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Conflict-related Sexual Violence

*Violence against women and girls
in armed conflict*



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INTRODUCTION

As this report is written, there are over 110 ongoing armed conflicts worldwide.¹ At the same time, we are witnessing that hard won generational gains on gender equality are being reversed. This is no coincidence, as when respect for gender equality declines, violence tends to rise.²

Gender equality lies at the core of human rights and United Nations values, and gender-based discrimination is prohibited under almost every human rights treaty. Despite significant advancements in securing women's rights globally, millions of women and girls still face discrimination and violence, and are deprived of their equality, dignity and autonomy. This deeply ingrained and systematic discrimination and violence persist across societies, and in recent years, skepticism and denial of international standards on women's human rights, gender equality, and gender-based violence have resurfaced. Meanwhile, women and girls are increasingly raising their voices and demanding equality, including through feminist movements.

Violence against women and girls remains a worldwide crisis which profoundly affects the well-being and lives of individuals, families and communities. Data from surveys and studies conducted between 2000 and 2018, reveal that almost one in three women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence from a partner or non-partner at least once in their lifetime.³ The COVID-19 pandemic further intensified violence against women and girls, exacerbated by factors including security, health and economic worries, isolation with abusers and deserted public spaces. UN Women described the concerning trend as a "shadow pandemic."⁴

In 2023, the outbreak and escalation of conflict subjected civilians to increased conflict-related sexual violence, driven by the proliferation of arms and heightened militarization. Both State and non-State armed groups targeted civilians with rape, gang rape and abductions, amidst unprecedented levels of internal and cross-border displacement. Attacks on health centers severely limited access to life-saving services, including sexual and reproductive health care. The year further saw a noticeable rise in gender-based hate speech, gendered disinformation and incitement to violence, in which threats and acts of sexual violence were used to destabilize, humiliate and punish targeted communities and political opponents, their families and women human rights defenders.⁵ Even though women and girls are disproportionately affected by sexual violence, their voices continue to be muted or absent from key decision-making forums on matters of peace and security.

The UN General Assembly reiterated in resolution 75/161 the need to intensify efforts aimed at preventing and eliminating all forms of violence against women and girls in public and private spheres in all regions of the world.⁶ Furthermore, the resolution recognizes the special needs of women and girls living in areas affected by complex humanitarian emergencies, and stresses the importance of effectively prioritizing and addressing the prevention of and response to all forms of violence against women and girls in armed conflict and post-conflict situations. As impunity and barriers to women's access to justice persists, increased support to victims and survivors must be ensured.

This report will look at the most prevalent challenges and developments concerning gender-based violence targeted towards women and girls in society today, with a focus on sustainable development goals (SDGs) 5, gender equality, and 16, peace, justice and strong institutions. Although the international communities have created several international agreements on protecting women against gender-based violence, the issue is still very much present, and in some parts of the world increasing instead of declining.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL 5

Sustainable Development Goal 5 is about achieving gender equality and strengthening women's and girls' position and representation in all areas of society. Some of its targets include ending all forms of discrimination, violence against women and girls, and harmful practices, ensuring women's participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all decision-making levels, universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights and equal rights to economic resources and property. Gender equality and women's rights is essential to achieve all sustainable development goals before 2030, and is therefore a consistent theme throughout the 17 goals.

According to the Sustainable Development Goals Report from 2023, progress on gender equality is too slow in many areas. Merely 15.4 percent of Goal 5 indicators with data are "on track", 61.5 percent have progressed moderately but acceleration is needed, and 23.1 percent are far or very far off track from the 2030 targets.⁷ To illustrate this with some examples, it will at the current rate take an estimated 300 years to end child marriage, 286 years to close gaps in legal protection and remove discriminatory laws and 140 years for women to be represented equally in positions of power and leadership in the workplace.⁸

Target 5.b on technology for women empowerment is the only Goal 5 target that is "on track."⁹ What is more, three of the targets lack sufficient data for the trend assessment: 5.2 on violence against women and girls, 5.6 on reproductive health access and rights and 5.a on equal economic rights.¹⁰ Violence against women and girls tends to be underreported, owing to stigma, social norms related to honor and shame, fears of retaliation, absence of effective protection mechanisms for survivors or lack of trust in the justice system. It is moreover often difficult to obtain data on violence in areas where conflict is escalating, due to security concerns, limited infrastructure and lack of access by service providers and human rights monitors.¹¹



Despite progress made in recent decades, the world is not on track to achieve gender equality by 2030. Existing evidence suggests that violence against women was exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Lockdown, reduced mobility, heightened isolation, stress and economic uncertainty among other conditions led to a surge in domestic violence and exposed women and girls to other forms of violence such as child marriage and sexual harassment online.¹² Barriers exist to accessing sexual and reproductive health care, information and education, particularly due to negative laws, or a lack of positive laws, related to abortion, the HPV vaccine and sex education.¹³ Discriminatory laws and gaps in legal protection persist, and data collected from 119 countries in 2022 reveal that 55 percent of countries lack laws that explicitly prohibit direct and indirect discrimination against women.¹⁴ Progress has also been slow in ensuring equality in politics. However, legislated gender quotas have proven effective in increasing women's share in political representation. Countries applying gender quotas in the 2022 parliamentary elections saw an average of 30.9 percent women's representation, compared to 21.2 percent in countries

1 Geneva Academy, "Today's Armed Conflicts."

2 International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), "Women, Peace and Security: Towards the 25th anniversary of resolution 1325."

