WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY ADVOCACY BRIEF

ADVANCING THE WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY (WPS) AGENDA IN THE INDO-PACIFIC

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

With respect for Aboriginal cultural protocol and out of recognition that its campuses occupy their traditional lands, Western Sydney University acknowledges the Darug, Eora, Dharawal (also referred to as Tharawal) and Wiradjuri peoples and thanks them for their support of its work in their lands (Western Sydney and beyond).

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UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION 1325 ON WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY: 22 YEARS ON

On 31 October 2000, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) adopted Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) in recognition of the unique experiences of violence and vulnerability among, and the particular needs of, women and girls during war. UNSC Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) acknowledges that the full participation of women at all stages of a peace process is necessary to maintain international peace and security for all members of society. UNSCR 1325 called for the full and equal involvement of both women and men at every stage of the peace and conflict resolution process from initial negotiations through to signature, ratification and implementation on the ground through the transitional period. Nine subsequent UNSC Resolutions (1820, 1888, 1889, 1960, 2106, 2122, 2422, 2467 and 2493) have entrenched what has become known as the 'WPS agenda' in international relations, an agenda that articulates with discussions and debates around human rights, human security and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). All UN member states are urged to develop National Action Plans (NAPs) to further the WPS core strategy of addressing gender equity through gender mainstreaming, which treats gender as an integrated component within all programs, rather than a distinct and separate area of programming.

Since 2000, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) has been working on embedding the WPS agenda across all facets of its operations. In October 2021, NATO members adopted the *Action Plan for the Implementation of the NATO/Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC) Policy on Women, Peace and Security 2021–2025*, a document that builds on previous NATO WPS action plans and recommits NATO members, as well as NATO partners including Australia, to transforming existing practices by 'integrating gender perspectives across its three core tasks (deterrence and defence, crisis prevention and management, and cooperative security) and throughout its political and military structures'.[1] As Australia and other Indo-Pacific states seek to advance the WPS agenda in the region, there is much that can be learned from NATO's experience.

In marking the 22nd anniversary of the passing of UNSCR 1325, Western Sydney University convened a one-day discussion with high-level global experts from strategic NATO Heads of Missions in Australia and Australian officials and representatives. We were privileged to have Australia's Ambassador for Women and Girls, Christine Clarke CSC, the Member for Reid, Sally Sitou MP, and the Chief Executive of the Australian Human Rights Commission, Leanne Smith, address our event at Western Sydney University that assessed the progress of UNSCR 1325. Also attending the event were ambassadors of Croatia, Estonia and Denmark, and the High Commissioner of Canada. These dignitaries represent core NATO member states in Australia and have considerable country expertise due to their engagement with NATO and geopolitical positioning within the NATO

Alliance. Also joining our discussion were experts on the following cross-cutting themes:

1. Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI)
2. Women and Girls with Disability
3. Education and Participation
4. Technology and Inclusion.

The event discussed these four thematic areas in the context of current challenges and progress toward achieving the WPS agenda for Australia, the Indo-Pacific region and globally.

This advocacy brief summarises our discussions. It considers the question of how to consolidate and expand the WPS agenda to support UN SDGs on gender equality (SDG5), reduced inequality (SDG10), and peace, justice and strong institutions (SDG16). We first discuss the WPS agenda in a broad context before looking at NATO's engagement with WPS, and at Australia's experience. Finally, this advocacy brief presents recommendations to policymakers on expanding the WPS agenda to address SOGI, disability, education and cybersecurity.

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1. 'Action Plan for the Implementation of the NATO/Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC) Policy on Women, Peace and Security 2021–2025', North Atlantic Treaty Organization, last updated 21 October 20212, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_187485.htm.

THE WPS AGENDA: CURRENT GLOBAL ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

The full implementation of the WPS agenda is slow and, in some instances, has even been reversed. While over 100 UN member states have adopted National Action Plans (NAPs), fewer than one third of these have any funding attached, indicating a lack of programmatic commitment to gender equality. Indeed, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic from January 2020 has coincided with a pushback against gender equality and the WPS agenda, with higher than usual rates of sexual and gender-based violence being recorded across the world.[2] Due to COVID restrictions, many women were trapped in violent situations during lockdown. Women were also more likely to lose their employment and economic security and, in turn, their capacity to maintain their safety and wellbeing. Women also faced greater risks than men as frontline health workers, carers and educators.[3]

COVID-19 has had a significant and disproportionate impact on women of colour, First Nations women, women and girls with disabilities, and women from the LGBTIQ+ communities. Women and girls of colour experienced higher than average rates of infection, hospitalisation and death. This is due in part to the systematic inequities that they face, including inadequate access to healthcare, lack of access to paid sick leave due to precarious employment, and living in crowded multigenerational households. Women of colour are also more likely to work in frontline health and caring jobs that put them at higher risk of exposure to COVID.

First Nations women and girls experienced higher rates of infection and hospitalisation than the general population. This is due in part to systematic inequalities such as a lack of access to healthcare, clean water and adequate housing. First Nations women also face additional challenges due to their cultural practices, such as the need for communal gatherings and ceremonies.

Women and girls with disabilities have been particularly vulnerable during the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to a higher incidence of violence, abuse and exploitation, there was also a significant increase in neglect. Many women and girls with disabilities also faced challenges in accessing healthcare, medication and medical equipment, as well as increased isolation and a lack of social support due to

the potential secondary, long-term impacts of COVID-19 as a person living with a prior impairment, chronic illness and/or condition. Additionally, caregivers of women and girls with disabilities were often unable to provide care due to their own illness and the need to quarantine themselves to ensure they did not increase the risk of transmission to those for whom they cared. These factors placed significant strain upon existing care professionals and diminished the network of available carers, locally, regionally and nationally.

Prior to COVID-19, women from LGBTIQ+ communities faced numerous challenges including a higher likelihood of experiencing discrimination and stigma (particularly when seeking healthcare), family violence, and higher rates of unemployment, poverty, and mental health issues, which were exacerbated during the pandemic. Many LGBTIQ+ people rely on community and social support networks, which were disrupted due to quarantine and social distancing measures.[4]

Although the WPS agenda has been growing in prominence in international discussions over the past two decades, there is more work yet to do. Currently, it does not sufficiently address the specific vulnerabilities and experiences of LGBTIQ+ people who are often targets of violence and discrimination, especially in the context of conflict zones where LGBTIQ+ are targeted, or where they are easily identifiable.[5]

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2. 'The Shadow Pandemic: Violence against Women during COVID-19', UN Women, accessed 30 July 2023, https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/in-focus-gender-equality-in-covid-19-response/violence-against-women-during-covid-19

3. 'Women at the Core of the Fight against COVID-19 Crisis', OECD, 1 April 2020, https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/women-at-the-core-of-the-fight-against-covid-19-crisis-553a8269/.

4. Natalie Amos, Paola Gioia Macioti, Adam Hill, and Adam Bourne, *Pride and Pandemic: Mental Health Experiences and Coping Strategies among LGBTQ+ Adults during the COVID-19 Pandemic in Australia: National Report* (Melbourne: Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, La Trobe University, 2022).

5. Kellyn Botha, *Our Identities under Arrest: A Global Overview on the Enforcement of Laws Criminalising Consensual Same-Sex Sexual Acts between Adults and Diverse Gender Expressions* (Geneva: ILGA, December 2021).

For example, when LGBTIQ+ people seek to use medical services, their confidentiality is often compromised, so they face additional barriers and discrimination when accessing support.[6] The targeting of both women and LGBTIQ+ people during conflict is potentially lethal, especially in states where homosexuality is illegal.[7]

Another vulnerable group that has been largely absent from WPS discussion are women and girls with a disability, who are among the most vulnerable targets of gender-based violence, particularly those with mobility impairments and cognitive impairments who rely upon others for support. Around 15–20 per cent of people globally live with disabilities, the largest minority group in the world. Women and girls have the highest levels of disability, and, due to poverty, have increased vulnerability to violence. The combined impacts of gender, disability and poverty create unique vulnerabilities for women and girls with disabilities to violence in its frequency, intensity and prevalence. As a group, they consistently experience multiple disadvantages both during and post-conflict. Minor disabilities that remain untreated in conflict zones can become permanent impairments that impact lifelong opportunities such as employment, education and training.

