

Women, Peace, and Security: Two Decades of the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 Agenda

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Abstract

The adoption of **United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325** in 2000 marked a transformative moment in international peace and security by formally recognizing the critical role of women in conflict prevention, peacebuilding, peace negotiations, peacekeeping, humanitarian response, and post-conflict reconstruction. Over the past two decades, the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda has expanded through successive Security Council resolutions and the development of National Action Plans (NAPs), reflecting growing international commitment to integrating gender perspectives into security governance. Despite these normative and institutional advances, implementation remains uneven across regions due to persistent gender inequalities, limited political commitment, inadequate financial resources, underrepresentation of women in peace processes, and the evolving nature of armed conflicts. Contemporary security challenges—including violent extremism, cyber insecurity, climate-related conflicts, forced displacement, and digital misinformation—have further complicated the realization of the WPS agenda while underscoring its continuing relevance.

This article critically examines the evolution, achievements, and limitations of the Women, Peace, and Security agenda from 2000 to the present. It analyses the contribution of UNSCR 1325 to international peacebuilding, conflict resolution, and global governance by assessing its four foundational pillars: participation, protection, prevention, and relief and recovery. Drawing on recent global developments and comparative case studies, the article evaluates the effectiveness of institutional mechanisms, regional initiatives, and national implementation strategies in advancing women's meaningful participation in peace and security processes. It argues that although the WPS agenda has significantly reshaped international security discourse by embedding gender within peace and security governance, its transformative potential remains constrained by implementation gaps, geopolitical rivalries, militarized approaches to conflict, and inadequate accountability mechanisms. The article concludes that strengthening the WPS agenda requires greater political commitment, sustainable financing, intersectional policy approaches, stronger institutional accountability, and enhanced representation of women at all levels of peace and security decision-making. Such measures are essential for building inclusive, sustainable, and resilient peace in an increasingly complex global security environment.

Keywords: Women, Peace and Security; UNSCR 1325; Gender and Security; Peacebuilding; Conflict Resolution; Feminist Security Studies; United Nations; Global Governance.

1. Introduction

The adoption of **United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325** on 31 October 2000 marked a watershed in the evolution of international peace and security governance. For the first time, the

United Nations Security Council formally acknowledged that armed conflict affects women and men differently and recognized that sustainable peace cannot be achieved without the full, equal, and meaningful participation of women in conflict prevention, peace negotiations, peacekeeping, humanitarian response, and post-conflict reconstruction. By placing gender at the centre of international security policy, UNSCR 1325 fundamentally challenged traditional security paradigms that had long conceptualized women primarily as victims of armed conflict rather than as political actors, mediators, peacebuilders, and decision-makers. The resolution therefore represented not merely a policy innovation but a normative shift in international security governance by expanding the understanding of peace and security beyond military considerations to include human security, gender justice, and inclusive governance.

Over the past two decades, the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda has evolved into one of the most influential normative frameworks within the United Nations system. Building upon UNSCR 1325, the Security Council has adopted a series of subsequent resolutions addressing conflict-related sexual violence, women's participation in peace processes, accountability, humanitarian protection, counter-terrorism, and post-conflict recovery. Simultaneously, more than one hundred countries have adopted National Action Plans (NAPs) designed to integrate WPS principles into national security strategies, foreign policy, defence institutions, and development planning. Regional organizations, including the African Union, the European Union, NATO, ASEAN, and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), have similarly incorporated gender perspectives into peacekeeping operations, mediation initiatives, and conflict prevention mechanisms. These developments indicate that the WPS agenda has become a central pillar of contemporary international peacebuilding and multilateral security cooperation.

Despite these normative advances, implementation has remained uneven and frequently contested. Women continue to be significantly underrepresented in formal peace negotiations, ceasefire monitoring mechanisms, transitional justice processes, and post-conflict governance institutions. According to United Nations data, women remain a minority among chief mediators, negotiators, and signatories in major peace agreements despite growing evidence that peace processes involving women are more likely to produce durable and inclusive outcomes. Furthermore, conflict-related sexual violence, forced displacement, trafficking, and gender-based persecution continue to affect millions of women and girls across conflict zones. These persistent disparities raise important questions concerning the extent to which the WPS agenda has transformed international security governance beyond the level of normative commitments.

The contemporary global security environment further complicates the implementation of the WPS agenda. Armed conflicts have become increasingly fragmented, involving non-state armed groups, violent extremist organizations, private military companies, cyber operations, and transnational criminal networks. Simultaneously, climate change, resource scarcity, pandemics, digital misinformation, and emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence have introduced new dimensions to international security that were not envisaged when UNSCR 1325 was adopted. These developments disproportionately affect women and marginalized communities while also creating new opportunities for women's leadership in peacebuilding, humanitarian action, and resilience-building. Consequently, the WPS agenda must continuously adapt to changing geopolitical realities if it is to remain relevant in addressing contemporary security challenges.

Another important development concerns the growing recognition that women's experiences of conflict are not homogeneous. Feminist security scholars increasingly argue that gender intersects with race, ethnicity, religion, class, disability, age, indigeneity, migration status, and sexual orientation to produce

diverse experiences of insecurity and exclusion. This intersectional perspective challenges universal approaches to the WPS agenda by emphasizing that women from different social, cultural, and political contexts encounter distinct barriers to participation in peace processes and security institutions. It also highlights the importance of locally driven peacebuilding initiatives that reflect the specific needs and priorities of affected communities rather than imposing standardized international models of conflict resolution.

The expansion of the WPS agenda has also generated important debates within international relations scholarship. Liberal institutionalists view UNSCR 1325 as evidence of the growing capacity of international organizations to promote normative change and strengthen multilateral cooperation. Constructivist scholars emphasize how the resolution has reshaped international norms concerning gender and security, contributing to the gradual socialization of states into more inclusive approaches to peacebuilding. Feminist security theorists, however, argue that despite significant normative progress, implementation has often been constrained by militarized security institutions, patriarchal political structures, unequal power relations, and selective international engagement. Critical scholars further question whether the increasing institutionalization of the WPS agenda has diluted its transformative feminist origins by integrating gender into existing security frameworks without fundamentally challenging the political and structural conditions that generate conflict and inequality.