3 World Health Organization (WHO), "Violence Against Women Prevalence Estimates, 2018."

4 UN Women, "The Shadow Pandemic: Violence against women during COVID-19."

5 UN Secretary-General, S/2023/413, "Conflict-related sexual violence: report of the Secretary-General."

6 UN General Assembly, resolution 75/161, "Intensification of efforts to prevent and eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls."

7 United Nations, "The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2023: Special Edition."

8 Ibid.

9 United Nations, "Sustainable Development Goals Progress Chart 2023."

10 Ibid.

11 UN Secretary-General, S/2023/413.

12 UN Women Australia, "Types of violence against women and girls."

13 United Nations, "The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2023: Special Edition."

14 Ibid.

without quotas.¹⁵

In Norway, violence against women is still a challenge hindering the achievement of gender equality. One out of five Norwegian women report to have been raped at least once in their lifetime, and few perpetrators of rape are convicted.¹⁶ The UN Human Rights Committee has expressed concerns over the continuation of violence against women and girls in Norway, the lack of free consent at the center of the definition of rape in the Penal Code, the significant underreporting of rape and other forms of gender-based violence, low numbers of persecutions and convictions, barriers to access justice for rape victims, and the reported higher rates of violence against Sami women, who face difficulties in seeking justice due to cultural and linguistic barriers and mistrust of authorities.¹⁷

Norway has expressed that the empowerment of women and girls, and gender equality, are important priorities for the Government. Its international commitment is stipulated in the Action Plan for Women's Rights and Gender Equality in Norway's Foreign and Development Policy (2023–2030). Respect for human rights lies at the core of the action plan, which is based on the premise that gender equality is a human right that must be promoted to lead social change. The action plan emphasizes that gender equality must be taken into account in all aspects of foreign and development policy, and operates with five main objectives: that everyone has the right and opportunity to decide over their own body; to live their lives free from violence and harmful practices; equal economic rights and opportunities to participate in public life; and right and opportunity to participate in efforts to promote climate, energy and food security.¹⁸

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Nasjonalt kunnskapssenter om vold og traumatisk stress (NKVTS), "Høy forekomst av vold og overgrep i Norge."

¹⁷ UN Human Rights Committee, CCPR/C/NOR/7, "Concluding observations on the seventh periodic report of Norway."

¹⁸ Regjeringen, "Women's rights and gender equality."

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL 16

Sustainable Development Goal 16 is about promoting peaceful and inclusive societies, providing access to justice for all and building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. It envisions a world where people, regardless of their ethnicity, faith or sexual orientation, can live their lives without fear of violence. Elevated levels of armed violence and insecurity have destructive consequences for a country's development. Sexual violence, crime, exploitation and torture are prevalent where there is conflict or no rule of law. To find lasting solutions to conflict and insecurity, it is crucial for Governments, civil society and communities to work together. Strengthening the rule of law and promoting human rights is key to this process, as is reducing the flow of illicit arms, combating corruption, and always ensuring inclusive participation.¹⁹

Peace is a precondition for sustainable development and strong institutions securing justice for all. However, the achievement of Goal 16 and the global path to peace is hindered by ongoing and new violent conflicts around the world. Progress on target 16.3, justice for all, 16.6, effective institutions, and 16.8, inclusive global governance, has stagnated or even regressed. In 2022, there was an unprecedented surge in the number of civilian deaths in conflicts, fueled by the war in Ukraine. Looking at 12 of the world's deadliest conflicts, civilian deaths increased by 53 percent between 2021 and 2022.²⁰

According to the UNHCR Global Trends report from 2023, 108.4 million people worldwide were forcibly displaced at the end of 2022, as a result of "persecution, conflict, violence, human rights violations and events seriously disturbing public order."²¹ This is an increase of 19 million compared with the end of 2021. In 2023, a record 75.9 million people were internally displaced, whereby 47 million were new internal displacements.²² Women and girls, in particular displaced, returnees and refugees, face a particular risk of conflict-related sexual violence, including being trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation, sexually abused in exchange for food or forced into prostitution as a means of survival.²³

¹⁹ United Nations, "Goal 16: Promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies."

²⁰ United Nations, "The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2023: Special Edition."

²¹ UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), "Global Trends report."

²² UN News, "Record 75.9 million internally displaced in 2023, UN-backed report reveals."

²³ UN Secretary-General, S/2024/292, "Conflict-related sexual violence: report of the Secretary-General."

²⁴ Regjeringen, "Norway's follow-up of Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals."



The Norwegian Government takes part, both nationally and globally, in efforts to end abuse and combat violence against women and children. Norway is committed to continuing its efforts to counter violence against women and children through the provision of political, technical and financial support. Inclusive processes in general, and the influence of women, are decisive for achieving sustainable development and lasting peace. This is a matter of human rights and the legitimacy of the process, but it is also a matter of understanding the complexity of a conflict and accessing the full spectrum of insights and experiences.²⁴

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

UN Women defines gender-based violence (GBV) as harmful acts directed at an individual or a group of individuals based on their gender.²⁵ This kind of targeted violence is rooted in gender inequality, the abuse of power and harmful norms, and includes sexual, physical, mental and economic harm inflicted in public or in private, as well as threats of violence, coercion and manipulation. Women and girls are disproportionately affected, regardless of their age, race or socio-economic background. It is estimated that one in three women will experience sexual or physical violence in their lifetime.²⁶

Violence against women and girls includes violence, and threats and abuse in the family; sexual abuse; murder by an intimate partner; harmful traditional practices, such as female genital mutilation; trafficking in women, often with a view to sexual exploitation; and rape and other forms of sexual violence in situations of violent conflict and humanitarian crises.²⁷ Gender-based violence is carried out, tolerated and even justified as a form of protection or legitimate control of women, and prevents women from taking part in society on an equal footing with men. It is also a serious violation of human rights, and undermines the health, dignity, security and autonomy of survivors.²⁸