The importance of education for women and girls was formally recognised in the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 2, Achieve Universal Primary Education, which sought to 'ensure that by 2015, children everywhere – boys and girls alike – will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling'. It is also recognised in the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 Quality Education, which aims to 'ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all'. With restrictions back in place on education for women in Afghanistan, it is important to remember the links between education, better health and improved economic outlook that contribute to peace.

Finally, an emerging target area in the WPS agenda is the digital sphere, with efforts underway to integrate cybersecurity and digital protection into the WPS framework. Online gender-based violence, including harassment, threats and abuse targeting women and girls, has become a pervasive issue. This form of violence can have significant impacts on individuals' safety, well-being and freedom of expression in online spaces. Strategies to reduce gender-based violence online have been developed and trialled in the public, private and not-for-profit sectors. The private sector has played a vital role in developing and implementing measures to enhance online safety for women. Many technology companies have implemented policies, tools and reporting mechanisms to combat online harassment and abuse.[8] Collaborations between civil society organisations, technology companies and governments have resulted in initiatives aimed at addressing online violence and promoting digital security for women. Effective strategies include raising awareness about online violence, providing digital literacy and security training, fostering stronger online community norms, and advocating policies that protect individuals from cyber threats and harassment.[9]

6. Kerry H. Robinson, Cris Townley, Jacqueline Ullman, Nida Denson, Cristyn Davies, Peter Bansel, Michael Atkinson, and Sarah Lambert, 'Advancing LGBTQ+ Safety and Inclusion: Understanding the Lived Experiences and Health Needs of Sexuality and Gender Diverse People in Greater Western Sydney (Penrith: Western Sydney University & ACON, 2020).

7. Lucas Ramon Mendos, Kellyn Botha, Rafael Carrano Lelis, Enrique López de la Peña, Ilia Savelev, and Daron Tan, *State Sponsored Homophobia 2020: Global Legislation Overview Update* (Geneva: ILGA, 2020).

8. 'Microsoft Responsible AI Standard Reference Guide', Microsoft Corporation, December 2022, https://query.prod.cms.rt.microsoft.com/cms/api/am/binary/RE5dlCb.

9. Wookjae Maeng and Joonhwan Lee, 'Designing a Chatbot for Survivors of Sexual Violence: Exploratory Study for Hybrid Approach Combining Rule-Based Chatbot and ML-based Chatbot', in *Asian CHI Symposium 2021* (conference proceedings) (New York: Association for Computing Machinery, 160–66). Available at https://doi.org/10.1145/3429360.3468203; 'Digital Safety: Internet Shutdowns', Committee to Protect Journalists, 13 April 2021, https://cpj.org/2021/04/digital-safety-internet-shutdowns.

IMPLEMENTING THE WPS AGENDA WITHIN NATO

Integration, inclusion and integrity are the three principles that guide NATO's approach to the WPS agenda.[10] NATO has integrated gender perspectives into its planning and operations to address inequality 'through the Alliance's three core tasks of deterrence and defence, crisis prevention and management, and cooperative security'.[11] Improving representation of women and their participation in all tasks includes 'improving gender balance in NATO's civilian and military structures and encouraging Allies and partners to do the same'. Integrity requires that NATO address inequalities and includes designing policies such as NATO's Policy on Preventing and Responding to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (2019) to reflect current standards, as well as measures to prevent and respond to sexual harassment.[12] As a partner, Australia can learn from NATO's past and present experiences in adopting the WPS agenda.

The importance of the WPS agenda can be seen in the expanded range of security and humanitarian activities NATO has conducted over the past few decades. NATO's peacekeeping and security operations take place in complex and fluid environments, which often endure for several decades, making it difficult to predict the outcome or stability of the situation. Afghanistan is a case in point. The US-led overthrow of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan commenced in October 2001 and was succeeded by NATO's state-building and security mission, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) from August 2003 to December 2014, which provided military security, education infrastructure development and health services across Afghanistan's four military sectors. NATO's successor non-combat mission (Resolute Support) provided logistical support and training for the Afghan National Army from 2015 as Allied forces scaled down toward an end of the Western presence in mid-2021. The case of Afghanistan demonstrates that state-building is highly complex. Even 'robust' peacekeeping operations may encounter resistance from local populations, making it difficult to permanently establish stability and security. In the case of Afghanistan, multiple NATO members and other states, including Australia, were involved in the mission over time. Ultimately, the orchestrated withdrawal of Western forces in August 2021 permitted the return to power of the Taliban. Despite promises to respect women's rights, renewed discrimination against women has ensued, especially in education.

NATO's mission in Iraq is the first to integrate a gender perspective into every stage from initial implementation and has had a female commander, a Canadian, since December 2019. Over the past 20 years, women in senior decision-making roles within NATO have increased by 11 per cent. Listening to women affected by conflict is integral to advancing WPS. For example, NATO created space for Afghan women leaders to discuss issues affecting them, while women ambassadors in the African Union helped to convey the experiences of Somali women caught up in conflict, as well as those of Sudanese and South Sudanese women.

The challenges of implementation are, however, complex, and the pace of change is often slow. In 2012 the NATO Secretary General appointed the first Special Representative for Women Peace and Security. In 2019, the Special Representative, Clare Hutchinson, noted that while there had been some progress, much more needed to be done to 'turn our words into actions'.

In October 2021, NATO defence ministers endorsed the NATO 2021–2025 Action Plan on WPS.[13] It supports the commitment by Allies to further advancing gender equality and integrating gender perspectives into all that NATO does, and some 25 NATO partner countries have now associated themselves with the WPS action plan. In October 2022, the incoming NATO Special Representative for Women, Peace and Security, Irene Fellin, noted the development of the NATO strategic concept that for the first time integrated Human Security and Women, Peace and Security into NATO's core tasks. NATO's efforts to institutionalise gender-based protections are continued in its work on a manual on gender-inclusive language.[14]

Australia can learn from NATO's past and present experiences. As a valuable, capable and reliable NATO partner, it is in Australia's interest to try to develop best practice with respect to implementing the WPS agenda.

10. 'Women, Peace and Security', North Atlantic Treaty Organization, last updated 17 April 2023, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_91091.htm.

11. 'Women, Peace and Security'.

12. 'Women, Peace and Security'.

13. 'Action Plan'.

14. 'Women, Peace and Security'.

AUSTRALIAN SUPPORT FOR THE WPS AGENDA

Australia is a signatory to most international human rights conventions and supports two key WPS funds, contributing AUD$11 million to the WPS Global Facility between 2015–2022, and AUD$5.25 million to the Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund from 2016.[15] From 2011, Australia made an appointment to the position of Ambassador for Women and Girls, which, from December 2022, was changed to Ambassador for Gender Equality.[16] The last Ambassador for Women and Girls, Christine Clarke CSC, held the position throughout 2022.

National Action Plans (NAPs) play a critical role in translating commitments to UNSCR 1325 on WPS into concrete action. NAPs outline the domestic and/or foreign course of policy of a state to meet the WPS objectives. In March 2012, Australia adopted its first National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security, which was some six years after NATO members Denmark, Sweden, Norway and the United Kingdom launched their plans (all between 2005 and 2006).