Although an extensive body of scholarship has examined the Women, Peace, and Security agenda, several important gaps remain. Much of the existing literature concentrates either on the normative significance of UNSCR 1325 or on country-specific implementation strategies. Comparatively less attention has been devoted to examining how the WPS agenda has evolved in response to emerging security challenges such as climate-related conflicts, cyber insecurity, artificial intelligence, geopolitical competition, and the changing nature of warfare. Similarly, while women's participation in peace negotiations has received considerable scholarly attention, fewer studies have explored how technological transformation, digital governance, and intersectionality are reshaping the future trajectory of the WPS agenda. Addressing these issues is essential for understanding the continuing relevance of UNSCR 1325 within an increasingly complex international security environment.

Against this backdrop, this article critically examines the evolution of the Women, Peace, and Security agenda over the past two decades by assessing both its normative achievements and its practical limitations. It argues that although UNSCR 1325 fundamentally transformed international security discourse by recognizing women as indispensable actors in peace and security governance, the agenda's transformative potential remains constrained by implementation deficits, institutional inertia, geopolitical rivalries, and persistent gender inequalities. At the same time, the article contends that the WPS agenda remains highly relevant because its core principles of participation, protection, prevention, and recovery provide a flexible framework capable of responding to emerging global security challenges. Strengthening these principles through intersectional approaches, institutional accountability, and greater political commitment will be essential for achieving sustainable and inclusive peace in the twenty-first century. The remainder of the article is organized as follows. The next section reviews the principal scholarly debates surrounding the Women, Peace and Security agenda and identifies the theoretical and empirical gaps addressed by this study. The subsequent sections examine the evolution of UNSCR 1325 and the broader WPS framework, analyse its four foundational pillars, evaluate comparative experiences from selected conflict-affected regions, assess emerging challenges facing the agenda, and conclude by proposing policy recommendations for strengthening gender-responsive peace and security governance.

2. The Evolution of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda

The adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 in October 2000 marked a defining moment in the evolution of international peace and security. It represented the first time that the United Nations Security Council formally recognized women not merely as victims of armed conflict but as indispensable participants in conflict prevention, peace negotiations, peacekeeping, humanitarian response, and post-conflict reconstruction. The resolution fundamentally challenged conventional security paradigms that had traditionally focused on military threats, state sovereignty, and interstate conflict while overlooking the gendered dimensions of violence and insecurity. By acknowledging that sustainable peace depends upon the meaningful participation of women at all levels of decision-making, UNSCR 1325 transformed international security discourse and established the normative foundations of what is now known as the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda.

The emergence of the WPS agenda did not occur in isolation but was the culmination of several decades of international advocacy, feminist scholarship, and multilateral engagement concerning women's rights and gender equality. During the Cold War, international security remained predominantly state-centric, emphasizing military alliances, deterrence, and geopolitical competition. Gender issues received limited attention within security studies because women were generally portrayed as passive recipients of humanitarian assistance rather than active contributors to peace and conflict resolution. However, the end of the Cold War and the rise of intrastate conflicts in the 1990s exposed the limitations of traditional security frameworks. Violent conflicts in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Kosovo demonstrated that civilians, particularly women and children, increasingly became the primary victims of armed violence. Conflict-related sexual violence, forced displacement, trafficking, and the systematic targeting of civilian populations highlighted the need to broaden international understandings of security beyond military considerations.

At the same time, developments within international human rights and women's rights movements significantly influenced the evolution of the WPS agenda. The 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) established a comprehensive international legal framework for promoting gender equality and eliminating discrimination. The 1993 World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna recognized that women's rights are an integral and indivisible component of universal human rights, while the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing and the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action emphasized women's participation in conflict prevention, peacebuilding, and decision-making. These international commitments strengthened the argument that peace, security, and development could not be separated from gender equality and human rights.

Civil society organizations also played a decisive role in shaping the adoption of UNSCR 1325. Women's organizations from conflict-affected regions consistently challenged the exclusion of women from formal peace negotiations despite their substantial contributions to mediation, humanitarian assistance, and community reconciliation. International advocacy networks, particularly the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security, successfully mobilized governments and United Nations agencies to recognize women's contributions to peacebuilding and to address the gendered consequences of armed conflict. Their sustained engagement transformed the Security Council's understanding of security by demonstrating that excluding women from peace processes undermined both the legitimacy and sustainability of negotiated settlements.

UNSCR 1325 established four interrelated pillars that continue to guide the Women, Peace and Security agenda: **participation, protection, prevention, and relief and recovery**. Together, these pillars recognize that women must participate fully in peace and security decision-making, that they require protection from gender-based violence during armed conflict, that conflict prevention strategies should integrate gender perspectives, and that post-conflict reconstruction should address the specific needs and capacities of women and girls. Rather than treating these objectives as separate policy areas, the resolution conceptualized them as mutually reinforcing components of sustainable peacebuilding.

Following the adoption of UNSCR 1325, the Security Council progressively expanded the WPS agenda through a series of complementary resolutions. Resolution 1820 (2008) explicitly recognized conflict-related sexual violence as a tactic of warfare and affirmed that such violence could constitute a threat to international peace and security. Subsequent resolutions—including 1888 (2009), 1889 (2009), 1960 (2010), 2106 (2013), 2122 (2013), 2242 (2015), 2467 (2019), and 2493 (2019)—strengthened institutional accountability, enhanced monitoring mechanisms, promoted women's participation in peace processes, and addressed emerging challenges such as violent extremism, counter-terrorism, and transitional justice. Collectively, these resolutions transformed UNSCR 1325 from a single normative commitment into a comprehensive policy framework encompassing conflict prevention, peace operations, humanitarian action, governance, justice, and sustainable development.