The combined term sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) refers to violence that is both sexual and a form of discrimination. In an OSCE definition, sexual and gender-based violence includes "rape, attempted rape, all forms of sexual assault, sexual threats, harassment, exploitation or humiliation, forced pregnancy, forced sterilization, forced abortion, trafficking for sexual exploitation, sexual slavery and female genital mutilation."²⁹ Most of the detected victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation are women, and female victims are three times more likely than males of being subjected to physical or extreme violence at the hands of traffickers.³⁰

More than 200 million women and girls between the age of 15 to 49 have undergone female genital mutilation across 31 countries where the practice is prevalent, and this year, nearly 4.4 million girls are at risk of the harmful practice.³¹ 6 percent of women report that they have been subjected to sexual violence from a non-partner.³² Given the limited data collection and the stigma related to this form of violence, the real prevalence of non-partner sexual violence is, however, likely to be much higher.

GENDER-BASED CONFLICT-RELATED VIOLENCE Sexual violence continues to be used as a tactic of war, torture and terrorism. It is often used to gain control over territory, natural resources and trade, but also to silence journalists, detainees and migrants, punish and forcibly displace populations, subjugate women and girls and recruit new members to armed groups. Women and girls remain the primary victims of conflict-related sexual violence, often exacerbated by pre-existing gender discrimination and inequality patterns that existed prior to the onset of conflict.³³ Such violence inflicts long-lasting trauma and humiliation, fracturing families and the social fabric, triggering displacement and fueling armed actors' activities.

There are several factors contributing to increased conflict-related sexual violence and risk of being subjected to it. These include internal and cross-border displacement, ongoing conflict and proximity to military, worsening humanitarian conditions, food insecurity and poverty, economic hardship, political instability, collapsed rule of law and climate shocks such as flooding and drought. Notably, food insecurity and poverty may lead to forced prostitution or sexual exploitation in exchange for food, as means of survival. Conversely, sexual violence often causes socio-economic marginalization, which again increases the risks of food insecurity and poverty.

In most conflict-affected countries, men hold power, women are structurally or directly excluded, and women's rights and freedoms are deliberately targeted.³⁴ Discrimination against women prevents girls and women from living a fulfilled life and hampers economic development. Matters concerning women's rights are often a factor in political conflicts and serves as an underlying backdrop for terrorism and extremism. In fragile states and situations where individuals are displaced from their homes, women face heightened vulnerability to discrimination and abuse.³⁵ Yet, women's voices often remain muted or absent from key decision-making forums on matters of peace and security. Moreover, impunity remains the norm, which often results in recourse to customary justice.³⁶

The newest UN Secretary General report on conflict-related sexual violence stresses that the gendered power dynamics around peace and security must be transformed in order to eradicate all forms of violence against women. Sexual violence in conflict must be addressed in peace negotiations and agreements and included as a prohibited act in the frameworks of ceasefire agreements.³⁷

Women's voices often remain muted or absent from key decision-making forums on matters of peace and security

GENDER-BASED CONFLICT-RELATED VIOLENCE TODAY

We see examples of women remaining the most impacted group in several conflict-affected places. In Gaza, approximately 1.7 million people, including almost one million women and girls are forcibly displaced. Women and girls internally displaced face acute vulnerability and protection risks in overcrowded shelters lacking basic necessities and privacy.³⁸ An estimated 15 000 pregnant women are on the brink of famine, and severe shortages of food, water, medical care and staff as healthcare facilities have been struck by airstrikes and raids, places pregnant women and new mothers along with their newborns in dire conditions.³⁹ In a statement from February, UN experts, including the Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, expressed their concern over grave human rights violations to which Palestinian women and girls are subjected in Gaza and the West Bank. Women and girls in detention have reportedly been subjected to sexual assault, including body searches while naked, and photos taken in degrading situations.⁴⁰

Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Pramila Patten, has stated that there are reasonable grounds to believe that conflict-related sexual violence occurred in the Gaza periphery during the October 7 attacks, including rape and gang rape in at least three locations.⁴¹ In February, she visited Israel and the occupied West Bank, whereby from Ramallah, she reported instances of sexual violence in detention settings, such as invasive body searches; beatings, including in the genital areas; and threats of rape against women and female family members, as well as instances of sexual harassment and threats of rape during house raids and at checkpoints.⁴²

In Ukraine, the risk of being trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation persists for the women and children who are internally displaced and r

25 UN Women Australia, "Types of violence against women and girls."

26 UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), "Gender-based violence."

27 Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Action Plan for Women's Rights and Gender Equality in Foreign and Development Policy 2016-2020."

28 United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), "Gender-based violence."

29 OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, "Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in Armed Conflict."

30 UN Women, "Facts and figures: Ending violence against women."

31 UN Women, "Putting survivors at the forefront of the global movement to end female genital mutilation."

32 World Health Organization (WHO), "Violence Against Women Prevalence Estimates, 2018."

33 United Nations Peacekeeping, "Conflict-related sexual violence."

34 UN Secretary-General, S/2022/740, "Women and peace and security: Report of the Secretary-General."

35 Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Action Plan for Women's Rights and Gender Equality in Foreign and Development Policy 2016-2020."

36 UN Secretary-General, S/2024/292, "Conflict-related sexual violence: report of the Secretary-General."

37 Ibid.

38 UNFPA, "Situation Report Crisis in Palestine."

39 Ibid.

40 United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner (OHCHR), "Israel/oPt: UN experts appalled by reported human rights violations against Palestinian women and girls."

