, it is the first to explicitly mention men and boys as survivors of sexual violence G8 Declaration on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Call to Action on Protection from Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies issued jointly with Sweden
2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Third UK National Action Plan on WPS PSVI Ending Sexual Violence in Conflict Summit, London International Protocol on the Documentation and Investigation of Sexual Violence in Conflict published International Development (Gender Equality) Act passes
2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ministry of Defence appoints first Gender Champion, General Messenger
2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wilton Park conference on global action to tackle stigma Draft Principles for Global Action on Preventing and Addressing Stigma Associated to Sexual Violence in Conflict
2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> International Protocol updated in a second edition Lord Tariq Ahmad appointed Prime Minister's Special Representative on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Joanna Roper appointed Special Envoy on Gender Equality Launch of Women, Peace and Security Chiefs of Defence Network jointly with Bangladesh and Canada
2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fourth UK National Action Plan on WPS Safeguarding Summit Against Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment in the Aid Sector Launch of Women Mediators Across the Commonwealth Network
2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Murad Code on gathering information on conflict-related sexual violence published in collaboration with the Institute for International Criminal Investigations and Nadia's Initiative
2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Call to action to ensure the rights and wellbeing of children born of sexual violence in conflict Foreign Secretary Liz Truss announces new campaign for a global agreement on making sexual violence in conflict a 'red line'
2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Baroness Hodgson introduces the 'Women, Peace and Security Bill' as a private members bill in the House of Lords (scheduled) Conference on preventing sexual violence in conflict

Table 1: Landmarks in UK WPS

UK WPS has evolved from a two-page document to a plan running to dozens of pages and detailing seven separate strategic outcomes (see Table 2). The international policy field has grown to become complex and contested, and the UK faces many of the same challenges as others: fully incorporating a gender perspective across all relevant departments and portfolios, pursuing the full spectrum of the agenda, delivering transformative funding and change, and anticipating new horizons of insecurity.

To assess the distinctiveness of UK WPS we measured the relative prominence of themes in UK policy with all other NAPs issued worldwide between 2005 and 2020.² As is well established, policy differs in the weight accorded to each of the four ‘pillars’ (participation, protection, prevention, and relief and recovery), and in the inclusion of distinctive issues, ranging from longstanding concerns like sexual violence or refugees to more recent items like cybersecurity or LGBTQI+ inclusion.³ Each of the four existing UK plans was compared to others published in the same period, yielding a count for mentions of each pillar and fifteen other topics.⁴

2 The first NAP of all, Denmark’s, was published in 2005 following an appeal from the Security Council. See United Nations Security Council, “Statement by the President of the Security Council”, S/PRST/2004/40, 28 October 2004.

3 For a survey see Soumita Basu, Paul Kirby and Laura J. Shepherd, eds. *New Directions in Women, Peace and Security* (Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2020).

4 Each UK NAP was compared with others issued in the nearest five-year window: the first NAP with all others issued 2000–2005 (only 1); the second with 2006–2010 (30 NAPs); the third with 2011–2015 (51); and the fourth with the 2016–2020 period (62 NAPs). In assessing the UK against other governments, this method controls for the dominance of certain topics (such as sexual violence) across the policy field. As well as the four pillars, we established the attention given to: refugees; disasters; LGBTQI+; sexual and reproductive health; human trafficking; climate change; transitional justice; men and boys; human rights defenders; small arms and light weapons; big arms and non-proliferation; terrorism and extremism; sexual violence; sexual exploitation and abuse; and race and colonialism. The frequency of key words was established using the qualitative data analysis software NVivo 12, generating weighted measures of the average mentions in each document set. The method closely follows that laid out in Paul Kirby and Laura J. Shepherd, “Women, Peace and Security: Mapping the (Re)Production of a Policy Ecosystem”, *Journal of Global Security Studies* 6 (3) (2021), ogaa045.

NAP	Dominant Pillar and Main Themes	Actions ⁵
First (2006)	Prevention (UN crisis efforts) Small arms and light weapons Sexual violence / sexual exploitation and abuse	Twelve action points, each with an example of activity, grouped into: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UK support to UN (4 actions) • Training and policy within HMG (4 actions) • Gender Justice including gender-based violence (GBV) (2 actions) • DDR (1 action) • Working with NGOs (1 action)
Second (2010) ⁶	Participation Sexual violence Human rights defenders Indigeneity (women's participation)	National action <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence and lessons • Gender mainstreaming in programmes • Training • Gender perspective in operations • Reporting Bilateral <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Afghanistan, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Nepal country plans; Middle East and North Africa plan added following Arab uprisings Multilateral <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political support and capacity-building at the UN

⁵ Language and ordering reflects use in NAPs.

⁶ The second NAP was released in 2010 but updated in 2012. This latter revised copy is the version we refer to, though we retain the original publication date.

NAP	Dominant Pillar and Main Themes	Actions ⁵
Third (2014)	<p>Prevention (conflict and violence against women and girls [VAWG])</p> <p>Sexual violence</p> <p>Men and boys</p> <p>Sexual and reproductive health</p>	<p>Relief and recovery</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Humanitarian access • International law training • Multilateral policy engagement • VAWG risk assessments in humanitarian response • Reproductive health services • Gender-sensitive programmes <p>Prevention</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender-sensitive early warning systems and conflict analysis • WPS guidelines and protocols • VAWG data collection, programming and accountability systems • Research and innovation • ‘Harmful practices’ (female genital mutilation/cutting, trafficking, terrorism) • Small arms control <p>Protection</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UN and bilateral engagement • Security and justice reform • Multi-sectoral VAWG work • Women and girls’ income generation, sexual and reproductive health and rights, and voice • Women in UK government roles <p>Participation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women’s participation in peace processes, leadership, activism, elections and peacekeeping • Technical support to settlements, constitutions and NAPs

NAP	Dominant Pillar and Main Themes	Actions ⁵
Fourth (2018)	Prevention (conflict, VAWG and violent extremism) Sexual violence Terrorism and extremism Sexual exploitation and abuse	Decision-making <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meaningful and representative participation and leadership Peacekeeping <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gender perspective in peace operation standards and mandates GBV <ul style="list-style-type: none"> More effective measures to prevent and respond to GBV Humanitarian response <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Needs-based responses effectively meeting women's and girls' needs and promoting leadership and participation Security and justice <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increases in accountability, responsiveness to women's and girls' rights and needs Preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Women's participation in strategies to prevent and counter violent extremism UK capabilities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mainstreaming of gender perspective in National Security Council, cross-departmental plans, military training, conflict analysis Capacity-building of government staff

Table 2: Summary of Main Themes and Objectives in UK NAPs on WPS

Of the pillars, the UK has been significantly more focused on relief and recovery and prevention, the latter progressively shifting from the prevention of conflict to the prevention of violence against women and girls (VAWG) and most recently to preventing violent extremism. UK NAPs address sexual violence, sexual exploitation and abuse, and human rights defenders more than the average, but transitional justice, human trafficking and small arms and light weapons much less. Strikingly, no UK NAP has ever mentioned climate change.⁷ Nor has any plan tackled what we term 'big arms':

⁷ There have, however, been some fleeting references in reports to Parliament and on occasion funds to support work on gender and the environment.



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non-proliferation, arms control and arms trade issues beyond the more common interest in small arms and light weaponry and armed group demobilisation in post-conflict settings.