The first Australian National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security set out the Australian Government's long-term strategy to realise gender equality and human rights of women and girls in fragile and conflict-affected contexts. It was adopted for the period

2012–2018 and was launched on 8 March 2012, International Women's Day. Australia's first NAP was developed by the Australian Government Office for Women, which convened the Women, Peace and Security Inter-Departmental Working Group and undertook extensive civil-society consultation. The NAP provided a suite of strategies to achieve better outcomes for women and girls across the five thematic areas, including 'supporting civil society organisations to promote equality and increase women's participation in conflict prevention, peace-building, conflict resolution and relief and recovery'.[17] Notably, the NAP was viewed as an outward-looking document that sought to integrate gender perspectives into Australian offshore aid and humanitarian activity, but it did not do the same for gender issues within Australia, such as gender-based violence, especially domestic violence and sexual assault. A 2018 review made 25 recommendations for improvement, including providing budgetary resources to enable implementation of the WPS agenda; better coordination of initiatives within government; greater consultation between government and civil society; and greater accountability.[18]

Australia's second NAP was developed following the tabling of recommendations from two independent reviews, national consultations conducted by government and civil society, and WPS research and evidence. The document was released in April 2021 and aims to articulate, under several separate

strategies, plans and commitments to support women's economic security and leadership aspirations, and to ensure women and children are safe from violence. It was developed in response to a changing global context, where new challenges, including climate change and health pandemics, contribute to fragility and conflict. The NAP applies to both Australia's domestic and international efforts and will govern Australia's approach to WPS from 2021 to 2031.[19]

Australia's second NAP is based on four objectives that aim to

→ provide support for women and girls' meaningful participation and needs in peace processes;

→ reduce sexual and gender-based violence;

→ support resilience, crisis and security, law and justice efforts to meet the needs and rights of all women and girls; and

→ demonstrate leadership and accountability for Women, Peace and Security.[20]

Australia's second NAP will be implemented by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Department of Defence, Department of Home Affairs, Australia's Federal Police, and the Australian Civil-Military Centre.

In a broad sense, Australia supports aims of peace, justice and gender equality through its international activities as a member of the United Nations, and through its global and

15. 'Australia's International Support for Gender Equality: Women, Peace & Security', Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, accessed 30 July 2023, https://www.dfat.gov.au/international-relations/themes/gender-equality/Australias-international-support-for-gender-equality#WPS.

16. Penny Wong, 'Ambassador for Gender Equality', media release, 20 December 2022, https://www.foreignminister.gov.au/minister/penny-wong/media-release/ambassador-gender-equality.

17. Charles Hawksley and Nichole Georgeou, 'Issues in Australian Foreign Policy July to December 2012', *Australian Journal of Politics & History 59 (2013): 260–75.*

18. Commonwealth of Australia, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Final Independent Review of the National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2012–2018*, 24 October 2018, https://www.pmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/resource/download/independent-review-of-the-NAP-on-women-peace-and-security.pdf.

19. Australian Government, *Australian National Action Plan on Women Peace and Security, 2021–2031*, accessed 30 July 2023, https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/australias-national-action-plan-on-women-peace-and-security-2021-2031.pdf, pp. 6, 11.

20. Australian Government, *Australian National Action Plan,* 10.

regional alliances. Australia was a founding member of the United Nations in 1945 and has since been involved in numerous UN peacekeeping operations around the world, deploying troops, police and military advisers as part of its obligations to collective security.[21] Australia has five times been a member of the UN Security Council (1946–47, 1956–57, 1973–74, 1985–86 and 2013–2014) and is bidding for one of the non-permanent member vacancies in 2029.[22] Between 2001 and 2021, as part of its wider role in ensuring global security, Australia supported the US and NATO military and state-building missions in Afghanistan, which aimed to stabilise the state and improve the lives of women through improved security, health and education services.[23] As a 'partner across the globe', Australia is often invited to participate in NATO meetings, most recently – along with Japan, South Korea and New Zealand – in discussions in Madrid in June 2022 on the security of the Asia Pacific.[24]

As a Pacific middle power, Australia led the Pacific Islands Forum response to ending conflict in Solomon Islands through the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) from 2003 to 2017, playing a vital role in restoring the rule of law, rebuilding trust in the police, developing infrastructure and strengthening democratic processes.

The RAMSI mission played a strong advocacy role for the rights of women, funding public programs against gender violence, training police recruits in gender issues and lending official support to 16 days of activist marches against gender violence.[25]

As a major contributor to international development assistance, Australia has made gender and disability a cornerstone of its aid policies, and all aid programs must now demonstrate how both of these issues are addressed. Australia has also provided humanitarian assistance to regional neighbours, including, among others, Tonga in 2022 following the Hunga Tonga-Hunga Ha'apai Volcanic Eruption and Tsunami Disaster; Papua New Guinea in 2018 following the 7.5 magnitude earthquake in the Southern Highlands; Vanuatu in 2015 following the destruction wrought by Cyclone Pam; and to Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Maldives and Seychelles following the devastating Indian Ocean Tsunami of 2004.[26]

Much remains to be done within Australia to increase the safety of women from sexual and gender-based violence and to improve female representation in Australian institutions such as parliament, the police services and the armed forces. Increasingly, public events such

as the March for Justice (14–15 March 2021), which involved around 40 separate gatherings, have united women and men in demanding a fairer society. The May 2022 Federal election also showed Australian women are no longer prepared to tolerate continued unequal treatment.[27]

As Australia aims to contribute to furthering the progress of WPS globally and commits to implementing the WPS agenda in the Indo-Pacific region and at home, its own struggles with human rights must be confronted. Speaking with authority on the importance of human rights in other parts of the world remains a challenge when such rights are not enjoyed by all in Australia. As Australia tries to reckon with the legacy of its violent colonial history, its dispossession of First Nations peoples, its record of inaction on gender violence and inequality, and its internationally condemned policies on refugees and asylum seekers, it is hoped that political leadership will respond with deeds and not just words.

21.   'Australians and Peacekeeping', Australian War Memorial, last updated 19 July 2023, https://www.awm.gov.au/articles/peacekeeping.

22.   Alex Oliver, 'Australia Makes Another Tilt at the UN Security Council', *The Interpreter*, 30 September 2015, https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/australia-makes-another-tilt-un-security-council.

23.   John R. Allen and Vanda Felbab-Brown, 'The Fate of Women's Rights in Afghanistan', The Brookings Institution, September 2020, https://www.brookings.edu/essay/the-fate-of-womens-rights-in-afghanistan/.

24.   Anthony Albanese, 'Doorstop Interview – Madrid, Spain', 29 June 2022, https://www.pm.gov.au/media/doorstop-interview-madrid-spain-1.

25.   Charles Hawksley and Nichole Georgeou, (2015). Transitional Justice as Police-Building in Solomon Islands: Tensions of State-Building and Implications for Gender. In: Szablewska, N., Bachmann, SD. (eds) Current Issues in Transitional Justice. Springer Series in Transitional Justice, vol 4. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-09390-1_6

26.   Marise Payne, 'Further Australian Support for Tonga', media release, 9 April 2022, https://www.foreignminister.gov.au/minister/marise-payne/media-release/further-australian-support-tonga; 'Papua New Guinea Earthquake', Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, accessed 30 July 2023, https://www.dfat.gov.au/crisis-hub/papua-new-guinea-earthquake; 'Australian Support to Vanuatu Following Tropical Cyclone Pam – Fact Sheet', Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, accessed 30 July 2023, https://www.dfat.gov.au/about-us/publications/Pages/australian-support-to-vanuatu-following-tropical-cyclone-pam-fact-sheet; Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australia's Response to the Indian Ocean Tsunami: Report for the Period Ending 30 June 2005, 2005, https://www.dfat.gov.au/about-us/publications/Pages/australia-s-response-to-the-indian-ocean-tsunami-report-for-the-period-ending-30-june-2005.

27.   'Women 7–10 Percentage Points Less Likely to Vote Coalition: Analysis', The Australia Institute, 11 July 2022, https://australiainstitute.org.au/post/women-7-10-percentage-points-less-likely-to-vote-coalition-analysis/.