41 Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, "Mission report: Official visit of the Office of the SRSG-SVC to Israel and the occupied West Bank 29 January - 14 February 2024."

42 United Nations Meetings Coverage and Press Releases, "Reasonable Grounds to Believe Conflict-Related Sexual Violence Occurred in Israel During 7 October Attacks, Senior UN Official Tells Security Council."

efugees in third countries.⁴³ Another byproduct of the war is the increase in domestic violence. The Ukrainian National Police reported a 51 percent rise in registered cases of domestic violence during the first five months of 2023, compared to the same period in 2022. Factors such as stress, economic hardship, unemployment and conflict-related trauma contribute to this development.⁴⁴

The Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine has documented evidence that Russian authorities have committed sexual and gender-based violence in Ukraine, including rape, threat of rape, sexual slavery and forced nudity.⁴⁵ In the Kherson region, Russian soldiers raped and committed sexual violence against women of ages ranging from 19 to 83 years, often together with threats or commission of other violations.⁴⁶ In some cases, women and girls were raped in front of family members, while in other cases, their husbands or partners were killed.⁴⁷

In Colombia, women and girls have been forcibly displaced due to sexual violence, especially in border areas where conflict-driven trafficking for sexual exploitation is prevalent. Armed actors and organized criminal groups use this trafficking to fund their operations.⁴⁸ Despite the renewed commitment by the Colombian government to fully implement the Final Agreement for Ending the Conflict and Building a Stable and Lasting Peace, signed by the government and FARC-EP, violence between non-State armed groups has persisted in some areas, which heightens the risk of conflict-related sexual violence. The National Victims' Unit recorded 668 cases of conflict-related sexual violence in 2023, whereby 605 were women.⁴⁹ Multiple barriers exist to reporting and accessing services, including limited state presence in rural areas, lack of trust in the justice system, and fear

of reprisals due to the absence of effective protection mechanisms for survivors. Limited mental and sexual reproductive health services in rural areas moreover affects Afro-Colombian and Indigenous women and girls disproportionately.

In December 2021, UN human rights experts expressed "grave concern about the widespread sexual and gender-based violence committed against women and girls in the Tigray, Amhara and Afar regions of Ethiopia by parties to the conflict."⁵⁰ Internal conflicts and clashes and the subsequent displacements, as well as drought and the COVID-19 pandemic, placed women and girls in particular vulnerable conditions with an increased risk of gender-based violence.⁵¹ The exact prevalence of GBV in Ethiopia is unknown and sexual violence is severely under-reported due to fear and stigma.⁵² However, some numbers illustrate the concerning extent of GBV in the region. A study aimed at assessing war-related sexual and gender-based violence in Tigray found that 43,3 percent of women between the age of 15 to 49 had experienced at least one type of GBV. Of the sexual violence survivors, rape accounted for 82,2 percent of which 68,4 percent reported being gang raped.⁵³ According to a note from UNFPA, the number of people in need of GBV services increased to 5,8 million in 2022 from 3,5 million in 2021.⁵⁴

UN human rights experts have stated that the acts of violence in Tigray, Amhara and Afar appeared to "have been used as part of a deliberate strategy to terrorize, degrade and humiliate the victims and ethnic minority group that they belong to."⁵⁵ Between November 2022 and January 2023, the Eritrean Defence Force (EDF) reportedly perpetrated acts of sexual violence against women in the Kokob Tsibah district in Tigray. At least 15 women were held captive for nearly three months at an

EDF military camp, where they were repeatedly raped by soldiers, physically and psychologically abused and deprived of essential resources. In the same district, women held captive in their homes were subjected to gang-rape and rape.⁵⁶

In Sudan, reports of intimate partner violence, sexual exploitation and abuse, and trafficking are widespread, and more than 6.7 million people are at risk of gender-based violence.⁵⁷ Since fighting erupted in Khartoum and Merowe in April 2023 between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), reports have emerged of conflict-related sexual violence in Khartoum and in the Darfur and Kordofan Regions. There have been alarming reports that women and girls are being abducted, chained, and held in "inhuman, degrading slave-like conditions" in areas controlled by the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) in Darfur.⁵⁸

Women and girls who flee the conflict face a higher risk of sexual violence. According to UNHCR, women and girls fleeing Sudan and seeking asylum in neighboring countries have experienced or witnessed incidents of violence, including harassment at checkpoints, abduction, rape, sexual assault, sexual exploitation, and other forms of physical and psychological violence.⁵⁹ In addition, as a result of the economic impacts of the conflict and the dire humanitarian situation, women have been marginalized and deprived of livelihood opportunities. This has driven many to take extreme measures to support their families, thereby increasing the risk of sexual exploitation and abuse.⁶⁰

43 UN Secretary-General, S/2024/292, "Conflict-related sexual violence: report of the Secretary-General."

44 Human Rights First, "Gender-Based Violence Skyrockets in War-Ravaged Ukraine."

45 United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner (OHCHR), "UN Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine finds continued war crimes and human rights violations gravely impacting civilians."

46 UN News, "Ukraine: Rape and torture by Russian forces continuing, rights experts report."

47 UN Secretary-General, S/2024/292, "Conflict-related sexual violence: report of the Secretary-General."

48 Ibid.

49 Ibid.

50 United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner (OHCHR), "Tigray conflict: UN experts call for urgent action to stop violence against women."

51 World Health Organization (WHO), "WHO augments its role against Gender-Based Violence (GBV)"; Africa Renewal, "In Ethiopia, UN Women and partners fight gender-based violence."