The institutionalization of the WPS agenda has also been reflected in the growing adoption of National Action Plans (NAPs). Since the early 2000s, an increasing number of United Nations Member States have developed national strategies for implementing UNSCR 1325 by integrating gender perspectives into foreign policy, defence planning, peacekeeping operations, humanitarian assistance, and development cooperation. These plans have encouraged governments to establish coordination mechanisms, allocate financial resources, strengthen institutional capacity, and improve monitoring and evaluation of gender-responsive peace and security policies. Regional organizations such as the African Union, the European Union, NATO, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), and ASEAN have similarly incorporated WPS principles into their peace and security frameworks, reflecting the agenda's growing international legitimacy.

Despite these significant normative and institutional developments, implementation has remained uneven. Women continue to be underrepresented in formal peace negotiations, security institutions, military leadership, and post-conflict governance structures. Although evidence increasingly demonstrates that peace agreements involving women are more durable and comprehensive, women remain a minority among mediators, negotiators, and signatories in internationally mediated peace processes. Moreover, conflict-related sexual violence, forced displacement, human trafficking, and gender-based persecution continue to affect millions of women and girls in conflict-affected regions, indicating a persistent gap between normative commitments and practical implementation.

The evolving character of armed conflict has introduced additional challenges for the Women, Peace and Security agenda. Contemporary conflicts are increasingly characterized by the involvement of non-state armed groups, transnational terrorist organizations, cyber warfare, disinformation campaigns, private military contractors, and climate-induced insecurity. These developments have complicated traditional peacebuilding strategies while creating new forms of vulnerability for women and marginalized communities. At the same time, women have emerged as important leaders in local peace initiatives, humanitarian response, community resilience, climate adaptation, and post-conflict governance,

demonstrating that the WPS agenda remains highly relevant in addressing both traditional and non-traditional security challenges.

The agenda has also evolved conceptually through the growing influence of feminist security studies and intersectionality. Contemporary scholarship emphasizes that women's experiences of conflict differ according to race, ethnicity, religion, class, disability, age, indigeneity, migration status, and sexual orientation. This intersectional understanding has broadened the WPS framework beyond universal approaches to gender by recognizing that inclusive peacebuilding requires sensitivity to diverse social identities and locally specific contexts. Increasingly, the agenda is viewed not simply as a mechanism for protecting women but as a transformative framework for promoting inclusive governance, human security, social justice, and sustainable peace.

More than two decades after the adoption of UNSCR 1325, the Women, Peace and Security agenda remains one of the most significant normative achievements in international security governance. It has reshaped global understandings of conflict by demonstrating that durable peace depends upon the participation, leadership, and protection of women at every stage of conflict prevention, management, and recovery. Yet its continued effectiveness depends upon addressing persistent implementation gaps, adapting to new geopolitical and technological realities, and strengthening institutional accountability. The evolution of the WPS agenda therefore reflects an ongoing process of normative development rather than a completed project, requiring continuous adaptation to the changing nature of international peace and security.

3. The Four Pillars of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda: Progress, Challenges, and Emerging Realities

The adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 established a comprehensive framework for integrating gender perspectives into international peace and security through four mutually reinforcing pillars: **participation, protection, prevention, and relief and recovery**. Rather than functioning as independent policy objectives, these pillars collectively recognize that sustainable peace depends upon women's meaningful participation in political decision-making, protection from gender-based violence, effective conflict prevention strategies, and gender-responsive post-conflict recovery. Over the past two decades, these principles have shaped the evolution of international peacebuilding, humanitarian action, peacekeeping operations, and security governance. Nevertheless, the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda has remained uneven, reflecting the persistence of structural gender inequalities, geopolitical rivalries, resource constraints, and the changing character of contemporary conflicts. Examining the implementation of the four pillars demonstrates both the transformative impact of UNSCR 1325 and the continuing obstacles preventing its full realization.

Among the four pillars, **participation** has emerged as the normative foundation of the WPS agenda because it challenges one of the most enduring features of international politics—the exclusion of women from decision-making processes concerning war and peace. Historically, peace negotiations, ceasefire agreements, constitutional reforms, and post-conflict political settlements have been dominated by male political elites, despite the fact that women frequently play indispensable roles in community mediation, humanitarian assistance, local reconciliation, and conflict prevention. UNSCR 1325 sought to address this imbalance by urging Member States and international organizations to ensure women's full, equal, and meaningful participation at all levels of peace and security governance. Since 2000, considerable progress has been achieved through increased representation of women in peacekeeping missions, mediation

support teams, diplomatic services, and national security institutions. The appointment of women as Special Representatives of the Secretary-General, senior mediators, and leaders of United Nations peace operations reflects a gradual institutional shift towards recognizing women's leadership in conflict resolution.

Despite these advances, women's participation in formal peace processes remains disproportionately low. International evidence consistently demonstrates that women constitute only a small proportion of chief mediators, negotiators, and signatories to major peace agreements. This underrepresentation is not simply the consequence of discriminatory political cultures but also reflects deeper institutional barriers embedded within security governance. Peace negotiations often occur within militarized political environments where armed actors, military commanders, and political elites dominate decision-making. Such structures frequently exclude civil society organizations and grassroots women's groups despite their extensive involvement in local peacebuilding initiatives. Furthermore, women who gain access to negotiation processes often face limited influence over substantive agenda-setting, constitutional reform, security sector restructuring, and transitional justice mechanisms. Consequently, participation should not be understood merely as physical presence within negotiating forums but as meaningful influence over political outcomes. Genuine participation therefore requires institutional reforms that strengthen women's leadership, decision-making authority, and access to political resources throughout the entire peace process.