EXPANDING THE WPS AGENDA: GENERAL POINTS

It is well known that women and girls suffer disproportionately in conflict zones due to gender-based violence, household responsibilities and limited rights. These factors can lead to displacement, poverty and lack of access to healthcare and education. Militarisation is a significant driver of violence and insecurity throughout the world and fuels both sexual and gender-based violence and armed conflict. Global military expenditure is increasing, reaching US$2.1 trillion in 2021, after seven consecutive years of increases.[28]

Despite the increase in data on violence against women in the past decade,[29] there is still a lack of information on the nature, prevalence and incidence of different types of violence against women, which is also underreported. The extent and severity of gender-based violence is thus not well understood, which prevents the development of effective policies and programs to address the issue.[30] This lack of data and communication also leads to a lack of visibility for marginalised communities and missed opportunities to build capacity not just for women and girls but for their families as well.

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the gendered dimensions of inequality as it deepened pre-existing inequalities, disproportionally impacting women and girls,[31] and elucidated the link between sex and gender inequality and risk of harm.[32] For example, women were overrepresented in frontline essential-worker positions, putting them at higher risk of exposure to the virus. The pandemic exacerbated existing gender inequalities, including unequal division of household labour and caregiving responsibilities, which intensified with school closures and increased needs of household members. Lockdowns and movement restrictions led to an increase in gender-based violence. Women faced economic challenges with a higher likelihood of losing their jobs or experiencing reduced income, while health-system disruptions limited women's access to sexual and reproductive health services. In conflict contexts, conflict-related sexual violence against women and girls increased,[33] and there was a decrease in women's meaningful participation in peace processes from 23 per cent in 2020 to 19 per cent in 2021.[34]

The human rights framework articulated by the UN reflects its Eurocentric origins and is often perceived in the Global South to represent neo-imperialism due to its inconsistent and selective application.[35] With respect to the goal of gender equality, the discussion has, to some extent, been dominated by Western feminist approaches, which have historically reflected issues affecting affluent, White, cis-gender women living in the West (for example, the demand for equal pay by professional women living in countries in the Global North that exploit the labour of women living in the Global South) and neglected the concerns of trans- and cis-women from different socioeconomic, cultural and geographical contexts.

National Action Plans on Women, Peace and Security have been adopted by 105 countries – over half the UN member states – yet of these NAPs, less than one third had any budget attached and 33 per cent expired in 2021 or before.[36] This slow and halting response suggest a concerning lack of political will to implement Resolution 1325.

28.　'World Military Expenditure Passes $2 Trillion for First Time', Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 25 April 2022,　https://www.sipri.org/media/press-release/2022/world-military-expenditure-passes-2-trillion-first-time.

29.　'Violence against Women and Girls – What the Data Tell Us', World Bank, 1 October 2022, https://genderdata.worldbank.org/data-stories/overview-of-gender-based-violence/.

30.　UN Division for the Advancement of Women, *Violence against Women: A Statistical Overview, Challenges and Gaps in Data Collection and Methodology and Approaches for Overcoming Them*, accessed 30 July 2023, https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/vaw-stat-2005/docs/final-report-vaw-stats.pdf.

31.　United Nations, Policy Brief: The Impact of COVID-19 on Women, 9 April 2020, https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/report/policy-brief-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-women/policy-brief-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-women-en-1.pdf.

32.　Dara K. Cohen and Sabrina Karim, 'Does More Equality for Women Mean Less War? Rethinking Sex and Gender Inequality and Political Violence', *International Organization* 76, no. 2 (2022): 414–44.

33.　Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, *Conflict-Related Sexual Violence: A Report of the United Nations Secretary-General,* 29 March 2022, https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/auto-draft/SG-Report2021for-web.pdf.

34.　'Facts and Figures: Women, Peace and Security', UN Women, updated 14 October 2022, https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/peace-and-security/facts-and-figures.

35.　Hakimeh Saghaye-Biria, 'Decolonizing the "Universal" Human Rights Regime: Questioning American Exceptionalism and Orientalism', *ReOrient* 4, no. 1 (2018): 60.

36.　'National Action Plans at a Glance', Women's International League for Peace & Freedom, accessed 30 July 2023, https://1325naps.peacewomen.org/.
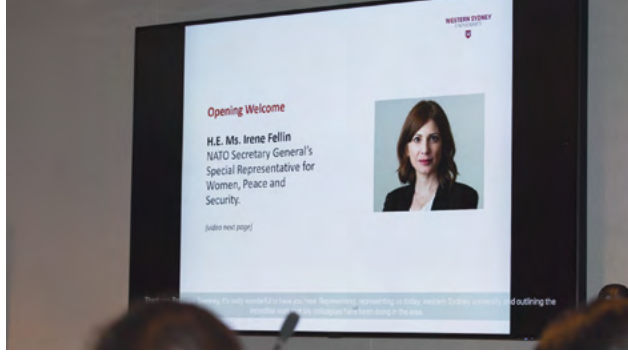
FOUR AREAS OF INCLUSION

GENDER AND SEXUAL DIVERSITY

→ Contemporary young people are more likely than previous generations to reject the traditional binary structure of gender to embrace fluidity and diversity. In order to build this new paradigm into the objective of gender equality, it is crucial to work closely and collaboratively with gender-diverse young people. As Christine Clark, Australia's Ambassador for Women and Girls throughout 2022, has pointed out, 'There is strength and wisdom in collaboration.' Co-designing programs with young people is core to this collaboration.

→ Contractors delivering government services currently have no accountability to the state in terms of addressing diversity in service provision. Tighter oversight of government contracts will lead to more inclusive service provision, addressing the concerns of diverse clients, including those who have a disability and those who are LGBTIQ+.

→ Education and sensitive discussion about gender diversity, gender- and sexuality-based violence, and gender equality are crucial. Digital access and online forums can provide a safe space for these conversations.

→ The WPS foundational lens on militarism and conflict deals only with negative peace, and is thus problematic for women and girls, and for LGBTIQ+ people, as it obfuscates the fact that violence against women also occurs in peaceful contexts. A more inclusive and gender responsive framework would be more productive moving forward.

→ The definition of 'violence' needs to be culturally specific: that is, we must understand what violence means for multiple people in multiple contexts. The definition cannot only be about physical or mental violence; it must also encompass economic violence and coercive control.

DISABILITY

→ Segregated institutions, housing and special assistance units make women and girls with disability particularly vulnerable in conflict and post-conflict transitional environments due to the ease with which they may be identified.

→ Disability services in conflict and transitional settings are too frequently inaccessible, removed from public view and positioned in isolated places. High levels of invisibility through the removal from public view and oversight dramatically increases disabled women's exposure to violence, abuse, exploitation and neglect, in addition to increasing the intensity, prevalence and frequency of the violence.

→ Different impairment types, such as mobility impairments, can increase women and girls' susceptibility to violence, abuse and exploitation as they are physically unable to escape approaching forces; for example, recent cases have been identified in the context of the Ukrainian war.

→ Social discrimination on the basis of both disability and gender means that often women and girls with disability are less likely to be protected in conflict zones as they are less valued and seen as unable to make a contribution on military, civil or political grounds. UNSCR 1325 was established to support women and girls to change the social norms that increase gendered vulnerabilities in areas of conflict. Moreover, in recognition of the increased vulnerability of women and girls with disabilities, there is now a greater effort to include disability in the wider WPS agenda.

→ The WPS agenda has expanded to include UNSCR 2475, which aims to demonstrate the relationship between interpersonal violence and systematic, institutionalised forms of violence and inequality. In addition to conflict zones and transitional landscapes, women and girls with disabilities remain at heightened risk of violence, abuse, exploitation and neglect in situations of ongoing uncertainty and insecurity – for example, as refugees displaced by climate disaster.