52 United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner (OHCHR), "Tigray conflict: UN experts call for urgent action to stop violence against women."

53 Fisseha et al., "War-related sexual and gender-based violence in Tigray, Northern Ethiopia: a community-based study", 1.

54 Gender-Based Violence AoR Global Protection Cluster, "The Situation of GBV in Ethiopia."

55 United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner (OHCHR), "Tigray conflict: UN experts call for urgent action to stop violence against women."

56 Amnesty International, "The State of the World's Human Rights."

57 UN Women, "A year of suffering for Sudanese women and girls."

58 UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), "Sudan Situation", External Update #34

59 UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), "Protection Brief Gender-Based Violence Sudan Situation."

60 UN Women, "A year of suffering for Sudanese women and girls."

PREGNANCIES AS A RESULT OF CONFLICT-RELATED SEXUAL VIOLENCE

During humanitarian crises, the conditions that undermine women's ability to exercise bodily autonomy and make reproductive choices increase dramatically, significantly raising the risk of unintended pregnancy. Sexual violence including rape and gang rape is used as a tactic in conflict-affected areas to exert control and intimidation, leaving women more vulnerable to fall pregnant against their will. In addition, desperation may lead individuals to engage in sex work for survival or fall victim to traffickers. Unintended pregnancies, in general, are associated with increased health risks for women, including higher maternal mortality rates and poorer health and economic outcomes for families and communities. In humanitarian and fragile settings, unintended pregnancies carry additional risks, such as limited access to essential health services.⁶¹

In 2022, a special report of the Secretary-General shed light on the distinct political, security and humanitarian challenges encountered by survivors who became pregnant as a result of conflict-related sexual violence and by their children born of wartime rape.⁶² These challenges include discriminatory laws and detrimental social norms, an increased vulnerability to trafficking driven by conflicts, and the perception that pregnant women, survivors, and their children are affiliated with the enemy, intensifying stigma and placing them at risk. The report urges states to ensure women's equal rights with men in relation to the transmission of nationality to their children, aligning with Article 9 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Further, it emphasizes the need for comprehensive and high-quality multisectoral support for survivors of sexual violence, encompassing services related to the safe termination of pregnancies resulting from rape, as well as other sexual and reproductive health rights.⁶³

The Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict has stated that the plight of children conceived as a result of wartime rape demands urgent attention. Many of these children are left stateless and uncertain of their legal status, and become susceptible to recruitment, radicalization, trafficking and other forms of exploitation.⁶⁴

The United Nations Security Council resolutions on women, peace, and security acknowledge the disproportionate consequences of conflict on women, the imperative to safeguard them from violence amid conflicts, and the crucial significance of women's participation and the protection of their rights in achieving international peace and security. The adoption of the initial resolution, UNSCR 1325, in 2000 was groundbreaking. Since then, the Security Council has adopted seven more resolutions on this topic.⁶⁵ Further, the work of the women, peace and security focal points network is guided by 10 UN Security Council resolutions and is bolstered by a number of related normative frameworks, which make up the broader women, peace and security (WPS) agenda.⁶⁶

In humanitarian and fragile settings, unintended pregnancies carry additional risks, such as limited access to essential health services

Resolution	Year	Summary
Resolution 1325	2000	Affirms the importance of the participation of women and the inclusion of gender perspectives in peace negotiations, humanitarian planning, peacekeeping operations, and post-conflict peacebuilding and governance.
Resolution 1820	2008	Recognizes sexual violence as a tactic of war and a matter of international peace and security that necessitates a security response.
Resolution 1888	2009	Strengthens efforts to end sexual violence in conflict by establishing a Special Representative of the Secretary-General and team of experts on rule of law and sexual violence in conflict.
Resolution 1889	2009	Establishes indicators for the monitoring of resolution 1325 and requests the Secretary-General to submit a report on women's participation and inclusion in peacebuilding.
Resolution 1960	2010	Establishes a monitoring and reporting mechanism on sexual violence in conflict.
Resolution 2106	2013	Stresses accountability for perpetrators of sexual violence in conflict, as well as women's political and economic empowerment.
Resolution 2122	2013	Positions gender equality and women's empowerment as critical to international peace and security, recognizes the differential impact of all violations in conflict on women and girls, and calls for consistent application of WPS across the Security Council's work
Resolution 2242	2015	Establishes the Informal Experts Group (IEG); addresses persistent obstacles in implementing the WPS agenda, including financing and institutional reforms; focuses on greater integration of the agendas on WPS and counter-terrorism and countering violent extremism; and calls for improved Security Council working methods on women, peace and security
Resolution 2467	2019	Positions conflict-related sexual violence as firmly rooted in the broader women, peace and security agenda; stresses justice and accountability efforts; calls for support and protection to women's civil society organizations; and calls for attention to the issues of children born of rape
Resolution 2493	2019	Calls for full implementation of all previous resolutions on women, peace and security; requests the UN to develop context-specific approaches for women's participation in all UN-supported peace processes; and urges Member States to ensure and provide timely support for the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in all stages of peace processes, including in the mechanisms set up to implement and monitor peace agreements

⁶¹ United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) East and Southern Africa, "Risk of sexual violence, unintended pregnancy soars in crisis settings, new report highlights."

⁶² UN Secretary-General, S/2022/77, "Women and girls who become pregnant as a result of sexual violence in conflict and children born of sexual violence in conflict: Report of the Secretary-General."

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, "Current trends and emerging concerns."

⁶⁵ Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Action Plan for Women's Rights and Gender Equality in Foreign and Development Policy 2016-2020."