The **protection** pillar reflects international recognition that armed conflict disproportionately affects women and girls through conflict-related sexual violence, trafficking, forced displacement, exploitation, and violations of fundamental human rights. During the conflicts in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and more recently in Myanmar, Sudan, Ukraine, and parts of the Middle East, systematic sexual violence has been employed as a deliberate strategy of intimidation, ethnic persecution, forced displacement, and social control. These experiences fundamentally transformed international legal understandings of wartime violence by recognizing sexual violence not merely as an inevitable consequence of conflict but as a serious violation of international humanitarian law and, in many circumstances, a war crime, crime against humanity, or act of genocide. Subsequent Security Council resolutions, particularly Resolution 1820 (2008), significantly strengthened the protection dimension of the WPS agenda by explicitly recognizing conflict-related sexual violence as a threat to international peace and security. The establishment of monitoring mechanisms, the Office of the Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, and greater integration of gender advisers within United Nations peace operations have contributed to improved international awareness and institutional coordination. International criminal tribunals have also advanced accountability by prosecuting conflict-related sexual violence under international criminal law, thereby reinforcing the principle that impunity for gender-based crimes cannot be tolerated.

Nevertheless, implementation remains inconsistent across conflict settings. Survivors continue to encounter significant obstacles in accessing justice due to weak judicial institutions, social stigma, fear of retaliation, inadequate medical services, and limited psychosocial support. In many conflict-affected societies, the collapse of governance structures further weakens legal protection while displacement and humanitarian crises expose women and girls to additional risks of trafficking, child marriage, and economic exploitation. Contemporary conflicts involving non-state armed groups and extremist organizations have further complicated protection efforts because such actors frequently operate beyond conventional legal and diplomatic frameworks. Consequently, the protection pillar increasingly requires

integrated approaches combining legal accountability, humanitarian assistance, security sector reform, survivor-centred services, and long-term community resilience.

The **prevention** pillar represents one of the most ambitious dimensions of the WPS agenda because it seeks to address the structural causes of conflict before violence escalates. Rather than concentrating exclusively on post-conflict reconstruction, UNSCR 1325 emphasizes early warning systems, preventive diplomacy, inclusive governance, and women's participation in conflict prevention as essential components of sustainable peace. This approach reflects the growing recognition that women frequently possess unique access to community-level information, local mediation networks, and social resilience mechanisms that can contribute significantly to identifying emerging tensions before they develop into violent conflict.

Despite its importance, prevention remains the least developed pillar within international practice. International responses continue to prioritize crisis management and military intervention rather than long-term prevention strategies addressing political exclusion, inequality, discrimination, environmental degradation, and institutional fragility. In many contexts, early warning mechanisms remain insufficiently gender-sensitive, overlooking indicators such as rising gender-based violence, restrictions on women's participation, attacks on women human rights defenders, and increasing discrimination against marginalized communities. Moreover, the growing influence of climate change, resource scarcity, food insecurity, forced migration, and environmental degradation has expanded the range of factors contributing to conflict, requiring broader understandings of preventive security. Feminist scholars therefore argue that prevention should extend beyond military deterrence to include investments in education, healthcare, economic inclusion, environmental sustainability, and democratic governance, recognizing that structural inequalities often create conditions conducive to violence and instability.

The fourth pillar, **relief and recovery**, emphasizes the importance of integrating gender perspectives into humanitarian assistance, post-conflict reconstruction, transitional justice, and long-term development. Armed conflict frequently destroys public institutions, healthcare systems, educational infrastructure, and economic opportunities while disproportionately affecting women through displacement, loss of livelihoods, caregiving responsibilities, and increased vulnerability to violence. Effective recovery therefore requires more than rebuilding physical infrastructure; it necessitates the reconstruction of inclusive political institutions capable of addressing historical inequalities and promoting social reconciliation.

Over the past two decades, the relief and recovery pillar has increasingly incorporated gender-responsive approaches to humanitarian action, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) programmes, security sector reform, transitional justice, and economic recovery. Women's organizations have played central roles in rebuilding communities, promoting reconciliation, supporting survivors of violence, and facilitating local peacebuilding initiatives. However, post-conflict recovery programmes continue to receive significantly less international attention and financial support than military stabilization efforts. Women remain underrepresented within reconstruction planning, land restitution processes, constitutional reform, and economic recovery programmes despite their substantial contributions to community resilience. Furthermore, humanitarian interventions frequently adopt standardized approaches that inadequately address the diverse experiences of women belonging to indigenous, minority, refugee, disabled, or economically marginalized communities.

The interaction between these four pillars demonstrates that the Women, Peace and Security agenda should be understood as an integrated framework rather than a collection of separate policy objectives. Women's

meaningful participation strengthens conflict prevention by improving institutional responsiveness and community engagement; effective protection contributes to sustainable recovery by enabling survivors to participate in reconstruction processes; prevention reduces humanitarian needs by addressing structural drivers of violence; and gender-responsive recovery creates more inclusive institutions capable of reducing future conflict risks. Weaknesses within one pillar inevitably undermine progress in the others, illustrating the interdependence of participation, protection, prevention, and recovery within contemporary peacebuilding.

The evolving global security environment has further broadened the relevance of the four pillars. Climate-induced conflicts, cyber insecurity, artificial intelligence, digital surveillance, misinformation, violent extremism, and transnational organized crime increasingly intersect with traditional forms of armed conflict, creating new challenges for international peace and security. Women are not only disproportionately affected by these developments but also increasingly contribute to innovative forms of conflict prevention, digital peacebuilding, humanitarian leadership, and climate resilience. Consequently, the future effectiveness of the WPS agenda depends upon adapting its four foundational pillars to address emerging security threats while maintaining its original commitment to gender equality, human rights, and inclusive peacebuilding.