A significant outlier is the third NAP, which introduced extensive language on men and boys, sexual and reproductive health and LGBTQI+ persons.⁸ This development was closely tied to the advent of the Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative (PSVI), leading to repeated recognition that men and boys are also survivors of sexual violence, and emphasising their potential as “allies and partners” for gender equality.⁹ By the fourth NAP – when PSVI activity had been substantially scaled back – the gender-inclusive approach was significantly reduced from its peak, and several mentions of masculinities removed from an earlier draft version.¹⁰

Taking a more restricted comparison with other WPS champion states – defined as those who had produced three or more NAPs in the 2005–2020 period – we can identify the facets that set the UK apart, either in a greater intensity of focus (men and boys, sexual violence, human rights defenders in early NAPs) or in the paucity or absence of attention (disasters, human trafficking, climate change and arms control).¹¹ These results are summarised in Diagram 1. On this measure, the UK currently practices a version of WPS that

8 The extent of inclusion can be overstated: there is one reference to ‘sexuality’ in the third NAP and one to ‘sexual orientation’ in the fourth. LGBTQI+ issues are muted in WPS policy generally, with only seven other governments making reference to them in the same period (France, Iraq, Italy, Japan, Nepal, Paraguay and the United States). For more see Jamie Hagen, “Queering Women, Peace and Security”, *International Affairs* 92 (2) (2016): 313–332.

9 HM Government, *United Kingdom National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2014–2017* (London: FCO, 2014), 2, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/319870/FCO643_NAP_Printing_final3.pdf.

10 Hannah Wright, “Masculinities Perspectives: Advancing a Radical Women, Peace and Security Agenda?”, *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 22 (5) (2020): 652–674.

11 Some more surprising results require contextualisation: the high relative appearance of ‘indigeneity’ is almost entirely driven by multiple references to the inclusion of indigenous women in the Nepal bilateral action section of the second NAP, rather than any more general concern.

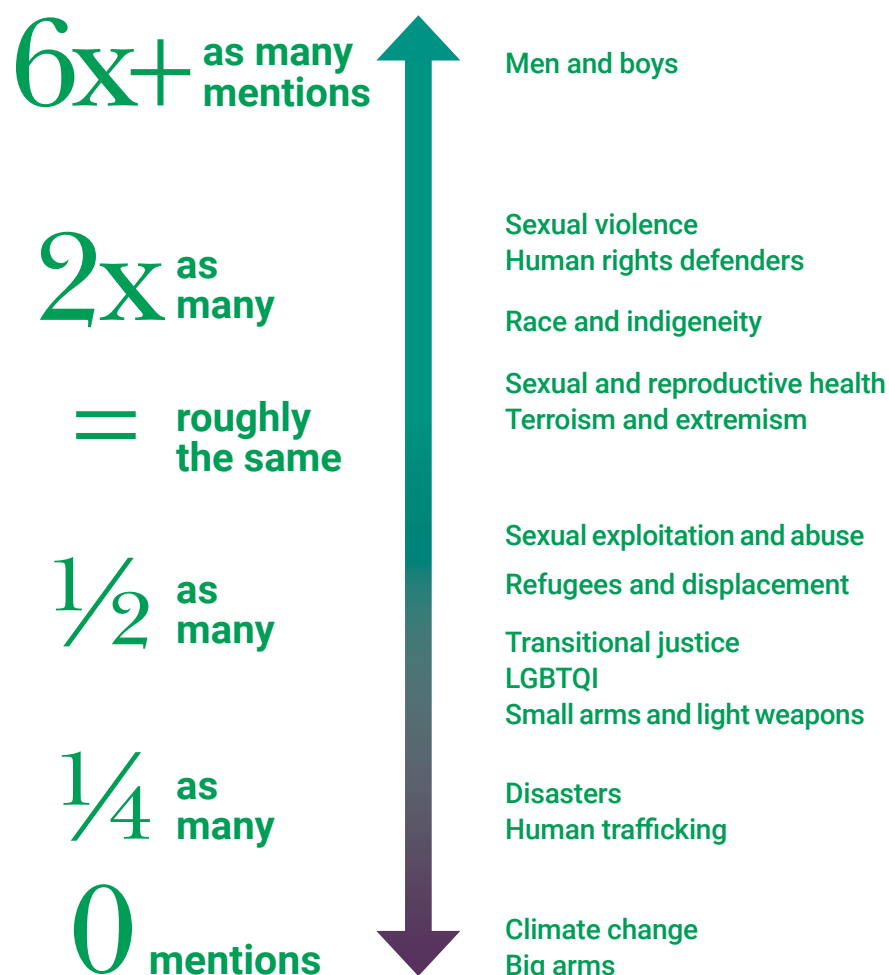


Diagram 1: UK WPS Relative to Other State Champions

emphasises sexual violence and violent extremism to the detriment of rights, justice and conflict prevention. Where it has innovated — as in the case of men and boys — this has been as a corollary of the focus on violence.

The text of action plans is often only a loose guide to operational practice. Advocates and researchers therefore stress the importance of detailed objectives and indicators in NAPs and supporting plans, and of strong financial and political commitments to ensure delivery. In the UK case, the significant scale and complexity of WPS work poses analytical and methodological challenges.

First, indicators are not always tightly defined or decisively linked to UK input. For example, in the fourth NAP, one measure of success on peacekeeping is the percentage of female peacekeeping troops as assessed by the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations. That



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British diplomacy may impact such figures is not in doubt, but — as the NAP itself recognises — an increase in female peacekeepers is not itself proof of successful UK action. The difficulty has been exacerbated by the move to a less onerous monitoring framework relative to the detailed third NAP.

Second, delivery is largely outsourced. While it is possible to track recipients of funding to some degree from public data, each will have its own approach and project-specific indicators, in many cases only partially supported by the UK government. In the absence of a single delivery framework, the degree of gender inclusivity or meaningful participation in a given programme is not discernible from without, even if these headline objectives are declared in a NAP.

Finally, political will fluctuates. While it is crucial for policy to be flexible and responsive, some of the most significant changes across NAPs appear linked to changes in leadership, with the fortunes of the agenda strongly dependent on interest from the Foreign Secretary. Though the same political party has led the UK government since 2010, this has not translated into as much continuity as might be hoped.

Accounting for UK WPS

It is impossible to establish how much the UK government has spent on WPS in the last fifteen years. There has never been a dedicated WPS budget, a longstanding point of contention.¹² While the government has argued that creating such a budget would limit its flexibility and disincentivise mainstreaming, the main representative of civil society in the UK context — Gender Action for Peace and Security UK (GAPS) — instead stresses that an additional dedicated budget would protect and perhaps expand targeted activity without detracting from deep integration.¹³

To assess the scale and character of action we therefore rely on a series of overlapping measures. A first is spending reported in NAPs themselves and in annual reports to Parliament since 2011, which includes spending from a range of departmental and cross-departmental funding sources. A preliminary mapping indicates that the majority of WPS projects (some 40%) have GBV as their primary focus, followed by 29% seeking the meaningful participation of women, and 13% addressing agenda-wide issues.¹⁴

The estimation is necessarily imprecise, and liable to mislead. Some programmes — such as the £26 million allocated to roads in eastern DRC and listed in the revised second NAP as promoting women's

¹² eg, GAPS, *Position Paper: Publication of the UK National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security* (London: GAPS, 2010), 1, https://gaps-uk.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/GAPS-Position-Paper_Publication-UK-NAP-WPS-2010.pdf; GAPS, *Recommendations for the 2014–2017 NAP* (London: GAPS, 2013), 1, <https://gaps-uk.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/GAPS-NAP-Response-2013.pdf>; GAPS, *Assessing UK Government Action on Women, Peace and Security in 2019* (London: GAPS, 2020), 5, <https://gaps-uk.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/GAPS-Shadow-Report-2019-1.pdf>.

¹³ See HM Government, *UK Government National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security: Annual Review October 2012* (London: FCO, 2012), 13, and HM Government, *UK NAP 2014–2017* (London: FCO, 2014), 8. For GAPS' argument: GAPS, *Assessing UK Government Action on WPS in 2019*, 5.