⁶⁶ WPS Focal Points Network, "UN Frameworks."

Despite this progress, women continue to face regular underrepresentation, and in some cases complete exclusion from peace processes and political dialogues. Women's organizations and activists have reported increasing restrictions on their work, sexual violence continues to be used by conflict parties in violation of international humanitarian law, and a gender perspective is still neglected in conflict prevention, recovery and reconstruction. Last year's annual report from the Secretary-General on women, peace and security highlighted a troubling trend of stalled progress and, in certain instances, regression across various areas of the women and peace and security agenda.⁶⁷

BEIJING PLATFORM

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA) is a significant document that serves as a global milestone in the advancement of women's rights and gender equality. It was established during the 4th World Conference on Women in 1995. With unanimous agreement, the international community embraced a comprehensive blueprint of commitments aimed at promoting the full development of women and ensuring their equality with men across 12 areas of concern: (1) women and poverty; (2) education and training of women; (3) women and health; (4) violence against women; (5) women and armed conflict; (6) women and the economy; (7) women in power and decision-making; (8) institutional mechanisms; (9) human rights of women; (10) women and media; (11) women and the environment; (12) the girl child.

The BPfA reaffirmed fundamental principles that would govern future actions and strategies for the empowerment of women, emphasizing the integration of their concerns into national plans and policies. It established a clear agenda for fostering women's empowerment and recognized the significance of gender mainstreaming as a strategy to ensure the inclusion of a gender perspective in all policies and programs at the national, regional and international levels. Governments and the United Nations committed to promoting and implementing gender mainstreaming as a crucial approach towards achieving gender equality.

CONVENTION ON THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN (CEDAW)

The Convention provides a comprehensive definition of discrimination against women and establishes a framework for national efforts to eradicate it. It also provides a basis for achieving gender equality through ensuring women's equal access to, and equal opportunities in, political and public life, as well as education, health and employment. The Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women plays a vital role in this process by issuing recommendations on various issues that affect women and highlighting areas that require increased attention from the State parties.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATION NO. 30 ON WOMEN IN CONFLICT PREVENTION, CONFLICT AND POST-CONFLICT SITUATIONS

The recommendation strengthened and made clear the applicability of CEDAW to a diverse range of settings affected by conflict and political crises. It also set out and affirmed the Convention's linkages with the UN Security Council's women, peace and security agenda.

Women's organizations and activists have reported increasing restrictions on their work.

SECRETARY GENERAL'S 2010 REPORT ON WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN PEACEBUILDING

Provided the groundwork for the development of the "Secretary-General's seven-point action plan on gender-responsive peacebuilding", which aims to strengthen the United Nations' efforts in addressing the needs and priorities of women in post-conflict scenarios. It seeks to ensure women's equal participation in shaping their communities and societies. It outlines commitments in key areas including conflict resolution, post-conflict planning and financing, civilian capacity, governance, rule of law, and women's economic recovery. Notably, the plan includes a commitment by the United Nations to allocate a minimum of 15 per cent of all UN-managed funding for peacebuilding projects to promote gender equality and women's empowerment.

SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION 1325

On October 31, 2000, the Security Council adopted a resolution on women and peace and security. This resolution reasserts the crucial role of women in preventing and resolving conflict, engaging in peace negotiations, contributing to peacebuilding and peacekeeping efforts, participating in humanitarian responses, and engaging in post-conflict reconstructions. It emphasizes the significance of their equal participation and complete involvement in all endeavors aimed at upholding and promoting peace and security. Resolution 1325 emphasizes the imperative for all entities involved to enhance the inclusion of women and integrate gender perspectives across United Nations peace and security endeavors. It further urges all conflicting parties to implement specific measures aimed at safeguarding women and girls from gender-based violence, particularly rape and other forms of sexual abuse, in times of armed conflict.

⁶⁷ UN Secretary-General, S/2022/740, "Women and peace and security: Report of the Secretary-General."

NATIONAL ACTION PLANS

Norway adopted its most recent National Action Plan (NAP) on Women, Peace and Security in 2023 for the period 2023–2030. The Inter-Ministerial Working Group responsible for developing the NAP consisted of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs; Defense; Justice and Public Security; Culture and Equality; Labour and Social Inclusion; and Climate and Environment. The NAP highlights the active participation of civil society in the development, implementation and monitoring of the plan. Norway's NAP adopts an approach to implementing the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda, encompassing both domestic and international aspects. It outlines three thematic priorities for the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325: Peace processes and implementation of peace agreements, security policy and operations, and humanitarian efforts, protection of civilian and protection of human rights. It emphasizes that an intersectional gender perspective must be integrated into all of Norway's work related to peace and security, that is, a gender perspective that takes the possibility of multiple discrimination into account.

The NAP highlights the importance of including women in peace and reconciliation processes and the implementation of peace agreements, in a meaningful way. It pledges to actively support civil society organizations that promote women's perspectives, experiences, and input, to ensure the inclusion of women at negotiation tables, and for a gender perspective to be integrated into the text of peace agreements. Moreover, conflict-related sexual violence is highlighted as a widespread problem which has a central place in peace and reconciliation processes. The NAP further stresses the importance of increased participation by women in security policy decisions, and ensures that gender perspective is a key element of all work within the Norwegian defence and justice sectors towards implementation of the WPS agenda. A gender perspective must also be incorporated into humanitarian efforts, to effectively provide humanitarian assistance. The NAP emphasizes the issue of sexual and gender-based violence in humanitarian crises and states that children of wartime rape and of parents from opposite sides of a conflict are particularly vulnerable.