More than two decades after the adoption of UNSCR 1325, the four pillars remain highly relevant to international security governance. They have transformed global understandings of conflict by demonstrating that sustainable peace cannot be achieved through military strategies alone but requires inclusive political participation, effective protection of human rights, preventive governance, and equitable post-conflict recovery. However, translating these normative commitments into practical outcomes continues to require stronger political will, greater financial investment, institutional accountability, and closer collaboration among states, international organizations, civil society, and local communities. The continuing evolution of the WPS agenda therefore depends not on the creation of additional normative commitments but on the effective implementation of the principles already embedded within the four pillars of Resolution 1325.

4. Contemporary Case Studies: Evaluating the Women, Peace and Security Agenda in Practice

More than two decades after the adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325, the effectiveness of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda is best understood through its implementation in contemporary conflict settings. Although the normative framework has significantly influenced international peacebuilding and security governance, its practical application has varied considerably across regions due to differences in political institutions, conflict dynamics, state capacity, and international engagement. The experiences of Afghanistan, Colombia, Ukraine, Sudan, and the Israel–Palestine conflict illustrate both the transformative potential and persistent limitations of the WPS agenda. These cases reveal that while women have increasingly emerged as peacebuilders, humanitarian leaders, community mediators, and civil society advocates, their participation in formal peace negotiations and post-conflict governance remains constrained by militarized political structures, patriarchal institutions, geopolitical rivalries, and inadequate implementation of international commitments.

Afghanistan represents one of the most significant tests of the WPS agenda since the adoption of UNSCR 1325. Following the international intervention in 2001, considerable efforts were made to promote women's participation in governance, education, public administration, and civil society. Afghan women increasingly entered Parliament, government ministries, universities, and the judiciary, while numerous

women's organizations actively contributed to peacebuilding initiatives and local conflict resolution. Afghanistan also adopted a National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security, signalling formal commitment to implementing Resolution 1325. However, the withdrawal of international forces and the Taliban's return to power in August 2021 fundamentally altered these gains. Restrictions on women's education, employment, freedom of movement, and political participation have significantly reduced women's role in public life, while women have been almost entirely excluded from formal political decision-making. The Afghan experience demonstrates that institutional reforms supported by international actors remain fragile unless they are accompanied by sustainable domestic political commitment and strong legal protections. It also illustrates a central weakness of the WPS agenda: despite extensive normative commitments, the international community has often struggled to ensure accountability when political transitions undermine women's rights and participation.

In contrast, Colombia offers one of the most frequently cited examples of the positive contribution of women's participation to peacebuilding. During the negotiations between the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), women played an unprecedented role in shaping the peace process. Women's organizations successfully advocated for the inclusion of a Gender Sub-Commission, which ensured that gender perspectives were integrated into the 2016 Final Peace Agreement. The agreement addressed issues including land rights, political participation, rural development, victims' rights, and conflict-related sexual violence. Colombia's experience demonstrated that meaningful participation by women can broaden the scope of peace agreements beyond military ceasefires by incorporating social justice, reconciliation, and community development. Nevertheless, implementation has remained uneven. Women human rights defenders, indigenous leaders, and community activists continue to face violence, intimidation, and targeted killings, particularly in rural regions where armed groups remain active. These developments suggest that women's participation in peace negotiations must be accompanied by long-term institutional protection and sustained implementation if peace agreements are to achieve durable outcomes.

The ongoing conflict in Ukraine has introduced new dimensions to the Women, Peace and Security agenda by highlighting the intersection of conventional warfare, humanitarian crises, displacement, and digital conflict. Since Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022, millions of women and children have been displaced internally and across international borders, while women have simultaneously assumed critical leadership roles in humanitarian assistance, local governance, healthcare, education, and community resilience. Ukrainian women have contributed not only as humanitarian responders but also as members of the armed forces, local administrations, civil society organizations, and international advocacy networks. Their expanding participation challenges traditional assumptions that women are primarily victims of armed conflict and reinforces the central argument of UNSCR 1325 that women are indispensable actors in peace and security. At the same time, reports of conflict-related sexual violence, trafficking risks, disruption of healthcare services, and the disproportionate impact of displacement illustrate continuing shortcomings in implementing the protection pillar of the WPS agenda. The Ukrainian case also demonstrates the growing significance of cyber warfare, digital misinformation, and attacks on critical infrastructure, suggesting that contemporary security challenges require the WPS framework to engage more explicitly with digital resilience and technological governance.

Sudan presents another important example of both the opportunities and limitations of the WPS agenda. Sudanese women played a highly visible role in the 2018–2019 popular protests that culminated in the removal of President Omar al-Bashir, becoming powerful symbols of democratic transformation and civic

resistance. Women's organizations actively participated in constitutional debates, transitional governance, humanitarian assistance, and local peacebuilding initiatives. However, the outbreak of armed conflict in 2023 between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces severely disrupted these advances. The conflict has generated one of the world's largest humanitarian crises, characterized by widespread displacement, food insecurity, attacks on healthcare facilities, and reports of conflict-related sexual violence. Women and girls have faced heightened risks of exploitation, trafficking, and gender-based violence while remaining significantly underrepresented in formal negotiations aimed at ending the conflict. Sudan therefore illustrates the fragility of political transitions and the limitations of international normative frameworks when state institutions collapse under conditions of prolonged armed violence.

The Israel–Palestine conflict provides another complex context for evaluating the Women, Peace and Security agenda. Decades of recurring violence, occupation, displacement, and humanitarian crises have profoundly affected women and children on both sides of the conflict. Palestinian women have played important roles in humanitarian assistance, civil society mobilization, education, and community resilience despite severe restrictions associated with conflict and displacement. Israeli women's organizations have likewise contributed to peace advocacy, dialogue initiatives, and campaigns promoting conflict resolution. Nevertheless, women remain underrepresented within formal political negotiations concerning the conflict, while escalating violence has further complicated efforts to advance inclusive peacebuilding. The humanitarian consequences of the conflict—including civilian casualties, destruction of infrastructure, displacement, limited access to healthcare, and psychological trauma—highlight the continuing relevance of the protection and relief pillars of the WPS agenda. At the same time, the prolonged political deadlock demonstrates that sustainable peace requires greater inclusion of women in diplomatic processes, transitional justice initiatives, and post-conflict governance.