¹⁴ Programmes were assigned to one of nine broad categories — and in rare instances more than one — to record their predominant area of focus: 'agenda-wide'; 'meaningful participation'; 'gender-based violence'; 'humanitarian response'; 'justice'; 'peacekeeping'; 'countering violent extremism'; 'education and empowerment'; and 'uncategorised'.

equal access to aid — lack any detail on the proportion of spending leading to a direct WPS benefit.¹⁵ Others are clearly gender-focused but cover a much wider remit than WPS, conventionally understood, such as the flagship £25 million ‘What Works to End Violence Against Women and Girls’ research programme, which in its first iteration was not primarily focused on conflict settings; the over £1 billion funding towards family planning; or the £355 million Girls Education Challenge programme, of which only programmes in Afghanistan and Somalia were cited by the government as WPS-adjacent.¹⁶

An alternative proxy is PSVI — a now-decade long effort which has absorbed much of the WPS energy in government, even as the domain of the NAPs exceeds it. With a budget of over £55 million since 2012, sexual violence has clearly been an overriding priority, as is confirmed by the number of high-profile events and partnerships that have focused on it (see Table 1). Heavily criticised by the aid commissioner for a lack of strategy and poor inclusion of survivors, the initiative has recently been rejuvenated, with a major conference scheduled for late 2022 and a revival of diplomatic leadership.¹⁷ Based on five years of PSVI records, survivor support accounted for 28% of funds, prevention and advocacy work for 24%, training in evidence gathering for 11% and only about 4% on judicial and accountability mechanisms.¹⁸ Yet the largest share — a third — was uncategorised or unclear.¹⁹ Though imprecise, the categories affirm the awareness-raising, support and prosecutorial focus of the Initiative, reinforcing the evidence on the prioritisation of sexual violence from NAP language.

15 HM Government, *UK Government National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325 Women, Peace and Security, November 2010 to November 2013, February 2012 Revision* (London: FCO, 2012), 43–44, https://www.peacewomen.org/sites/default/files/unitedkingdom_nationalactionplan_feb2012revised.pdf.

16 ‘What Works’ has been included in five reports to Parliament. On family planning and girls education see, respectively, HM Government, *UK National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2014–17: Report to Parliament 2017*, 10, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1022060/UK_National_action_plan_on_women_peace_and_security.pdf; HM Government, *UK National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security, 2014-2017: Country-Level Implementation Plan* (London: FCO, 2014), 20, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/385958/141211_-_FCO726_NAP_Implementation_Plan_FINAL.pdf.

17 See Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI), *The UK’s Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative: Joint Review* (London: ICAI, 2020), <https://icai.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/The-UKs-preventing-sexual-violence-in-conflict-initiative.pdf>.

18 Data for the 2012–2018 period was acquired via an earlier Freedom of Information request, but activity strands only listed through 2017. £43,117,491 was spent in this period. There does not appear to be comparably specific data for more recent years.

19 The activity strands are as listed in PSVI budgets: ‘International Protocol training/evidence gathering’; ‘judicial/accountability’; ‘prevention/advocacy’; ‘survivor support’; and ‘other’. We also recorded all those instances where activities were uncategorised. The ICAI review developed its own categorisation, classifying 54% of thematic spend as on justice and accountability against 23% on prevention and 23% on response. See ICAI, *The UK’s Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative*, 10.

A final snapshot is available via the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF), a ‘whole-of-government’ pot under the aegis of the National Security Council – only one of several sources of funding for WPS work, but the most important since its inception in 2015. Both official development assistance (ODA) and non-ODA funds are distributed from CSSF to departments, multilateral institutions and non-governmental agencies (commercial and civil society). Spending over a billion pounds in most years, it pays for much UK action on gender equality: in 2020–21 WPS was one of four high-level outcomes for the fund, and its two primary Sustainable Development Goals were those on gender equality (SDG 5) and just, peaceful and inclusive societies (SDG 16), both close correlates of WPS.²⁰

To capture the WPS dimension of the CSSF, we reviewed the 300 CSSF programme summaries published between 2017 and 2021, a period overlapping almost exactly with the fourth NAP.²¹ We identified every programme with a dedicated budget line referencing gender or a WPS issue.²² We also noted every other programme making some reference to a gender perspective or gendered beneficiaries but lacking a dedicated budget or programme item.²³ Where activities conceivably had some gendered component – e.g. mentioning human rights or justice processes – but included neither a budget line nor an explicit reference, these were assessed as not WPS-relevant. Our logic is that if gender is not part of reported budgeting, rationale, activities or outcomes it is unlikely to have played a significant role in practice.

20 HM Government, *Conflict, Stability and Security Fund: Annual Report 2020/21* (London: FCO, 2021), https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1040994/conflict-stability-and-security-fund-annual-report-2020-2021.pdf.

21 Each summary details project components, implementing organisation and budget, with additional sections giving context, justifying support and outlining expected results. However, the level of detail provided varies considerably, and in some cases the use of funds and/or the budget is redacted on national security grounds.

22 This included programmes with a specific enough focus and rationale including gender or women but that did not specify those exact terms in the project title, e.g. the ‘Inclusive Politics: Political Participation of Marginalised Groups’ spend in the 2019–20 Somaliland programme. We did not differentiate between canonical WPS and other gender work, like spending on economic opportunities, so our categorisation is for all CSSF gender spend, not just WPS activity. Where items include a significant WPS element but also address more than gender, we include the full spend possible in our count. For example, a reconciliation programme in Colombia in 2018–19 highlighted sexual violence in its general aim of giving voice to conflict victims, but presumably served other categories of harm. Our inclusion criteria thus partially compensates for the mainstreamed elements of programmes otherwise missed. A few very large programmes include a delivery and monitoring budget; these were not included in our count.

23 Programmes in this category range from those with clear WPS components – eg, gender advisors – but lacking distinct form within a larger spending envelope to those where there are only passing or superficial references to gender with little to no evident connection with programmes as described.

The exercise is complicated by CSSF accounting: while programme summaries detail about half of the fund's annual spend, they do not cover the two separate pots of "non-discretionary" funding (peacekeeping missions, tribunals, NATO or other UN and regional organisations) or the Rapid Response Mechanism. Nevertheless, we were able to discern some telling patterns. On the one hand, gender is a consistent presence. Almost half of the programmes in the four-year period contained some reference to women or gender, almost always in terms recognisable to the WPS field, such as protection from GBV, the development of gender perspectives in policy and operations, or the inclusion of women in peace and post-conflict decision-making. Gender has also become more prominent over time, mentioned in 58% of summaries issued in 2020–21 against just 29% of those from 2017–18. In recent years, SDG 5 is often listed as a government objective to which programmes contribute.

However, though the salience of gender has grown, discernible dedicated spending remains at a low level. As a proportion of all CSSF programmes, budget lines with a clear gender focus represent only 3% of the thematic and country spending in the 2017–2021 period, and just 1.3% if calculated as a share of the total CSSF budget. Our estimate is lower than the figures announced by government, in which £36 million of ODA-funded projects were said to have gender equality as a main objective, relative to our count of £22 million.²⁴ However, our finding is in line with previous evaluations which found just over 1% of CSSF spend dedicated to gender, peace and security.²⁵ Again, the trend is in an upwards direction, with the proportion of budgets clearly assigned to gender programmes growing each year to a high of 3.5% in the latest reporting.

Many of the programmes without a dedicated gender focus make broad allusions to 'gender awareness' or 'gender sensitivity', but often without a clear sense of the resources dedicated or the effects on the overall activity. In 2018–19, for example, the FCDO and MoD spent almost £4 million in Sri Lanka on stability and conflict response, emphasising 'gender-sensitivity' and GBV response as a component of community policing. But the scale of this work

24 Lord True, "Conflict, Stability and Security Fund: Gender and Human Rights: Question for Cabinet Office", House of Lords written questions, 24 May 2022, <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2022-05-10/hl14>.