→ Many governments, including Australia, place certain interpretations on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Articles 12, 17 and 18 in particular) that should be excluded. Article 17 states that 'every person with disabilities has a right to respect for his or her physical and mental integrity on an equal basis with others'. There is, however, a specific interpretation around this clause. For example, in Australia Article 17 is understood as applying at the intersection of criminal justice and disability, and many people with intellectual disability or psychosocial disability of some kind, can be incarcerated indefinitely without trial, seemingly in opposition to the intent of the clause. Instead, people with disability can exist in a kind of grey zone of remand, and they never move in nor out of the justice system. Article 18 concerns the right to mobility, which includes crossing borders. This means that if a Medical Officer of the Commonwealth (MOC) determines a hypothetical person with the same condition as the applicant could need access to $40,000 or more worth of medical and community services — whether or not the applicant will actually use them — they will not pass the health requirement. Increasingly, refugees with disabilities are coming into Australia, but the number is still very small and they are categorised as physical acquired disability, not necessarily congenital disability. Current interpretations of these clauses mean that many people with disabilities from the Indo-Pacific region would not be able to enter Australia as refugees.

EDUCATION

→ Both during and after conflict, women and girls consistently experience multiple disadvantages that affect their education. Women are already the cohort most vulnerable to gender-based violence in the domestic sphere, and conflict situations often disrupt girls' schooling. The closure of schools during conflict denies education to girls, a change that has life-long effects on their learning by denying them exposure to new ideas, vocational training and later employment prospects.

→ Education begins at home with teaching tolerance and respect at the youngest ages to children to inculcate respect for everyone—within the family, the workplace, people on the street, people with different education levels—and empathy for each other.

→ The importance of education for women and girls was formally recognized in the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 2, Achieve Universal Primary Education, which had as its objective "ensure that by 2015, children everywhere— boys and girls alike—will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling".[37] Education at primary school provides basic literacy and numeracy. These are essential skills in any society and for both boys and girls, but for girls they provide pathways to learning in situations where a family's resources toward education can often be devoted to sons over daughters.

→ At the close of 2015 the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 2, Achieve Universal Primary Education had made strong progress. In 2000, globally there were an estimated 100 million primary school-aged children who were not attending school, but by 2015 this had fallen to an estimated 57 million. By 2015 there were strong gains in South Asia, where in 1990 only 74 girls were enrolled in primary school for every 100 boys, but by 2015 there were 103 girls enrolled for every 100 boys.[38]

→ The importance of education is also recognised in United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 Quality Education, which aims to "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all."[39] Education of women and girls is vital in all societies as it empowers women to speak up and contribute to peacebuilding in meaningful ways. Education can enable gender mainstreaming that can deliver peace and security. With restrictions back in place on education for women in Afghanistan since the return of the Taliban to power in August 2021, it is important to remember the links between education, better health and improved economic outlooks that contribute to peace.

→ Improving the number of girls completing secondary education however remains complex, as social expectations within patriarchal societies lead to young girls playing supporting roles in the household, in caring, and in gathering food and firewood, as well as often marring at a relatively early age and having children of their own.

→ With respect to tertiary education, a British Council report of 2022 notes that raw numbers of women and men in education are not great indicators of gender inequality, and that a wider intersectional approach is required to fully understand the roots of the inequality that exists.[40]

→ Universities can play a key role in devising strategies to combat discrimination, and to creating open pathways for education for women, as well as for creating a climate of acceptance for LGBTIQ+ students. In the case of refugee women who want to access scholarships for university education, universities often do not take a holistic approach to their needs. States need to ask how their universities can contribute to scaling up the refugee assistance programs that are currently in place, and how this can articulate with the needs of refugees, for example through scholarships or bursaries.

→ Universities need to have a holistic approach to WPS because people of refugee backgrounds have a variety of complex legal, childcare and workplace issues. There is also an opportunity to do vocational training, thus a holistic view and approach of WPS and resettlement is essential.

→ Education is not however only about formal learning institutions; it is above all a social experience. In the educational realm, we are not yet fully utilizing the opportunities to learn from communities about themselves and their needs. There is room for further engagement when bringing communities into our educational spaces, including them in the co-design of curricula and training to provide the appropriate educational content to ensure sufficient engagement.

37. Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 2, Achieve Universal Primary Education, p. 127.

38. https://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/2015_MDG_Report/pdf/MDG%202015%20rev%20(July%201).pdf, p. 4

39. United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 Quality Education, https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2017/goal-04/

40. Helen Mott, 'Gender equality in higher education: maximising impacts', British Council Report 2022, https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/gender_equality_in_higher_education_report.pdf, p 21.

→ Finally, as UN Women notes, while gender advice is now frequently sought by governments for portfolios that affect women, it is often excluded from non-traditional areas, for example, the role of gender in insurance, climate change or disaster risk reduction.[41] Governments need to develop strategies for fully integrated and holistic understandings of gender to remove such barriers.

TECHNOLOGY

→ Advances in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) present both opportunities and threats. There are many applications of technology that can assist in the generation of knowledge about and reportage of gender-based violence against women and girls. Chatbots are helping to remove gender bias, and data generated is screened to prevent misinformation. For example, #MeTooMaastricht extracted information from social media posts to help survivors, assuming that they had shared their experiences in detail.[42] Spot tracked workplace harassment and organised the experiences into formal reports.[43] Lawbot provided options for handling sexual offenses.[44] In particular, eyewitness software is a widely used tool for reporting atrocities and offering live support to victims of gender-based violence in conflict zones.[45]

→ However, the past 5–10 years have also seen technology-induced sociopolitical crises, including the use of ICTs and social media to spread misinformation, undermine social cohesion, and reinforce authoritarian propaganda and surveillance.[46] This raises serious ethical concerns, particularly regarding gender and the surveillance of female and LGBTIQ+ activists living under autocratic regimes that mandate heterosexuality and place heavy restrictions on female participation in education and public life. It is noted that ICT initiatives often overlook power dynamics that uphold social and gender inequality. This oversight not only hampers the potential for technology to empower individuals but also contributes to online gender-based violence. Addressing this issue requires re-evaluating and resisting power dynamics within sociotechnical systems that exclude women and minority groups. It also necessitates shifting the responsibility for combating gender-based violence to companies and governments, as they play crucial roles in supporting mechanisms against this violence.[47]

→ Recent advancements in Artificial Intelligence (AI) and the use of generative pre-trained models, such as the GPT class of models developed by OpenAI,[48] power a growing number of everyday digital services from search engines (Google Search, Microsoft Bing) to smart assistants (Amazon Alexa, Apple Siri) and email auto-completion (Microsoft Out- look, Gmail). However, AI technology further amplifies gender-equity concerns as biased design and datasets not only perpetuate gender stereotypes over time (as evident in chatbot-training datasets) but also exacerbate the most extreme forms of discrimination, widening the gap between technology controllers and target users, and those excluded.[49]

In addition to the above challenges, the use of technology raises concerns over anonymity, privacy and security, given its capacity to reach a global audience. Anonymity online for women and girls seeking help from within conflict zones is especially complicated. Establishing a bank account can also be problematic for women, but online apps can assist women to maintain financial independence. Based on data from the Global Financial Inclusion Database 2014 in the period 2011–14, women worldwide were about 8 per cent less likely

41.   UN Women, *Guidance Note: Gender Analysis In Non-Traditional Sectors: Climate And Disaster Risk Finance And Insurance*, June 2022, https://wrd.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-07/Gender-analysis-in-non-traditional-sectors-en.pdf, p. 21.

42.   Tobias Bauer, Emre Devrim, Misha Glazunov, William Lopez Jaramillo, Balaganesh Mohan, and Gerasimos Spanakis, '#MeTooMaastricht: Building a Chatbot to Assist Survivors of Sexual Harassment', in *Machine Learning and Knowledge Discovery* in Databases, ed. Peggy Cellier and Kurt Driessens (Cham: Springer, 2020).