Taken together, these case studies demonstrate several broader patterns regarding the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security agenda. First, meaningful participation by women contributes to more inclusive peace agreements by expanding negotiations beyond military and political issues to include human rights, reconciliation, social justice, healthcare, education, and community development. Second, constitutional commitments and National Action Plans, while important, remain insufficient without sustained political commitment, institutional accountability, and adequate financial resources. Third, conflict-related sexual violence, forced displacement, trafficking, and attacks on women human rights defenders continue to undermine the protection objectives of the WPS agenda, particularly in conflicts involving non-state armed groups and fragile governance structures. Fourth, local women's organizations consistently emerge as indispensable actors in humanitarian response, mediation, and peacebuilding, yet they frequently receive inadequate recognition, funding, and representation within formal peace processes. Finally, contemporary conflicts increasingly involve new forms of insecurity—including cyber warfare, digital disinformation, climate-related displacement, and transnational humanitarian crises—that require the WPS agenda to evolve beyond its original focus on conventional armed conflict.

The comparative evidence therefore suggests that the principal challenge facing the Women, Peace and Security agenda is no longer the absence of international norms but the persistent gap between normative commitments and practical implementation. Although Resolution 1325 has fundamentally transformed international discourse by recognizing women as agents of peace rather than passive victims of conflict, translating this recognition into institutional practice remains uneven across conflict settings. Future implementation must therefore prioritize locally led peacebuilding, strengthen women's leadership in formal negotiations, improve accountability for violations of international humanitarian law, expand

financial support for women's civil society organizations, and integrate emerging issues such as climate security, digital governance, and technological change into peace and security strategies. Only through such comprehensive approaches can the Women, Peace and Security agenda fulfil its original objective of building sustainable, inclusive, and resilient peace in an increasingly complex international security environment.

5. Emerging Challenges and the Future of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda

The Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda has undergone significant normative and institutional expansion since the adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 in 2000. However, the international security environment within which the agenda now operates is fundamentally different from that of the early twenty-first century. Contemporary conflicts are increasingly characterized by geopolitical competition, hybrid warfare, cyber operations, violent extremism, climate-related insecurity, mass displacement, and the rapid advancement of digital technologies. These developments have altered both the nature of conflict and the mechanisms through which peacebuilding and humanitarian responses are organized. Consequently, while the principles of participation, protection, prevention, and relief and recovery remain central to the WPS framework, their implementation requires adaptation to an increasingly complex and interconnected global security landscape.

One of the most significant contemporary challenges is the transformation of armed conflict itself. Traditional interstate wars have increasingly been replaced or accompanied by intrastate conflicts involving non-state armed groups, private military companies, transnational terrorist organizations, and criminal networks. These actors frequently operate beyond conventional legal and diplomatic frameworks, making accountability for violations of international humanitarian law considerably more difficult. Women and girls are disproportionately affected by these conflicts through conflict-related sexual violence, forced displacement, trafficking, child recruitment, and the destruction of essential services such as healthcare and education. At the same time, women are increasingly assuming leadership roles within local peace initiatives, humanitarian organizations, and community resilience programmes. This dual reality underscores the need to move beyond viewing women solely as victims of conflict and instead recognize them as indispensable agents of conflict prevention, mediation, and post-conflict reconstruction. The resurgence of geopolitical rivalry has also complicated the implementation of the WPS agenda. Strategic competition among major powers has increasingly shaped the functioning of multilateral institutions, particularly the United Nations Security Council, where political divisions often impede collective responses to armed conflicts and humanitarian crises. Conflicts in Ukraine, Sudan, Myanmar, and the Middle East demonstrate how geopolitical interests frequently influence diplomatic engagement, sanctions, humanitarian access, and peace negotiations. Under these circumstances, gender equality and women's participation may receive less political attention than strategic or military considerations. Furthermore, geopolitical polarization can reduce international consensus on the implementation of WPS commitments, limiting the effectiveness of coordinated global responses and weakening institutional accountability. The challenge for the international community is therefore not only to preserve the normative integrity of the WPS agenda but also to ensure that gender equality remains central to peace and security decision-making even amid intensifying strategic competition.

Climate change has emerged as another critical dimension of contemporary peace and security. Environmental degradation, rising temperatures, extreme weather events, water scarcity, and food insecurity increasingly contribute to conflict, displacement, and political instability, particularly in regions

already affected by fragile governance. Women often experience the consequences of climate-related insecurity more acutely because of existing social and economic inequalities, limited access to resources, and caregiving responsibilities. At the same time, women frequently play central roles in community adaptation, environmental management, and local conflict resolution. The intersection of climate change and security therefore expands the scope of the WPS agenda beyond conventional armed conflict to include climate resilience, disaster risk reduction, and sustainable development. Integrating gender-responsive climate policies into peacebuilding strategies is becoming increasingly important for addressing the underlying drivers of insecurity rather than responding only after conflict has occurred.

Technological transformation presents both opportunities and risks for the future of the WPS agenda. Digital communication technologies have expanded opportunities for women's political participation, peace advocacy, and transnational networking. Social media platforms have enabled women activists, humanitarian organizations, and civil society groups to mobilize public opinion, document human rights violations, and coordinate humanitarian responses across borders. Digital technologies have also improved access to education, early warning systems, humanitarian coordination, and remote participation in peace processes. However, these developments are accompanied by significant challenges. Women peacebuilders, journalists, politicians, and human rights defenders increasingly face online harassment, cyber intimidation, misinformation campaigns, surveillance, and gender-based digital violence. Such attacks restrict freedom of expression, discourage political participation, and undermine democratic dialogue. The growing use of artificial intelligence in surveillance, border management, security operations, and public administration raises additional concerns regarding algorithmic bias, unequal access to technology, data privacy, and discriminatory decision-making. The WPS agenda must therefore expand beyond traditional peacekeeping and conflict prevention to address the gender implications of digital governance and emerging technologies.