Norway's NAP promotes an integrated approach by highlighting the interconnectedness between the WPS Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 5 and 16. 2030 marks the end of the action plan period, as well as the deadline for achieving the SDGs, and the 30th anniversary of UN Security Council Resolution 1325. Norway has aimed at advocating for a gender-balanced approach to peace and security work over time. The issue of women, peace and security was one of four focus areas Norway had during their period as an elected member of the UN Security Council for the period's 2021–22.⁶⁸ During their term, Norway worked systematically to promote participation by women human rights defenders and representatives of civil society, and to ensure protection of them against reprisals.

NORWEGIAN PRIORITIES IN THE SECURITY COUNCIL

As a member of the UN Security Council, Norway wanted to make use of its experience in peace diplomacy to strengthen the Council's conflict prevention and resolution efforts. Norway aimed at enhancing the protection of civilians, promote women's participation and rights in peace processes and highlight the links between security and sustainable development. Norway wished to focus on four thematic areas: 1) Peace diplomacy, 2) Inclusion of women, 3) Protection of civilians and 4) Climate change and security.

Norway wished to enhance the protection of civilians, promote women's participation and rights in peace processes and highlight the links between security and sustainable development. Their four focus thematic areas were: 1) Peace diplomacy, 2) Inclusion of women, 3) Protection of civilians and 4) Climate change and security. Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in humanitarian crises is a global challenge. The Norwegian Government took the lead in organizing an international conference on ending SGBV, which took place in Oslo on 23–24 May 2019. The conference aimed to raise awareness about the significance of addressing SGBV, enhance the effectiveness of humanitarian responses to SGBV, generate greater political commitment to prevent SGBV in humanitarian crises, and mobilize increased funding for these efforts.

The Norwegian Government has expressed their commitment to integrating measures to prevent and combat sexual violence into all its peace and security endeavors. Additionally, efforts will be made to enhance legal protections for individuals who experience abuse.⁶⁹

NORWAY'S EFFORTS IN THE SECURITY COUNCIL

Norway has been actively engaged in enhancing transparency within the Council by taking several measures. One of these includes inviting civil society representatives, including women human rights defenders, to provide briefings during open meetings of the Council. Through these efforts, Norway has been able to make progress within their priority thematic areas, with now stronger language incorporated into Council resolutions and statements, particularly during the renewal of mandates for UN peacekeeping operations, special political missions and sanctions regimes. Norway contributed to the strengthening of legal safeguards for listed individuals and entities, including sexual and gender-based violence as grounds for listing and thereby making UN sanctions regimes more targeted and effective, where they also worked to prevent negative humanitarian impacts.

Norway served as a penholder (co-penholder with Estonia in 2021) on Afghanistan in the Security Council, which became politically demanding since the Taliban took power in August 2021. Norway's overall aim has been to promote a unified Council response whenever possible. This has held political significance in relation to the Taliban regime, as it has not received recognition from any Security Council members. Following several rounds of negotiations, Norway finally succeeded in March 2022 to secure an agreement on a new, one-year mandate for the United Nations Assistance in Afghanistan. The resolution grants the United Nations a mandate to oversee and document human rights, with a specific emphasis on women's rights. It also enables the UN to coordinate humanitarian aid efforts and foster inclusive dialogue among all relevant Afghan actors and stakeholders, aiming for a comprehensive approach.

Further, Norway played an active role in proposing and facilitating negotiations for 20 press statements on Afghanistan, addressing critical issues such as girls' right to education and the protection

of women's rights. Towards the end of its tenure as an elected Council member, Norway secured support for a Security Council press statement expressing concerns regarding the Taliban's growing infringement on women's rights, including restrictive measures such as banning access to universities and prohibiting women from working in humanitarian aid organizations. Throughout numerous Council meetings on Afghanistan spanning the past two years, Norway consistently advocated for the involvement of Afghan civil society representatives, with a particular emphasis on promoting the participation of women.

NORWAY AND WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY

Norway has been actively engaged in one of its main priorities, which focuses on strengthening the efforts of the United Nations Council to protect and promote women's right to participate, particularly in peace processes. A significant aspect of Norway's work has been to garner broad support from Council members for the implementation of previous resolutions. Additionally, Norway has played a constructive role in advocating for stronger language regarding women's participation and protection in Council resolutions, including those related to UN peacekeeping operations and political missions. Opposition from certain Council members was met, but despite this Norway and like-minded Council members has successfully contributed to the improved clarity of commitments in this area across various Council resolutions.

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⁶⁸ Regjeringen. "Women, Peace and Security." Last updated 14.09.2023. Available at <https://www.regjeringen.no/en/topics/foreign-affairs/the-un/wps/id660488/>

⁶⁹ Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Meld. St. 36 (2016–2017), "Setting the course for Norwegian foreign and security policy."

Norway wished to provide a clear platform to the women who are most affected by violence and conflict, enabling them to have a voice. An example of this is the targeted initiative to increase the representation of women, particularly women peacebuilders and human rights defenders, giving introductory briefings at open Council meetings. These efforts were facilitated through a collaborative effort involving 15 previous, current, and incoming Council members. These members have committed to prioritizing the women, peace and security agenda and ensuring its concrete and practical implementation during their respective presidencies. During Norway's presidency in January 2022, half of the briefers at Council meetings were women, reflecting their commitment to promoting gender equality and inclusivity.