25 ICAI, *Report: The Conflict, Stability and Security Fund's Aid Spending: A Performance Review* (London: ICAI, 2018), 13, Figure 4, <https://icai.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/The-CSSFs-aid-spending-ICAI-review.pdf>. A 'thematic spend' analysis is not always straightforward. Where ICAI appear to calculate against discretionary programme spend – as we do – in government documents thematic spend also includes non-discretionary elements like peacekeeping.

in the overall objective of stimulating economic growth, reducing 'migration risks' to the UK and enhancing Sri Lanka's international role cannot be deduced.²⁶

The government has adopted a gender equality marker (GEM) system for CSSF and other ODA spend indicating whether programmes promote gender equality as a principal objective (GEM2), make a significant contribution to gender equality (GEM1) or none at all (GEM0). However, the government does not systematically track what proportion of spending on projects marked GEM1 contributes to gender equality/WPS, and CSSF projects that integrate gender language in the planning stages (when they first receive their GEM rating) do not always follow through in implementation.²⁷ Despite the promise in the fourth NAP that all CSSF portfolios would include at least one GEM2 project, the current accounting system may overestimate spend, and remains opaque. Since the government replaced GEMs with Gender Equality and Social Inclusion markers in April 2022, the impacts on WPS accounting and incentives for gender equality work are not yet clear.

26 See HM Government, *Sri Lanka: Delivering Increased Stability and Reducing the Risk of Conflict, CSSF Programme Summary 2018–19* (London: FCO 2019), https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/758078/ASIA_Sri_Lanka_Programme_Summary_FY_18_19.odt.

27 ICAI, *Report: The CSSF's Aid Spending*, 30. Though GEM ratings are sometimes revised during annual reviews, this is not done systematically.

Limits and Futures

Having outlined the record of the last fifteen years, this section turns to limitations, areas of contestation within and between government and civil society, and possible progress in the fifth NAP and beyond. Given the range of policy areas implicated in WPS, we organise our discussion in two broad sections, a first related to more recognisable 'core' aspects of the agenda, and a second dealing with the challenge of domestication.

PARTICIPATION, PREVENTION AND THE GENDER PERSPECTIVE

Responding to concerns that the participation pillar had been eclipsed by sexual violence, the government has stepped up its work on participation, including setting up the Women Mediators Across the Commonwealth network. However, NGOs note the government's inconsistency in ensuring women's meaningful participation in its own peace and security efforts, including in UK-hosted conferences and summits on peace, security and development.²⁸ In response, the government announced a commitment in 2015 that "in arranging all future UK-hosted peace-building events, we will identify women involved in the conflict and shine a torch on them to make sure their voices are heard" as well as offering "political and/or financial support" for their participation.²⁹ Though GAPS has called for a more systematic approach and proposed a 30% quota for women's participation, this

28 E.g., GAPS, *Women's Voices in the UK National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security: Summary Report* (London: GAPS, 2017), 8, <https://gaps-uk.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/GAPS-Summary-Consultations-report-NAP-April-2017.pdf>;

29 Baroness Verma, "The UK Firmly Believes That the 15th Anniversary Must Represent the Start of a New Era on Women, Peace and Security", speech at the UN Security Council Open Debate on Women, Peace and Security, 13 October 2015, <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/the-uk-firmly-believes-that-the-15th-anniversary-must-represent-the-start-of-a-new-era-on-women-peace-and-security>.

has so far been resisted on grounds of practicality.³⁰ Even without a quota, however, a lack of funding and the increasingly demanding process of applying for a UK visa have made it challenging for women activists to attend UK events.³¹ Where women activists have been invited, this is often to side events and not the main forum, and they usually have not been granted opportunities to shape the agenda. These challenges point to a lack of political will to make women's participation a priority, but also a need to go beyond 'counting women' to ensuring that feminist perspectives are substantively represented at such events, along with an intersectional approach that considers *which* women's perspectives are considered and prioritises multiply-marginalised groups.

Women's participation is also advanced through strong, independent women's movements, yet the UK government and NGOs have clashed over how the UK should help resource these. Currently, WPS funding is often short-term and project-focused, which leaves women's rights organisations (WROs) chasing shifting donor priorities, makes it difficult to pursue long-term strategies, increases time spent on fundraising and reporting to donors, and provides few resources for movement-building.³² As such, NGOs have consistently called for long-term, *flexible* funding to be channelled to WROs in conflict settings to cover core costs as well as multiyear programmes of work.³³ Conversely, the UK government's 'value for money' agenda since 2010 ushered in scepticism toward flexible funding, and its preference for reducing its administrative costs by making sizeable grants to large organisations rather than many smaller grants has deterred it from channelling funds directly to national or local WROs in conflict settings.³⁴

30 E.g., GAPS, *Assessing UK Government Action on WPS in 2017*, 4–5; GAPS, *Informing the new National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security* (London: GAPS, 2017), 13, <http://gaps-uk.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Informing-the-new-UK-NAP-on-WPS-GAPS-submission-April-2017.pdf>.

31 GAPS, *Assessing UK Government Action on WPS in 2019*, 11.

32 Angelika Arutyunova, *Watering the Leaves, Starving the Roots* (Toronto: AWID, 2013), 116–125, <http://issuu.com/awid/docs/20140819-wtl-complete/0>; Coomaraswamy et al, *Preventing Conflict, Transforming Justice, Securing the Peace: A Global Study on the Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325* (New York: UN Women, 2015), 382–383, https://wps.unwomen.org/pdf/en/GlobalStudy_EN_Web.pdf; GAPS, *Women's Voices*, 6, 9; Social Development Direct, *Report Endline Evaluation: The UK National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2014–2017* (London: Social Development Direct, 2017), 35, 42, https://www.sddirect.org.uk/media/1416/nap-endline_final_2017.pdf.

33 GAPS, *Recommendations for the 2014–2017 NAP*, 4; GAPS, *Informing the new National Action Plan*, 4, 9.

34 Social Development Direct, *Report Endline Evaluation*, 25–26.

Yet other funding programmes are developing innovative models for overcoming these obstacles and getting funds to feminist movements in the Global South. According to research by AWID, Mama Cash and the Count Me In! Consortium, these funds are variously characterised by a political commitment to funding feminist movements; eligibility criteria that prioritise feminist movements and allow for regranting; flexibility over thematic and geographic priorities; viewing sustainable and capacitated organisations as a valued end-goal; accessible documentation available in multiple languages; pooled funds that share risks and administrative burdens among multiple donors; and/or treating fund management as a political practice and not just a technical one.³⁵ The UK government should integrate these lessons in the design of future funding mechanisms and contribute to existing funds that work to apply these principles.

Turning to the prevention pillar, we have noted that the government's focus has narrowed from conflict prevention to violent extremism and sexual violence in conflict. As the emphasis on conflict prevention in the third NAP has been overtaken by preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) in the fourth, some NGOs have expressed concern about a militaristic agenda co-opting human rights-oriented WPS efforts.³⁶ In response to concerns expressed by some feminists that women's political struggles would be instrumentalised in service of state security agendas, the fourth NAP supports the "participation and leadership of women in developing strategies to prevent and counter violent extremism", noting that "risks around the instrumentalisation of women should be considered and avoided".³⁷ Yet debates over what kind of agency women (or indeed men) exercise in choosing whether and how to engage with P/CVE, while important, often mask deeper concerns about P/CVE as a practice used by states to delegitimise political

35 Kasia Staszewska, Kellea Miller and Esther Lever, *Moving More Money to the Drivers of Change: How Bilateral and Multilateral Funders Can Resource Feminist Movements* (AWID, Mama Cash and the Count Me In! Consortium, 2020), https://www.awid.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/MovingMoreMoney_FINALFINAL.pdf.

36 GAPS, *Prioritising Peace: Challenging Approaches to Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism* (London: GAPS, 2018), http://gaps-uk.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/GAPS-report_Prioritise-Peace-Challenging-Approaches-to-P-CVE-from-a-WPS-perspective.pdf; Fionnuala Ní Aoláin, "The 'War on Terror' and Extremism: Assessing the Relevance of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda", *International Affairs* 92 (2) (2016): 275–291; Gina Heathcote, "Security Council Resolution 2242 on Women, Peace and Security: Progressive Gains or Dangerous Development?", *Global Society* 32 (4) (2018): 374–394.