Another pressing concern is the shrinking space for civil society organizations. Women's organizations have been among the most effective actors in mediation, humanitarian assistance, community reconciliation, and post-conflict recovery. Their close engagement with affected communities enables them to identify local priorities, promote dialogue, and strengthen social cohesion. Despite these contributions, many women's organizations continue to operate under severe financial constraints, restrictive legal environments, and political intimidation. In several conflict-affected states, civil society actors face increasing restrictions on funding, registration, freedom of association, and participation in peace negotiations. The exclusion of local women's organizations from formal decision-making processes weakens the effectiveness of the WPS agenda because sustainable peacebuilding depends upon local ownership and inclusive governance rather than externally imposed solutions. Strengthening financial support, institutional partnerships, and political recognition for women's civil society organizations therefore remains essential for ensuring the long-term success of the WPS framework.

Financing constitutes another persistent implementation challenge. Although numerous governments have adopted National Action Plans and international organizations have incorporated WPS principles into their policies, financial commitments have often remained inadequate. Many National Action Plans lack dedicated budgets, clear monitoring mechanisms, or measurable indicators for evaluating progress. Peacekeeping missions and humanitarian programmes similarly face resource limitations that affect their ability to recruit gender advisers, implement protection programmes, support survivors of sexual violence, and strengthen women's participation in peace processes. The disparity between political commitments and financial investment illustrates that the principal challenge confronting the WPS agenda is no longer

the absence of international norms but the limited allocation of resources necessary for their effective implementation. Sustainable financing should therefore become a central component of future WPS strategies, supported by stronger partnerships among governments, international organizations, regional institutions, and donor agencies.

The growing recognition of intersectionality has further reshaped contemporary debates concerning the future of the WPS agenda. Early implementation efforts often treated women as a relatively homogeneous category, emphasizing gender without fully considering how race, ethnicity, religion, class, disability, age, indigeneity, migration status, or sexual orientation influence experiences of conflict and peacebuilding. Contemporary scholarship increasingly emphasizes that women affected by conflict experience multiple and overlapping forms of discrimination that require context-specific policy responses. For example, refugee women, indigenous women, women with disabilities, and members of ethnic or religious minorities frequently encounter distinct barriers to accessing humanitarian assistance, justice, healthcare, education, and political participation. Incorporating intersectionality into the WPS agenda therefore strengthens its capacity to address diverse experiences of insecurity while promoting more inclusive and equitable peacebuilding strategies.

Looking ahead, the future effectiveness of the Women, Peace and Security agenda will depend on its ability to evolve alongside changing global realities while remaining anchored in its core principles of participation, protection, prevention, and recovery. Rather than expanding the normative framework through additional resolutions alone, greater emphasis should be placed on implementation, accountability, and institutional reform. Governments should integrate WPS commitments into national security strategies, defence policies, foreign policy, disaster management, climate adaptation, and digital governance frameworks. International organizations should strengthen monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, improve data collection, increase financial support for local women's organizations, and promote women's leadership in mediation, peacekeeping, and post-conflict governance. Regional organizations can also play an increasingly important role by adapting the WPS framework to local political and cultural contexts while facilitating cooperation among member states.

Ultimately, the future of the Women, Peace and Security agenda depends upon recognizing that peace is not merely the absence of armed conflict but the presence of inclusive political institutions, social justice, human security, and gender equality. The challenges confronting the international community in the twenty-first century—whether climate change, technological disruption, violent extremism, pandemics, or geopolitical rivalry—cannot be addressed effectively without the meaningful participation and leadership of women. More than two decades after the adoption of UNSCR 1325, the WPS agenda remains not only relevant but indispensable for building resilient societies and strengthening international peace and security. Its continued success, however, will require sustained political commitment, institutional innovation, and a willingness to translate international norms into measurable action at the global, regional, national, and local levels.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

More than two decades after the adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325, the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda has evolved from a normative commitment into one of the most influential global frameworks for integrating gender perspectives into international peace and security. The analysis presented in this article demonstrates that the agenda has fundamentally transformed international understandings of conflict by challenging the traditional state-centric and militarized

conception of security that dominated much of the twentieth century. By recognizing women as active participants in conflict prevention, mediation, peacekeeping, humanitarian response, and post-conflict reconstruction, the WPS agenda has broadened the meaning of security to include human rights, inclusive governance, social justice, and sustainable peace. This normative shift represents one of the most significant contributions of Resolution 1325 to contemporary international relations, influencing the policies of the United Nations, regional organizations, national governments, and civil society actors across diverse conflict settings.

The article demonstrates, however, that the institutionalization of the WPS agenda has not automatically translated into consistent implementation. While significant progress has been achieved through the adoption of successive Security Council resolutions, National Action Plans, gender-responsive peacekeeping policies, and greater international recognition of conflict-related sexual violence, implementation remains uneven across regions and conflicts. Women continue to be significantly underrepresented in formal peace negotiations, ceasefire monitoring mechanisms, security institutions, and post-conflict governance despite substantial evidence demonstrating that their participation contributes to more durable and inclusive peace agreements. The comparative analysis of Afghanistan, Colombia, Ukraine, Sudan, and the Israel–Palestine conflict illustrates that women consistently emerge as community leaders, humanitarian responders, mediators, and advocates for reconciliation, yet their contributions remain insufficiently reflected within formal political and diplomatic processes. This persistent gap between international commitments and practical implementation remains one of the greatest challenges confronting the WPS agenda.