43.   Parmy Olson, 'This Chatbot Is Helping People Track Harassment at Work', *Forbes*, 2 March 2018, https://www.forbes.com/sites/parmyolson/2018/03/02/chatbot-spot-sexual-harassment-ai/.

44.   Robert Ambrogi, 'Chatbot Helps Crime Victims Gauge Their Legal Options', *LawSites* (blog), 9 December 2016, https://www.lawsitesblog.com/2016/12/chatbot-helps-crime-victims-guage-legal-options.html.

45.   eyeWitness, https://www.eyewitness.global.

46.   Melissa Zimdars and Kembrew Mcleod, *Fake News: Understanding Media and Misinformation in the Digital Age* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2020).

47.   Philippe Doneys, Kyoko Kusakabe, Evelyn F. Wamboye, Rebecca Elmhirst, Arul Chib, and Joyee Shairee Chatterjee, 'Gender, Technology and Development: Reflections on the Past, and Provocations for the Future', *Gender, Technology and Development* 26, no. 3 (2022): 285–94.

48.   Alec Radford, Jeffrey Wu, Rewon Child, David Luan, Dario Amodei, and Ilya Sutskever, 'Language Models Are Unsupervised Multitask Learners', OpenAI blog 1.8 (2019): 9; OpenAI, https://openai.com.

49.   Doneys et al., 'Gender, Technology and Development'.

than men to own a formal bank account. In 2014, only about 25 per cent of African women aged 15 and above had access to a formal financial account, as compared with almost 33 per cent of men.[50] 'Mobile money' presents a useful way to make financial transactions from SIM card to SIM card. For many people with no bank account, 'mobile money accounts' can be a way to bring more women into the global economy through digital financial services.[51]

→ The regulation of social media in Australia, in particular, is relatively loose, which has implications for privacy and anonymity online. Unlike some countries with stricter regulations, such as the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), Australia has not implemented comprehensive privacy laws specifically targeting social media platforms. As a result, individuals using social media platforms in Australia, even if they have private profiles, may have limited privacy or anonymity. The platforms themselves collect vast amounts of user data, including personal information, browsing habits and interactions, which can

be used for targeted advertising and other purposes. Additionally, there is a possibility that this data could be accessed by third parties or exploited in ways that compromise privacy.[52]

→ Finally, internet shutdowns remain a favoured tactic of governments to push back against mass demonstrations, entrench military coups or cut off conflict areas from the rest of the world. Authorities in Myanmar, Cuba, Sudan, Chad, Ethiopia, India and Iran have throttled online access, blocked service providers and carried out full network disruptions in recent years.[53] Various tools are available to citizens in regions of conflict for bypassing internet censorship and maintaining communication during shutdowns, including Virtual Private Networks (VPNs) that provide access to blocked sites using proxy servers.[54] Users can download popular free VPNs, such as programs developed by TunnelBear and Psiphon, from app stores, directly from product websites, or through Android application packages (APK files) sent by

email or messaging apps like Telegram and Signal.[55] In addition, private servers like Outline that enable users to create and share servers worldwide can be used in conjunction with networks like Bridgefy that allow devices to communicate in proximity without internet or SMS services. Creative options such as SMSWithoutBorders allow users to post on social media.[56] Nahoft was favoured during the Internet blackout in Iran in November 2019 for bypassing keyword-based blocking,[57] while VPNs and Outline servers facilitated the #womanlifefreedom protests when the Iranian government sought to restrict internet access in late 2022.[58] Serverless circumvention tools like Intra, GoodbyeDPI,[59] Green Tunnel and Geneva can regain access to blocked websites,[60] while secure browsers like Tor Browser offer anonymity and can bypass censorship to some extent, although determined governments can still block them by shutting down entry relays.[61]

50. Asli Demirgüç-Kunt, Leora F. Klapper, Dorothe Singer, and Peter van Oudheusden, 'The Global Findex Database 2014: Measuring Financial Inclusion around the World' (World Bank Policy Research Working Paper No. 7255, 15 April 2015), https://ssrn.com/abstract=2594973.

51. OECD, *Bridging the Digital Gender Divide: Include, Upskill, Innovate*, 2018, https://www.oecd.org/digital/bridging-the-digital-gender-divide.pdf.

52. 'Social Media and Online Privacy: A Guide for Australian Businesses', Office of the Australian Information Commissioner, accessed 30 July 2023, https://www.oaic.gov.au/privacy/your-privacy-rights/social-media-and-online-privacy.

53. Steven Feldstein, 'Government Internet Shutdowns Are Changing. How Should Citizens and Democracies Respond?', Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 31 March 2022, https://carnegieendowment.org/2022/03/31/government-internet-shutdowns-are-changing.-how-should-citizens-and-democracies-respond-pub-86687.

54. 'Surveillance Self-Defense: Choosing the VPN That's Right for You', Electronic Frontier Foundation, last reviewed 7 July 2023, https://ssd.eff.org/en/module/choosing-vpn-thats-right-you.

55. 'Digital Safety: Internet Shutdowns', Committee to Protect Journalists, 13 April 2021, https://cpj.org/2021/04/digital-safety-internet-shutdowns.

56. SMSWithoutBorders, https://smswithoutborders.com.

57. Lily Hay Newman, 'A New App Helps Iranians Hide Messages in Plain Sight', *Wired*, 17 September 2021, https://www.wired.com/story/nahoft-iran-messaging-encryption-app.

58. Deniz Kılıç and Aisling Ní Chúláin, 'How Iranians Are Hopping between VPNs to Stay Connected and Break through Internet Censorship', *Euronews.next,* 28 April 2023, https://www.euronews.com/next/2022/11/06/iran-protests-vpn-use-soars-as-citizens-seek-way-around-internet-censorship.

59. 'GoodbyeDPI', Open Technology Fund, accessed 30 July 2023, https://www.opentech.fund/results/supported-projects/goodbyedpi.

60. University of Maryland, 'New Artificial Intelligence System Automatically Evolves to Evade Internet Censorship', *ScienceDaily*, 13 November 2019, www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2019/11/191113124822.htm.

61. mrphs, 'Breaking Through Censorship Barriers, Even When Tor Is Blocked', *Tor Blog*, 3 August 2016, https://blog.torproject.org/breaking-through-censorship-barriers-even-when-tor-blocked/.

RECOMMENDATIONS

ACKNOWLEDGE THE STRUCTURAL DIMENSIONS OF VIOLENCE

→ **Keep the focus on structural inequality**
While it is crucial to understand the prevalence, incidence and impacts of violence on people's everyday lives, any gendered analysis must be attuned to the specific, and often intimate, ways in which women as a social group experience and are exposed to violence as a consequence of structural gender inequality.

→ **Pay attention to institutional violence**
Violence is not only physical but also institutional. Institutional exclusion (for example, from education and healthcare) and punishment (for example, through police and prisons) are forms of state-based violence that disproportionately affect socially marginalised populations, including women and girls. Trans people, too, frequently feel unsafe in public spaces and when accessing services (especially medical). These are forms of violence that are not often acknowledged.

→ **Involve men in conversations about preventing gender-based violence and promoting gender equality**
It is crucial to acknowledge that men are primarily responsible for perpetrating violence against women, and that gender-based violence affects women of all classes and educational backgrounds. However, men can act as valuable allies in the fight against gender-based violence, and society as a whole must work together to eliminate this issue.

PRIORITISE INTERSECTIONAL APPROACHES

→ **Adopt an intersectional approach to the WPS agenda, taking into account factors such as gender, sexuality, disability, class, age and ethnicity, in the pursuit of political and economic equality, peace and justice**
An intersectional approach is crucial for identifying and addressing power imbalances and inequalities that cross-cut the social organisation of gender. By recognising and addressing the complex interplay between these factors, we can work towards a more equitable and just society for all individuals, particularly the most vulnerable groups of women and girls who live in poverty, have a disability, or belong to an ethnic minority.