37 HM Government, *UK National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2018–2022* (London: HM Government, 2018), 18, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1022064/FC01215-NAP-Women-Peace-Security-ONLINE_V2.pdf; For an important critique of concerns about instrumentalisation, see Elizabeth Mesok, "Beyond Instrumentalisation: Gender and Agency in the Prevention of Extreme Violence in Kenya", *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17539153.2022.2036422>.

opponents from across the ideological spectrum, empowering governments to extend surveillance regimes, pathologise and criminalise dissent, and persecute racial and ethnic minorities.³⁸ Treating 'extremism' as more exceptional than other forms of political violence has lent itself to short-termist and authoritarian approaches that target individual 'resilience' at the expense of addressing structural injustices and engaging in conflict prevention.

On GBV, policy has largely acted on CRSV committed by combatants as a limited subset, and interpreted 'prevention' as in criminal prosecution and anti-impunity terms. Critics have noted that war and militarisation exacerbate many forms of GBV beyond 'rape as a weapon of war', and that the focus on violence occurring in conflict zones, while important, ignores how the UK's security policies and practices produce gendered violence closer to home, including domestic and sexual violence committed by military, police and border personnel, for example.³⁹ In Northern Ireland, paramilitarism continues to be cited as influencing some women's and girls' experiences of GBV, particularly stalking, sectarian and online abuse, threats and harassment in formal politics, in some instances affecting their ability to access services.⁴⁰ NGOs further call for a more holistic approach aimed at preventing violence before it happens by addressing the political, economic, social and cultural systems and structures that produce it.⁴¹ The government has identified security and justice sector support as an area where it has a comparative advantage; however, evidence that securing convictions effectively prevents GBV is weak and the domestic UK record on convictions is likewise poor.⁴²

38 Arun Kundani, *The Muslims are Coming! Islamophobia, Extremism and the Domestic War on Terror* (London: Verso, 2014).

39 Harriet Gray, "The 'War'/'Not-War' Divide: Domestic Violence in the Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative", *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 21 (1) (2019): 189–206; Fiona Hamilton, Neil Johnston and Jake Kanter, "Sex Claims Against 2,000 Police Officers", *The Times*, 11 October 2021, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/sex-claims-against-2-000-police-officers-fnt9blkd7>; Black Women's Rape Action Project and Women Against Rape, *Rape and Sexual Abuse in Yarl's Wood Immigration Removal Centre 2005–2015* (London: Black Women's Rape Action Project and Women Against Rape, 2015), <http://againstrape.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Report2015.pdf>.

40 Women's Policy Group NI, *Response to Westminster Northern Ireland Affairs Committee Call for Evidence: The Effect of Paramilitaries on Society in Northern Ireland* (Belfast: Women's Policy Group NI, 2022), <https://wrda.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/WPG-NI-Response-to-Westminster-Northern-Ireland-Affairs-Committee-Call-for-Evidence.pdf>; Siobhán McAlister, Gail Neill, Nicola Carr and Clare Dwyer, "Gender, Violence and Cultures of Silence: Young Women and Paramilitary Violence", *Journal of Youth Studies* (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2021.1942807>; Catherine Turner and Aisling Swaine, *At the Nexus of Participation and Protection: Protection-Related Barriers to Women's Participation in Northern Ireland* (New York: International Peace Institute, 2021), <https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Womens-Participation-Northern-Ireland-2-Final.pdf>.

41 E.g. GAPS, *Women's Voices*, 8; GAPS, *Informing the new National Action Plan*, 11.

42 Paul Kirby, "Ending Sexual Violence in Conflict: The Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative and Its Critics", *International Affairs* 91 (3) (2015), 464–468; Joel H. Garner, Christopher D. Maxwell and Jina Lee, "The Specific Deterrent Effects of Criminal Sanctions for Intimate Partner Violence: A Meta-Analysis", *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology* 111 (1) (2021): 227–271.



While the government's ratification of the Istanbul Convention is welcome, its inclusion of a reservation in relation to protections for migrant survivors of intimate partner abuse is of great concern, and indicates a continuing division between internal and external aspects of the agenda in practice.

In contrast to PSVI, DFID's theory of change on VAWG recommended a multisectoral approach that increases women and girls' access to and control over resources, works to change social norms that drive GBV, and provides comprehensive services to survivors in addition to security and justice sector interventions.⁴³ Before their merger in 2020, then, NGOs sometimes supported DFID's approach over the (then) FCO's, or advocated streamlining the two, which recent guidance begins to do.⁴⁴ As the government looks forward to the second major PSVI conference in 2022, it should resist the temptation to seek headline-grabbing commitments in favour of supporting work that promotes long-term structural change addressing the root causes of GBV. Domestically, such an approach would mean, among other things, reversing cuts to services for survivors of domestic and sexual violence and to social housing and the welfare system that trap survivors in abusive situations.⁴⁵ Furthermore, while the government's ratification of the Istanbul Convention is welcome, its inclusion of a reservation in relation to protections for migrant survivors of intimate partner abuse is of great concern, and indicates a continuing division between internal and external aspects of the agenda in practice.

43 DFID, *How to Note: Violence Against Women and Girls* (London: DFID, 2013), https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/67336/how-to-note-vawg-1.pdf.

44 FCDO and MOD, *UK National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security – Implementing Strategic Outcome 3: Gender-Based Violence* (London: FCDO and MOD, 2019), https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/959778/UK_NAP_Guidance_on_Strategic_Outcome_3-GBV.pdf.

45 See Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW Committee), *Concluding Observations on the Eighth Periodic Report of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland*, CEDAW/C/GBR/CO/8, 14 March 2019, 6, 9, https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3801131/files/CEDAW_C_GBR_CO_8-EN.pdf.



an intersectional approach should entail addressing gendered harms experienced by sexual and gender minorities, men and boys that result from patriarchy, cisnormativity, heteronormativity and their intersections — as signalled by the more inclusive language of the third NAP and by the CSSF Gender, Peace and Security portfolio

The contrast between a narrow focus on CRSV against women and girls and a more comprehensive approach to the agenda also indicates the importance of a fully gender-inclusive NAP. While some countries' NAPs explicitly include intersectionality as a core principle for how they understand and pursue gender justice, the UK so far has not.⁴⁶ The fourth NAP "recognises that the challenges facing women and girls differ according to, for example, age, race, ethnicity, caste, class, disability, sexual orientation and gender identity, and urban/rural locations" and commits to ensuring "our efforts address the needs and rights of women and girls from all social backgrounds", though reporting often does not make clear how this commitment translates into practice.⁴⁷ The CSSF Gender, Peace and Security portfolio 2021 call for programmes that "pilot and build the evidence base for intersectional inclusion approaches to conflict programming" could represent a step forward for linking gender equality work with efforts to address other inequalities and injustices.⁴⁸ Taking intersectionality seriously would also mean "to acknowledge that [conflict-related] violence is a manifestation of historical and contemporary racist and patriarchal oppression, and addressing it also entails addressing the structural issues and inequalities that produce conflict" such as global economic

46 Intersectionality is a concept that emerged from Black feminist thought to analyse how interlocking systems of power such as patriarchy, racism and capitalism produce compounding oppressions for those who are marginalised in multiple ways. For the earliest statement see Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersections of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics", *University of Chicago Legal Forum* (1) (1989): 139–167.