A central argument advanced throughout this article is that sustainable peace cannot be achieved solely through military stabilization, ceasefire agreements, or constitutional settlements. Rather, durable peace requires inclusive institutions capable of addressing the structural inequalities that contribute to conflict and insecurity. The four pillars of the WPS agenda—participation, protection, prevention, and relief and recovery—should therefore be understood as mutually reinforcing components of a comprehensive peacebuilding framework rather than as isolated policy objectives. Women's meaningful participation strengthens conflict prevention by broadening political dialogue and improving institutional legitimacy; effective protection from gender-based violence contributes to social recovery and justice; preventive governance addresses the root causes of conflict before violence escalates; and gender-responsive recovery facilitates long-term reconciliation and institutional resilience. Weaknesses in one pillar inevitably undermine progress in the others, highlighting the importance of integrated and coordinated approaches to peace and security governance.

The article also highlights the growing relevance of the WPS agenda within an evolving international security environment. Contemporary conflicts differ substantially from those that shaped the adoption of UNSCR 1325 in 2000. Hybrid warfare, cyber operations, violent extremism, transnational organized crime, climate-related insecurity, pandemics, and digital misinformation increasingly influence both the causes and consequences of armed conflict. At the same time, technological transformation has created new opportunities for women's participation through digital advocacy, online mediation, virtual diplomacy, and transnational civil society networks while simultaneously exposing women peacebuilders, journalists, and political leaders to unprecedented levels of online harassment, cyber violence, surveillance, and algorithmic discrimination. These developments suggest that the WPS agenda must continue to evolve if it is to remain responsive to the changing nature of international security. Integrating digital governance, artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, and climate security into WPS implementation

strategies should therefore become a priority for both national governments and international organizations.

Another important finding emerging from this study concerns the significance of intersectionality for understanding contemporary peacebuilding. Women affected by conflict cannot be treated as a homogeneous category because experiences of violence, displacement, political exclusion, and humanitarian vulnerability differ according to race, ethnicity, religion, class, disability, age, migration status, indigeneity, and other intersecting identities. Policies that fail to recognize these differences risk reproducing inequalities even while promoting gender equality in broader terms. Consequently, future implementation of the WPS agenda should adopt more intersectional approaches that recognize the diverse experiences and priorities of conflict-affected communities. Locally led peacebuilding initiatives, indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms, and community-based women's organizations should receive greater recognition and financial support because they possess contextual knowledge and social legitimacy often unavailable to external actors.

The findings of this article also carry important policy implications for governments, international organizations, and regional institutions. First, women's participation should become a mandatory component of formal peace negotiations, mediation processes, and post-conflict governance rather than remaining dependent upon political discretion. Governments should adopt legal and institutional mechanisms that ensure meaningful representation of women within peace delegations, constitutional reform commissions, transitional justice mechanisms, and security sector institutions. Second, National Action Plans should be accompanied by dedicated financial resources, measurable performance indicators, independent monitoring systems, and periodic public reporting to strengthen accountability. Third, peacekeeping operations should further institutionalize gender-responsive training, expand the recruitment of women peacekeepers and military observers, and strengthen protection mechanisms for civilians affected by armed conflict. Fourth, international donors should increase direct financial support for local women's organizations whose contributions to humanitarian assistance, mediation, and reconciliation frequently remain underfunded despite their central role in sustaining peace. Finally, the WPS agenda should be systematically integrated into climate adaptation policies, digital governance strategies, counter-terrorism initiatives, disaster risk reduction frameworks, and broader sustainable development programmes, recognizing the increasingly interconnected nature of contemporary security challenges.

From a theoretical perspective, this article contributes to the growing literature on feminist security studies by demonstrating that the WPS agenda has evolved beyond a normative framework focused primarily on women's protection towards a broader model of inclusive security governance. Rather than viewing women solely as vulnerable populations requiring protection, the article emphasizes their agency as political leaders, peacebuilders, negotiators, and architects of institutional transformation. It further argues that the effectiveness of the WPS agenda should not be measured exclusively through the number of women participating in peace processes or the number of National Action Plans adopted by states. Instead, evaluation should focus on the extent to which international institutions, national governments, and local peace processes have become more inclusive, accountable, and responsive to the diverse experiences of conflict-affected populations. Such an approach shifts attention from procedural compliance towards substantive transformation, thereby providing a more comprehensive framework for assessing the long-term impact of Resolution 1325.

This study nevertheless has certain limitations. The analysis relies primarily on secondary sources and selected case studies, which, although representative of important regional experiences, cannot capture the

full diversity of conflict settings worldwide. Future research could build upon this analysis by undertaking comparative fieldwork, interviewing women mediators, peace negotiators, humanitarian practitioners, and community leaders, or examining the implementation of National Action Plans through country-specific empirical studies. Greater attention should also be devoted to emerging issues such as the governance of artificial intelligence in conflict settings, the gendered implications of autonomous weapons systems, digital peacebuilding, climate-induced displacement, and the role of women in responding to increasingly complex humanitarian emergencies. These areas remain relatively underexplored despite their growing importance within international peace and security.

In conclusion, the Women, Peace and Security agenda remains one of the most significant normative innovations in contemporary international relations. It has reshaped international understandings of peace by demonstrating that sustainable security depends not only on military capabilities and diplomatic agreements but also on inclusive governance, gender equality, human rights, and meaningful political participation. More than twenty-five years after the adoption of UNSCR 1325, the central principles of participation, protection, prevention, and relief and recovery continue to provide a relevant and adaptable framework for addressing both traditional and emerging security challenges. However, the future success of the agenda will depend less on the adoption of additional international resolutions and more on the political will of states, the institutional commitment of international organizations, the availability of adequate financial resources, and the active engagement of local communities. Bridging the gap between normative aspirations and practical implementation remains the defining challenge of the Women, Peace and Security agenda. If governments and international institutions succeed in translating these principles into effective policies and inclusive institutions, the vision embodied in UNSCR 1325 will continue to serve as a cornerstone for building peaceful, resilient, and equitable societies in the twenty-first century.

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