→ **Adopt a decolonising approach to gender**
A decolonising approach to gender is one that is respectful of cultural differences in understandings of gender among Indigenous populations living in postcolonial nation states and territories colonised by European imperial powers, particularly since the 19th century. Doing 'gender work' in such contexts requires recognising that practices and perspectives of gender among colonised peoples and local communities may vary greatly from the traditional Western construct of binary gender. There needs to be a shift away from a heteronormative, binary understanding of gender to one that embraces gender fluidity and diversity to protect vulnerable people.

→ **Expand the WPS agenda to include the human rights of people with diverse sexual and gender identities**
To fully address racism, sexism, transphobia, homophobia, ableism and ageism, the WPS agenda must be expanded to include the human rights of people with diverse sexual and gender identities. This requires the inclusion of broader perspectives of LGBTIQ+ and disability in the WPS agenda. A collective and inclusive approach is necessary at both local and global levels.

→ **Fund research targeting queer, trans and nonbinary youth in different Indo-Pacific states**
These young people are rarely provided the means or support to advocate for themselves. Targeted funding for young people's skill development to enable them to undertake advocacy work in their own communities needs to come from wealthy countries. Funding will assist young queer activists to build a political platform for self-expression and to challenge the cultural prejudices that lead to violence against queer-, trans-, and nonbinary-identifying girls and young women.

→ **Australia, as a multicultural society, should leverage the skills, knowledge, experience and networks of its diverse population to increase awareness of the WPS agenda**
This effort would improve operational effectiveness and help to address issues faced by the military in the field. Globally there is a lack of resources to implement the WPS agenda—for example, taking action against gender-based violence; increasing women's participation in peacekeeping; preventing sexual exploitation and abuse by experts on mission, military and police personnel. By promoting awareness of these issues and leveraging the expertise of its diverse population, Australia can better understand the context of conflict, address these challenges and promote gender equality and security in conflict-affected areas.

WORK WITH WOMEN TO DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT PEACE AND SECURITY POLICIES

→ **Allocate funding to promote the inclusion of women in decision making and problem solving**

For policymakers to address common threats like cybercrime, violent extremism and climate change, they must adopt new perspectives and actively listen to women, including those in marginalised groups. Governments must increase female political representation and seek out women's perspectives to ensure their voices are heard.

→ **Strengthen and promote female leadership**

It is important to have the participation of strong women with diverse perspectives who demonstrate professionalism and expertise on issues that affect their respective states. The conversation needs to shift from being *about* women to being engaged *with* women who are actively working on the ground in conflict zones and transitional landscapes.

→ **Support women in traditionally male-dominated roles**

There is a need to better support women in male-dominated roles, especially those who are the first to occupy such positions in their communities. It is important to understand how to assist women in achieving their goals and provide the necessary support to alleviate the burden they face.

→ **Develop clear criteria for the inclusion of women and girls in peace making and peace building**

There is a need to revisit UNSC Resolution 1325 to provide women with a platform to express their voices and share their unique stories. By doing so, we can help to ensure that women's perspectives are heard and considered in conflict-resolution efforts. Raising the voices of those with lived experiences is pivotal; it is equally important for those who have a voice to offer their platform to those who have lived experience.

ENCOURAGE FEMALE EDUCATION AND PARTICIPATION

→ Women have significant roles to play in peace-making, but in conflict-affected areas, they often face limited access to education and employment opportunities, which can hinder their participation in peace-building efforts. Therefore, it is crucial for states and tertiary institutions to provide support and resources to help women and girls access education and employment opportunities. By doing so, we can empower women to participate fully in peace-building and promote gender equality in conflict-affected areas.

→ Social education (within the home and family setting or within the community), as well as formal education (within schools, etc.) that teaches respect for women and promotes gender equity and social inclusion, are key to addressing gender-based violence.

→ Access to formal educational opportunities for women and girls in times of peace and in conflict contexts can play a critical role in addressing gender-based violence by challenging harmful gender stereotypes and norms that can lead to gender-based violence, and by changing attitudes and behaviours that contribute to gender-based violence. It can also empower individuals to make their own choices and to stand up for their rights by assisting them to develop the skills and knowledge to prevent and respond to gender-based violence.

→ Universities can play an important part in strengthening the role of women's decision making in all aspects of society by improving access to education for women and girls in conflict-afflicted areas through

» **partnering with local organisations**: Universities can partner with local organisations that work with women and girls in conflict-affected contexts. This can include NGOs, community-based organisations, and women's groups. By working collaboratively, universities can identify the specific educational needs of women and girls in context, and develop programs that meet those needs.

» **offering scholarships and financial support**: Universities can offer scholarships and financial support to women and girls from conflict-affected contexts. This can help to overcome financial barriers that may prevent them from accessing education.[62] Scholarships offered specifically for women and girls can cover tuition fees, textbooks and other education-related expenses.

» **providing flexible learning options:** Universities can provide flexible learning options that accommodate the specific needs of women and girls in conflict-affected contexts. This can involve partnering with local organisations or international NGOs to deliver quality, inclusive and safe education[63] through open-source technology, remote learning programs,[64] part-time study options, evening classes, micro-credentials, accelerated learning programs,[65] 'catch-up' courses,[66] and so on. Flexible learning options can enable women and girls who may have caregiving responsibilities or other obligations to access education.[67]

» **addressing safety concerns:** Universities must address safety concerns that may prevent women from attending campus. This can involve providing safe transportation, building safe and secure facilities, and implementing safety measures such as security personnel and emergency-response plans.[68]

» **Addressing cultural barriers**: Universities must address cultural barriers that may prevent women from attending campus. This can include engaging with community leaders and families to promote the value of education for women and girls and addressing cultural beliefs that may prevent women from attending university.

→ There is a need for sexual education to not only talk about reproductive health but about consent, a woman's right to say no, and to know how to defend themselves.

→ School curricula need to build in greater gender equality, and teachers need to be up-skilled to adapt to it seamlessly.

62. While most Australian universities offer scholarships for refugees, Monash University supported 11 Afghan scholars and teachers to escape Afghanistan as Kabul fell to the Taliban on 14 August 2021. Carol Saffer, 'Monash University Helped Eleven Young Afghan Academics Escape the Taliban', 22 September 2021, https://www.unhcr.org/innovation/its-no-longer-business-as-usual-for-refugee-education-heres-why/.

63. For example, the UNHCR Innovation and the Education Unit in the Division of International Protection established the Connected Learning Consortium for Higher Education for Refugees. This initiative pools resources across institutions to expand access for refugees to accredited higher education through digital learning. Ita Sheehy, 'It's No Longer "Business as Usual" for Refugee Education. Here's Why', UNHCR Innovation Service, 21 October 2016, https://www.unhcr.org/innovation/its-no-longer-business-as-usual-for-refugee-education-heres-why/.

64. 'Education', Save the Children Lebanon, accessed 30 July 2023, https://lebanon.savethechildren.net/what-we-do/education.

65. 'About', P&G Purpose, accessed 30 July 2023, https://pgpurpose.org/index.php/about/.

66. Céline Schmitt, 'Congolese Refugee Children Attend Catch-Up Classes in Rwanda', UNHCR, 12 November 2012, https://www.unhcr.org/news/stories/congolese-refugee-children-attend-catch-classes-rwanda.

67. The University of Toronto's Centre for Refugee Studies has a program called the Education in Emergencies (EiE) program. EiE works to improve access to education for children and youth in conflict-affected settings. The program provides training to teachers, develops curriculum materials and supports the development of safe and supportive learning environments. See Partnerships in Education in Emergencies, https://eiepartnerships.org/.