47 HM Government, *UK NAP on WPS 2018–2022*, 5.

48 HM Government, "Intersectional Approaches to Conflict Programming: Terms of Reference", 21 May 2021, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/conflict-stabilisation-and-security-fund-gender-peace-and-security-calls-for-bids-2021-to-2022/intersectional-approaches-to-conflict-programming-terms-of-reference>.

inequalities and climate change.⁴⁹ Further, an intersectional approach should entail addressing gendered harms experienced by sexual and gender minorities, men and boys that result from patriarchy, cisnormativity, heteronormativity and their intersections — as signalled by the more inclusive language of the third NAP and by the CSSF Gender, Peace and Security portfolio.⁵⁰

Examples of good practice actions from comparable NAPs in the global north. The UK government should seriously consider the inclusion of equivalent measures.



Gender analysis

“Integrate a thorough analysis of gender equality, gender norms and masculinities into all programmes” (Netherlands III)



Gender inclusivity

“Promote equitable access to GBV services for vulnerable groups such as women and girls with disabilities and persons of diverse sexual orientation and gender identity” (US II)



Funding and monitoring

“Establish baselines and principle/significant funding on WPS across Ireland’s development and humanitarian work” (Ireland III)



Migration and refugees

“Ensure the relief, recovery and better integration of women in Ireland affected by conflict” (Ireland III)



Arms control

“As part of the risk analysis of potential human rights violations for arms export controls, an assessment is also made of the risk as to whether grievous acts of sexual and gender-based violence or serious violence against women and girls could be perpetrated using the requested military equipment” (Germany III)



Climate change:

“Gender issues are systematically integrated and evaluated as part of responses to climate change” (US II)

Box 1: Example Policy Language from Other WPS Champions

49 Sarah Smith and Elena Stavrevska, “A Different Women, Peace and Security is Possible? Intersectionality in Women, Peace and Security Resolutions and National Action Plans”, *European Journal of Politics and Gender* 5 (1) (2022), 66.

50 HM Government, “LGBT+ Inclusive Approaches to Conflict and the WPS Agenda: Terms of References and Objectives”, 25 August 2021, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/lgbt-inclusive-approaches-to-conflict-and-the-women-peace-and-security-agenda-call-for-bids/lgbt-inclusive-approaches-to-conflict-and-the-wps-agenda-terms-of-reference-and-objectives>.

DOMESTIC APPLICATIONS AND POLICY COHERENCE

Some Global North and WPS champion countries have begun to revise the purely external focus of their NAPs. For example, in response to civil society consultations and demands, Ireland's third NAP (2019–2024) has been commended by the UN for its inclusion of actions under the remit of the Department of Justice and Equality, Department of Rural and Community Development, An Garda Síochána (police) and the Health Service Executive, even though ultimately led by its Department of Foreign Affairs.⁵¹ That NAP's objectives recognise the challenges facing migrant and refugee women coming into Ireland from conflict and post-conflict settings and the need for support tailored to women in the asylum process. This is a useful example of an all-of-government application of WPS with some congruence between its actions on issues such as GBV through its foreign policy and its support to migrant women domestically. The Irish 'direct provision' asylum process itself however remains strongly critiqued for how it treats asylum seekers.

All four UK NAPs are outward-facing, yet UK policies on related domestic and transnational issues often conflict with or disregard WPS principles. As noted above, migration and asylum receive almost no mention in UK WPS policies and reporting, and the dissonance between migration policies and WPS principles has been highlighted by government-commissioned NAP evaluations.⁵² While WPS resolutions urge states to recognise risks facing female refugees,⁵³ the current government's commitment to reducing net migration and decades of legislation designed to reduce migration to the UK from the Global South have produced policies that enact a range of gendered and racialised harms against migrants and asylum seekers.⁵⁴ Currently,

51 Shirley Graham, *Report on the Consultation for Ireland's National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325, Women, Peace & Security* (National Women's Council of Ireland, Amnesty International, Irish Consortium on GBV, 2011), https://www.nwci.ie/images/uploads/1325_report_final.pdf; UN Security Council, *Women and Peace and Security: Report of the Secretary-General*, S/2019/800, 9 October 2019, https://www.un.org/shestandsforspeace/sites/www.un.org/shestandsforspeace/files/un_secretary_general_report_on_wps_2019_english.pdf.

52 E.g. Lydia Stone and Anna Parke, *Midline Report: UK National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security* (London: Social Development Direct, 2016), 18, 34, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/533592/External_evaluation_of_the_National_Action_Plan_on_women_peace_and_security_-_midline_evaluation_2016.pdf.

53 E.g. UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000), S/RES/1325, 3; UN Security Council Resolution 1889 (2009), S/RES/1889, 4; UN Security Council Resolution 2467 (2019), 9.

54 On the history of UK migration legislation, see Nadine el-Enany, *(B)ordering Britain: Law, Race and Empire* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020).



While WPS resolutions urge states to recognise risks facing female refugees, the current government's commitment to reducing net migration and decades of legislation designed to reduce migration to the UK from the Global South have produced policies that enact a range of gendered and racialised harms against migrants and asylum seekers

asylum-seeking survivors of GBV face re-traumatising assessment processes where they must meet unreasonable standards of evidence, often facing disbelief from the Home Office.⁵⁵ Migrants and refugees – including those who are pregnant, nursing, and/or survivors of GBV and torture – can be detained without time limits while cases are processed, and there have been multiple reports of sexual abuse of detained women by detention centre staff.⁵⁶ While awaiting the outcome of asylum claims, applicants cannot work and often face destitution, but have no recourse to public funds, leaving them ineligible for basic services, including access to domestic violence refuges.⁵⁷ Collaboration between immigration authorities and public bodies such as law enforcement and healthcare providers further deter those with insecure immigration status who are experiencing domestic abuse from seeking justice and support services for fear of being deported.⁵⁸ This situation is exacerbated by the government's refusal to ratify Article 59 of the Istanbul Convention, which would grant residence to survivors whose immigration status depends on an abusive partner. The Nationality and Borders Act 2022 punishes those who arrive in the UK via 'irregular' routes while safe and legal routes are closed off, and the latest policy of deporting asylum

55 Gemma Lousley and Sarah Cope, *We are Still Here: The Continued Detention of Women Seeking Asylum in Yarl's Wood* (London: Women for Refugee Women, 2017), <https://www.refugeewomen.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/women-for-refugee-women-reports-we-are-still-here.pdf>.

56 Lousley and Cope, *We are Still Here*; Black Women's Rape Action Project and Women Against Rape, *Rape and Sexual Abuse in Yarl's Wood*.

57 Rebecca Gail Dudley, "Domestic Abuse and Women With 'No Recourse to Public Funds': The State's Role in Shaping and Reinforcing Coercive Control", *Families Relationships and Societies* 6 (2) (2017): 201–217; Priscilla Dudhia, *Will I Ever Be Safe? Asylum-Seeking Women Made Destitute in the UK* (London: Women for Refugee Women, 2020), <https://www.refugeewomen.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/WRW-Will-I-ever-be-safe-web.pdf>.

58 CEDAW Committee, *Concluding Observations on the Eighth Periodic Report*, 7, 13.

seekers to Rwanda further undermines the Refugee Convention.⁵⁹ A radical rethink of migration policies is needed to bring them into line with WPS and refugee regime principles.

While earlier NAPs — the third in particular — included specific commitments on conflict prevention, UK arms exports highlight a profound disjuncture between government and civil society interpretations of conflict prevention and its relationship to WPS. NGOs highlight how UK arms have fuelled conflict, their devastating impact on people of all genders overseas, and the gendered domestic impacts of increasing defence spending at the expense of welfare and care infrastructure.⁶⁰ Yet references to arms transfer controls are absent from all four NAPs despite being introduced into UN WPS policy in 2013 through General Recommendation 30 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and UNSCR 2106.⁶¹ The latter documents reference the UN Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) — of which the UK was among the leading state advocates — and its obligation on states to assess the risks of arms, *inter alia*, “being used to commit or facilitate serious acts of gender-based violence or serious acts of violence against women and children” before authorising arms transfers.⁶² Despite a licensing system that is said to include gender considerations, successive UK governments have appeared to let political and economic considerations influence or outweigh their risk assessments.⁶³ Recent changes to this system, while integrating the ATT criterion on GBV more explicitly, substantially weaken criteria regulating transfers that could undermine peace and security, leaving more room for ministerial discretion.⁶⁴ Taking the conflict prevention elements of WPS seriously would require a

59 UNHCR, “UNHCR Analysis of the Legality and Appropriateness of the Transfer of Asylum-Seekers Under the UK-Rwanda Arrangement”, 8 June 2022, <https://www.unhcr.org/62a317d34>; On the Nationality and Borders Act see Women for Refugee Women, *Five Ways the Nationality and Borders Bill Threatens Women* (London: Women for Refugee Women, 2021), <https://www.refugeewomen.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Five-ways-the-Nationality-and-Borders-Bill-threatens-women.pdf>.

60 Quakers in Britain, Christian Aid and Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, *The Impact of the UK’s Arms Transfers and Military Spending on Women’s Rights* (London: Quakers in Britain, Christian Aid and Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, 2019), https://wilpf.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/UK_CEDAW-Jt_WILPF_Christian-Aid_Quakers.pdf; GAPS, Informing the new National Action Plan on Women, 6; GAPS, Assessing UK Government Action on WPS in 2017, 9–10.

61 CEDAW Committee, *General Recommendation No. 30 on Women in Conflict Prevention, Conflict and Post-Conflict Situations*, CEDAW/C/GC/30, 18 October 2013, 8, 9, 24; UN Security Council Resolution 2106 (2013), S/RES/2106, 2.

62 United Nations, *Arms Trade Treaty*, article 7 (4), <https://unoda-web.s3-accelerate.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/English7.pdf>.

63 Anna Stavrianakis, “Requiem for Risk: Non-Knowledge and Domination in the Governance of Weapons Circulation”, *International Political Sociology* 14 (3) (2020): 233–251.

64 Control Arms UK, *Supplementary Written Evidence Submitted by Control Arms UK* (London: UK Parliament, 2022), submitted to the parliamentary Committees on Arms Export Control, <https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/43608/pdf/>.



Inclusion of Northern Ireland in the NAP would thereby align with an overall strategic-level approach to congruent domestic implementation of WPS across UK ‘nations’, as well as acknowledge Northern Ireland-specific priorities driven by women’s civil society and implemented in the context of its devolved political institutions and government departments.

political commitment to not merely *taking into account* these risks, but assuming that they override political and economic incentives to licence arms transfers. Further, the use of arms in domestic and wider gendered violence within the UK requires all-of-government, UK-wide approaches. In Northern Ireland for example, 20 years after the peace agreement, while police responses to the use of firearms in intimate partner violence have improved, paramilitary control and ‘punishment shootings’ remain a concern.⁶⁵

The UK has in particular been critiqued for failing to implement WPS in Northern Ireland. The CEDAW Committee has consistently recommended state implementation of WPS in Northern Ireland,⁶⁶ while civil society actors have called for its implementation since the agenda’s adoption in 2000, and in the context of subsequent UK NAPs.⁶⁷ Northern Ireland shares many domestic WPS-related priorities common across the UK, as well as those specifically related to the Northern Ireland ‘Troubles’ and its extended period of peacebuilding. Inclusion of Northern Ireland in the NAP would

65 Jessica Leigh Doyle and Monica McWilliams, “What Difference Does Peace Make? Intimate Partner Violence and Violent Conflict in Northern Ireland”, *Violence Against Women* 26 (2) (2020): 139–163; John Alderice, John McBurney and Monica McWilliams, *The Fresh Start Panel Report on the Disbandment of Paramilitary Groups in Northern Ireland* (Belfast: Northern Ireland Executive, 2016), <https://www.northernireland.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/newnigov/The%20Fresh%20Start%20Panel%20report%20on%20the%20disbandment%20of%20paramilitary%20groups.pdf>.

66 CEDAW Committee, *Concluding Observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland*, CEDAW/C/UK/CO/6, 10 July 2008, 10, para 285; CEDAW Committee, *Concluding Observations on the Eighth Periodic Report*, 10, para 39–40.

67 GAPS, *Global Monitoring Checklist on Women, Peace and Security* (London: GAPS, 2009), https://www.peacewomen.org/assets/file/Resources/NGO/WPS_ChecklistWPS_GAPS_2009.pdf; Aisling Swaine, “Assessing the Potential of National Action Plans to Advance Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325”, *Yearbook of International Humanitarian Law* 12 (2009): 403–433; United Nations, “UNSCR 1325 on Trial in Northern Ireland: Summary of Proceedings and Outcome”, *Peace Women*, 25 August 2004, <https://www.peacewomen.org/node/89775>.

thereby align with an overall strategic-level approach to congruent domestic implementation of WPS across UK 'nations', as well as acknowledge Northern Ireland-specific priorities driven by women's civil society and implemented in the context of its devolved political institutions and government departments.

Key WPS priorities, such as women's participation and the prevention of, and protection from, GBV imply the agenda's particular relevance to the ongoing fulfilment of the 1998 Good Friday/Belfast Agreement. For example, the 2019 annual report on the NAP noted the involvement of women from Northern Ireland in the UK's Women Mediators across the Commonwealth Initiative and joint funding with the Northern Ireland Executive to a programme supporting women's participation.⁶⁸ Women's organisations, however, point to enduring gaps such as the need for peacebuilding led by the government in Northern Ireland to more fully centre and respond to the voice, leadership and interests of women, and the need for gendered approaches to legacy issues and processes for dealing with the past so that gender equitable peace is advanced.⁶⁹

The ongoing presence of paramilitarism is also cited as affecting women and the work of women's organisations in Northern Ireland. While the Independent Reporting Commission on disbanding paramilitarism and Northern Ireland Executive's Tackling Paramilitarism Strategy recognise the coercive and controlling presence of paramilitary groups at community levels,⁷⁰ much more understanding and response to gendered aspects and women's experiences of paramilitarism is needed. Women's organisations highlight that the nature of paramilitary-related membership and activity has changed, requiring fuller understanding and locally-driven responses as broader peace implementation evolves. In some communities, for example, paramilitaries deal in 'loan sharking' affecting the poorest and most marginalised women; control

68 HM Government, *UK National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2018–2022: Annual Report to Parliament 2019* (London: FCO, 2020), 33, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1022062/UK_National_Action_Plan_on_Women_Peace_and_Security_2018-2022_Annual_Report_to_Parliament_2019.pdf.

69 The Westminster Associate Parliamentary Group and The Northern Ireland Assembly All Party Group on Women, Peace and Security, *An Inquiry into the Position of Women in Northern Ireland Since the Peace Agreement* (Belfast: Northern Ireland Women's European Platform, 2014), <https://gaps-uk.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/NIWEP-Westminster-Summary-Report.pdf>; Legacy Gender Integration Group, *Gender Principles for Dealing with the Legacy of the Past* (Belfast: Legacy Gender Integration Group, 2015), https://www.ulster.ac.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0009/66285/Gender-Principle-Report-Sept-2015_Final-Version.pdf.

70 Independent Reporting Commission, *Fourth Report December 2021*, Presented to Parliament pursuant to Regulation 3(1) of the Northern Ireland (Stormont Agreement and Implementation Plan) Act 2016 (Independent Reporting Commission) Regulations 2016, https://www.ircommission.org/sites/irc/files/media-files/IRC%20Fourth%20Report%20web%20accessible_1.pdf.

drug dealing; run protection racketeering; and exert control over communities including through intimidation targeted on the basis of racism and hate-based crimes.⁷¹ Further, the operation of some groups through and in the guise of 'community organisations' in receipt of public funding enhances their status and control over communities, undermining the broader peacebuilding work of many women's organisations.⁷² Women in leadership from grassroots peacebuilding to formal politics experience direct threats to life, intimidation, control, sexual slander and falsified sexual imagery-based abuse in their roles, directly inhibiting women's 'participation' in peacebuilding and in broader politics.⁷³ There is further need for recognition of the different needs, interests and barriers experienced by women across different communities and identities in the context of ongoing peacebuilding.⁷⁴

Domestic implementation of the NAP is an opportunity to ensure some coherence between foreign and domestic policy and, for a context like Northern Ireland, to be undertaken with respect to the context of devolution. The NAP should legitimise and provide a basis from which implementation of WPS is advanced locally in response to priorities identified by diverse women's civil society. Ireland's NAP for example, in the context of the peace agreement and its shared border, gives full recognition of the significance of the historic work of women's peacebuilding in Northern Ireland. The UK NAP offers a framework for shared priority setting within and across the UK's devolved institutions, while also a critical tool of accountability for WPS implementation in response to women's civil society-led priorities.