68. Stephanie Bengtsson, Kate McAllister, and Darren Abrahams, 'The School Bus Project: Mobile Education for Refugees', HEART, 31 October 2016, https://www.heart-resources.org/doc_lib/school-bus-project-mobile-education-refugees/.

INCORPORATE THE WPS AGENDA INTO PUBLIC-SERVICE POLICY

→ **Adopt a feminist foreign policy that actively promotes gender equality and human rights**
The WPS agenda should be incorporated into a state's consciously feminist foreign policy to address the unique challenges faced by women in conflict-affected areas.

→ **Prioritise the national police and intelligence services**
We must ensure that gender perspectives are integrated into military, political and police training programs. To increase women's participation in security and peace-building positions, it is important to focus on supporting women's empowerment through collaboration and connection both nationally and internationally.

→ **Recognise the vital role of women in leadership positions in government**
We must prioritise the inclusion of women's perspectives in policy-making processes and ensure that national plans are regularly updated to reflect their input. It is also essential for women to be actively involved in international discussions and efforts related to the WPS agenda. By doing so, we can promote greater gender equality and contribute to more effective and inclusive governance. It is important for all governments, including the Australian Government, to remove any interpretations in relation to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), especially with regard to articles 12, 17 and 18, to ensure the required safety and protections necessary for women and girls with disabilities.

→ **Incorporate a WPS agenda into crisis-response policy**
It is crucial to provide greater WPS education and training to those in positions to apply it. Fully inclusive and accessible WPS education and training will ensure that all necessary and contingent related social services are responsive and adaptable to local, national, regional and global levels for those in need. By doing so, we can create a more effective and inclusive crisis response system that prioritises the needs and rights of women, especially highly vulnerable women and girls, in conflict and crisis situations.

FOSTER MULTIDISCIPLINARY AND MULTISECTORAL COLLABORATION

→ **Prioritise multidisciplinary collaboration to promote the WPS agenda**
In order to support democracy, it is essential to increase women's participation and leadership in all areas, including natural resource management. Linkages between women, peace and security should be established in order to achieve sustainable solutions that prioritise inclusion, equity and accountability. By taking this approach, we can effectively advance the WPS agenda and promote more inclusive and equitable governance. There is a need to learn from initiatives from other regions. The Indo-Pacific region provides an example of what can be done in states that have some of the highest rates of violence against women globally.[69] Drawing on those lessons and seeing how they can be applied may require creating platforms for local leaders who might not be visible but who need to become visible locally and globally. In addition, universities can help to create that space in both education and research.

69. 'Violence Against Women', World Health Organization, 9 March 2021, https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/violence-against-women.

→ **Apply comparative lessons from prior work with services in conflict-affected communities to crisis-response policy**
Lessons gained from prior collaboration with local crisis-response services are critical in informing effective crisis-response strategies. Additionally, it is essential to improve access to post-conflict services and to increase awareness of their availability and the appropriate channels for accessing them. By prioritising these efforts, we can better support the needs of communities impacted by conflict and promote more effective and efficient crisis response.

→ **Involve universities and industry partners in the WPS agenda**
By doing so, we can scale up existing programs and involve communities and industries in education that supports the WPS agenda. In addition to providing support for and promoting opportunities for women, it is crucial to create pathways into appropriate work experience that align with the goals of the WPS agenda. This support should continue beyond education and extend to the workplace in order to promote greater gender equity and ensure that women have access to the same opportunities as men. Partnerships between business and society may help to increase women's participation.

USE INCLUSIVE TECHNOLOGIES

→ **Address violence against women online**
To find solutions for online gender-based violence, it is vital to challenge the economic models of social media platforms, increase the influence of governments and international bodies, and address the technological architectures enabling hate speech and perpetuating gendered digital inequalities in the technology industry and governing bodies.[70]

→ **Provide women with online anonymity and privacy**
Fundraising to give out more VPNs (through offshore VPN providers) and The Onion Router (TOR) networks will allow for anonymous and undetectable platforms. Providing pathways that are safe, secure and anonymous is important to guaranteeing women's voices. In Australia, the ease of discovering individuals on social-media platforms can be attributed to factors such as the interconnectedness of online networks, the sharing of personal information and the availability of public records. In some cases, even with privacy settings in place, certain information can still be accessible or leaked through other means, such as screenshots, unauthorised access, or data breaches.[71]

→ **Promote digital inclusion**
Work with Big Tech companies to help women and girls in crisis – in conflict zones, as refugees, and in the aftermath of disaster – to access connective technology that is safe and anonymous.[72] Ensuring broadband and mobile network access for the millions of women currently lacking it is vital for fostering digital inclusivity. To achieve this, implementing public broadband plans, engaging in private–public partnerships, promoting competition and enacting appropriate regulations are essential. Additionally, competitive pricing strategies, public–private partnerships and municipal networks can extend coverage to remote and underserved areas, providing them with substantial services. Lastly, universal service initiatives can effectively reach rural areas with low population densities.[73]

→ **Make use of AI software**
Conversational AI for gender-based violence could support victims of gender violence. These chatbots and software solutions demonstrate the potential of conversational AI in addressing gender-based violence, providing support and resources, and raising awareness. Moreover, they contribute to raising awareness about the prevalence and impact of gender violence, driving conversations and actions for social change.[74]

70. Becky Faith, 'Tackling Online Gender-Based Violence: Understanding Gender, Development, and the Power Relations of Digital Spaces', *Gender, Technology and Development* 26, no. 3 (2022): 325–40.

71. 'Social Media and Online Privacy'.

72. 'AI for Humanitarian Action Projects', Microsoft Corporation, accessed 30 July 2023, https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/ai/ai-for-humanitarian-action-projects; Lauren Parater, '10 Funding Resources for Humanitarian Innovators', UNHCR Innovation Service, 22 May 2015, https://www.unhcr.org/innovation/10-funding-resources-for-humanitarian-innovators-2/.

73. OECD, *Bridging the Digital Gender Divide.*

74. Ambrogi, 'Chatbot Helps Crime Victims'; Olson, 'This Chatbot Is Helping People'; Bauer et al., '#MeTooMaastricht'; eyewitness, https://www.eyewitness.global.

ADVANCING THE WPS AGENDA IN AUSTRALIA AND THE INDO-PACIFIC REGION

One of the important connections between Australia and NATO is the commitment to the WPS agenda. NATO has adopted the WPS global agenda and has adapted it to fit its vision. In the case of the treatment of women in Afghanistan, the UN Human Rights Council, Australia and 60 other states have called for change. In March 2022 Australia's former foreign minister Marise Payne hosted an online meeting of 17 female foreign ministers to discuss the situation of women in Afghanistan.

WPS and human security are both integral to a safe and secure Indo-Pacific. To ensure these issues are addressed, collaborations between Australia and NATO must continue, and deepen. The July 2022 NATO Madrid summit, attended by Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, addressed the security of the Indo-Pacific region. Australia has a strong partnership with NATO, with strong dialogue and participation. There needs now to be a renewed focus on international cooperation around advancing the WPS agenda.

Australia released its second National Action Plan in April 2021. Its focus is on ending violence against women through development programs, in partnership with civil-society organisations. Education about domestic violence through sports programs has been effective, including, for example, trying to make men understand gender violence is not acceptable by giving it a 'red card'. Political and organisational leadership must also be held accountable when working with WPS, especially when the pace of change is slow.

Advocates for gender equality talk about 'doing the harm' – the impact of what we are doing, and how we can no longer do the same things. When the possibility of change is raised, what can be delivered should also be advanced. The Australian National Action Plan emphasises the importance of recognising that the Indo-Pacific region is diverse and that there is a need to consider all the different voices in this space. There is an opportunity for Australia to work with neighbours to advance the WPS agenda in the Indo-Pacific to contribute to a safer and more prosperous region. It is an opportunity that should not be wasted.