71 Women's Policy Group NI, *Response to Westminster Northern Ireland Affairs Committee*, 7; Women's Policy Group NI, *Covid-19 Feminist Recovery Plan* (Belfast: Women's Policy Group NI, 2020), <https://wrda.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/WPG-NI-Feminist-Recovery-Plan-2020.pdf>.

72 Women's Policy Group NI, *Response to Westminster Northern Ireland Affairs Committee*, 7.

73 Turner and Swaine, *At the Nexus of Participation and Protection*.

74 Leanne Abernethy, "Loyalist Women Have a Voice, But Who's Listening?", *Glencree Journal* 2021, <https://www.glencree.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/83639-essay-1-Leanne-Abernethy-1.pdf>; Monica McWilliams and Priyamvada Yarnell, *The Protection and Rights of Black and Minority Ethnic Women Experiencing Domestic Violence in Northern Ireland* (Belfast: NICEM, 2013), https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/Delivery.cfm/SSRN_ID2489957_code2101330.pdf.

Conclusions

The UK government should expand and refine its WPS work, taking credit for existing strengths and recognising persistent limitations. The UK is in an unparalleled position as an original champion of the agenda and given its special placement at the intersection of several WPS fields. It also has a responsibility to the agenda not only as one of its preeminent advocates but also as in evaluating its own institutional practices and conflict histories.

At present, UK WPS policy is unduly limited in three respects. First, despite significant investment, monitoring, evaluation and learning procedures could be significantly strengthened. Improvements in fund labelling and tracking would improve reporting, enable independent scrutiny, and allow for a clearer identification of policy success. The welcome inclusion of civil society and academic expertise should be given a stronger formal basis throughout NAP development and delivery.

Second, the many opportunities for domestication of the agenda continue to be neglected. Though these pose understandable bureaucratic and political challenges, the success of the agenda depends on coherence and creative thinking across policy domains and government departments, even where this is politically sensitive. It is especially important that the UK government engage with domestication to avoid the impression that it believes WPS applies only beyond its borders and in its aid and humanitarian relationships with distant others.



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Finally, the fifth NAP offers an opportunity to commit to the full breadth of the agenda and make a step change in policy ambition. The UK continues to lead on issues of CRSV, and the Foreign Secretary's recommitment is welcome. However, the national action plan framework should not be taken to mean that governments should only engage with parts of the agenda (or what has been called 'a la carte WPS'). In crucial contemporary threats like climate change and the arms trade, the government should do more to comprehensively apply the gender perspective and ensure maximal adherence with its commitments to international regimes such as CEDAW and the Refugee Convention.

Together, these measures can help to advance the UK's contribution to WPS as a universal, rights-based framework with conflict prevention at its heart.

Recommendations

1

Infrastructure and Monitoring: To improve monitoring and accountability and the UK's infrastructure for implementing WPS, the government should:

- a.** introduce a labelling system for tracking targeted WPS spending across different funding mechanisms, including WPS components of larger projects, and report on spending annually
- b.** create new mechanisms for disbursing flexible multi-year core funding to national and local women's rights organisations in fragile and conflict affected contexts, building on good practices from other donors⁷⁶
- c.** put civil society and research engagement on a stronger formal footing, improving the integration of evidence and voice into the NAP process, including by reinstating the WPS Steering Group announced in the fourth NAP
- d.** develop and implement a gender-inclusive and intersectional framework across WPS policy, meaningfully engaging with women of differing racial, class, sexual, religious, bodily experiences and identities while consistently recognising the varying roles of men and boys, and people of diverse sexual orientation, gender identities and expressions and sex characteristics

⁷⁶ See Staszewska, Miller and Lever, *Moving More Money to the Drivers of Change*.

2

Domestication: To bring domestic policies in line with WPS principles, the government should:

a. Initiate UK-relevant promotion of and approach to the WPS agenda

- include in the NAP actions to initiate UK/domestic-focused engagement with the WPS agenda, such as creating opportunities for policy dialogue and promotion of WPS relevant to centrally mandated areas of policy, as well as in the devolved administrations
- create a mechanism for promoting and sharing of learning on WPS implementation across the devolved institutions (see also 3.c below)
- make available funding to support and enable devolved leadership on implementation of the WPS agenda and specifically for women's civil society to implement WPS domestically

b. Northern Ireland

- recognise the significant history of peacebuilding work led by women and women's organisations in the context of any inclusion of Northern Ireland in the NAP
- recognise the role of the Northern Ireland Office in advancing the UK's commitments under the WPS agenda and the implementation of the NAP under its remit
- ensure that any inclusion of Northern Ireland in the NAP is done in response to consultation with local women's civil society, locally-led priority setting and in the context of broader devolved governance

c. Gender-Based Violence

- ratify article 59 of the Istanbul Convention as soon as possible
- ensure the maintenance of legal rights to hold the state accountable for ensuring justice for victims and survivors of gender-based violence
- legislate a statutory guarantee of local funding for services for survivors of domestic and sexual violence, including gender-specific and trans-inclusive services for women and men, and specialist services for migrant women, women of colour and LGBTQI+ survivors

d. Migration and asylum

- develop trauma-informed procedures for assessing asylum claims and invest in non-carceral alternatives to immigration detention that allow asylum seekers and migrants to reside in the community⁷⁷
- abolish the 'no recourse to public funds' rule and create a 'firewall' to prevent police and other public bodies from sharing abuse victims' and other vulnerable individuals' details with immigration enforcement
- open up safe routes for arrival in the UK for asylum seekers, abandon the Memorandum of Understanding with Rwanda for the coercive deportation of migrants and asylum seekers, and end the deportation of individuals before their options for legal appeal have been exhausted

3

Policy Ambition: To respond to global trends and create a more ambitious WPS policy, the UK government should:

- a. urgently integrate a gender perspective into climate change policy, building on steps already made to address natural resource management through the CSSF Gender, Peace and Security Portfolio⁷⁸
- b. revisit its arms transfer control regime to ensure the maximum possible adherence to the Arms Trade Treaty, including by strengthening the government WPS infrastructure and cross-departmental gender awareness in assessing the risks of transfers, and to contribute meaningfully to conflict prevention
- c. work to strengthen synergies between WPS and human rights frameworks, including by supporting and resourcing the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women's monitoring of General Recommendation 30 and ensuring formal and informal engagement between the Committee and the UN Security Council to enhance coherent approaches to gender and conflict
- d. more closely coordinate with other WPS champions to pre-empt duplication and better respond to contemporary challenges within the agenda, such as the assault on sexual and reproductive health and rights

⁷⁷ See Marchu Girma and Gemma Lousley, *The Way Ahead: An Asylum System Without Detention* (London: Women for Refugee Women, 2017), <https://www.refugeewomen.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/women-for-refugee-women-reports-the-way-ahead.pdf>.

⁷⁸ HM Government, "Piloting Gender-Transformative Approaches to Natural Resource Management in a Time of Climate and Environmental Stress: Terms of Reference", 21 May 2021, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/conflict-stabilisation-and-security-fund-gender-peace-and-security-calls-for-bids-2021-to-2022>.

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