During its presidency, Norway facilitated a ministerial-level open debate on women, peace and security, which was chaired by Minister of Foreign Affairs Anniken Huitfeldt. This event represented an important step forward as it became the first formal Council meeting to recognize the significance of women human rights defenders in peace processes. Additionally, the discussion highlighted the critical need for creating a safe and enabling environment for women peacebuilders and human rights defenders. It was also the first time the issue of prevention and response to reprisals was discussed at a Council meeting. During Norway's term in the Council, they led negotiations that resulted in the adoption of eight conclusions with concrete recommendations for certain countries. It is noteworthy that all the conclusions adopted during Norway's chairmanship of the Working Group either maintained similar language as previous conclusions or stronger. For instance, there were advancements in the areas of addressing sexual and gender-based violence, including sexual and reproductive health and rights.

UNITED NATIONS POPULATION FUND

Gender-based violence is one of the most prevalent human rights violations in the world, knowing no social, economic and national boundaries. It is estimated that one in three women worldwide will experience physical or sexual abuse in her lifetime. The United Nations Population Fund aims at responding to and reducing gender-based violence, supporting programs in over 150 countries and territories worldwide in humanitarian, peace and development settings.

Norway places significant importance on providing support to UNFPA's core funding, recognizing it as a crucial investment in the organization. By prioritizing this funding, Norway enables long-term planning, flexibility in responding to emerging priorities, and sustainable support for human rights-based programs that have a positive impact on the lives of women and young people in developing countries. Norway actively supports UNFPA's initiatives, including promoting rights-based adolescent and youth development, ending child marriage and teenage pregnancies, improving reproductive health and rights, and combating gender-based violence, even in humanitarian settings. Additionally, Norway's funding contributes to supporting important initiatives such as UNFPA Supplies and the Joint Program on Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting. In 2022, Norway ranked in second place in overall contributions to the UNFPA.

WOMEN HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

Since 2018, over one-third of the women briefers, supported by the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace, and Security, who addressed the Security Council, have faced reprisals and intimidation.⁷⁰ In a survey conducted by UN-Women, which included women civil society representatives who briefed the Council from January 2021 to May 2022, nine out of thirty-two respondents reported experiencing reprisals. One woman shared that her colleague, who assisted her during the briefing, was arrested, detained, and subjected to physical abuse, leading both to flee the country. Consequently, she is unable to continue her crucial human rights work due to the ongoing risks to her personal safety. Another prominent women's rights advocate revealed that after her briefing, the government of her country broadcasted a film on television and social media, coercing her father and a colleague to defame her. It is worth noting that not all survey participants underwent risk assessment and protection planning before the meeting, and in many cases, these assessments were conducted by civil society groups rather than the United Nations or the inviting Security Council member.⁷¹ The efforts made by OHCHR to develop guidance material to address reprisals against civil society briefers, as well as the formation of an informal group of Member States focusing on this issue, are encouraging steps forward.

Women human rights defenders working in crisis and conflict settings often face significant challenges in accessing adequate funding. To address this critical gap, the Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund has launched a funding window specifically tailored for women human rights defenders. This initiative has already commenced providing direct logistical assistance to at-risk women human rights defenders. It is crucial to ensure the availability of rapid and flexible funding from various funds and other sources for organizations specializing in the protection of human rights defenders. Civil society organizations remain the most dependable support system for activists facing perilous circumstances. Therefore, enabling them with sufficient resources is of utmost importance.

Quarterly reports generated by peace operations serve a vital purpose in transmitting information regarding violations and abuses targeting women human rights defenders to the Security Council. In 2021, 14 peace operations submitted reports to the

Security Council highlighting instances of violence directed at human rights defenders. Notably, reports from the United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia consistently include sex-disaggregated data on the killings of human rights defenders. These reports also prioritize the integration of gender considerations into security analyses and recommendations. Moreover, they specifically identify when leaders from certain ethnic groups or if lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queen and intersex community are targeted – an approach that should be adopted as a standard practice across all peace operation reports.

The international community's support strategies and response mechanisms for women human rights defenders facing immediate risks remain inadequate and underdeveloped, as exemplified by the evacuations carried out in Afghanistan following the Taliban's takeover in August 2021. In this context, civil society organizations took on crucial responsibilities, including compiling lists of women at risk, facilitating connections with Member States and other entities involved in evacuation flights, and organizing safe passage to the airport and even evacuation flights themselves. However, the lack of safety measures deterred many women activists from attempting to access the airport, and some chose not to leave without their families. Disturbing reports emerged of women activists being killed or arrested while awaiting evacuation.

Furthermore, interviews with civil society representatives and Afghan women revealed that many resettlement programs favored individuals who had supported the military, rather than those who had actively contributed to peacebuilding, human rights advancement, and democracy—thus displaying a bias toward men. Additionally, most visa applications necessitated processing from a third country, placing financial burdens on women who often lacked the necessary resources to obtain travel documents for themselves and their families. Requirements for women to be accompanied by male relatives further complicated the passport application process and travel arrangements, particularly for single and widowed women. Many of those who managed to travel to neighboring countries currently reside in dire conditions while awaiting visa approvals, facing the risk of deportation back to Afghanistan.

⁷⁰ NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security, "Statement by Ms. Kaavya Asoka: UN Security Council Open Debate on Protecting Participation."
⁷¹ UN Secretary-General, S/2022/740, "Women and peace and security: Report of the Secretary-General."

WOMEN IN PEACE PROCESSES

There is an emerging consensus that the involvement of women in peace processes results in agreements that are more long-lasting and effectively implemented after civil war.⁷² Having women in leadership positions greatly decreases the likelihood of violent conflicts and increases the chances of peacefully resolving existing ones. Research also reveals that countries with greater gender equality are more likely to find nonviolent solutions to conflicts and are less prone to resort to military force in international disputes. On the other hand, countries with significant gender gaps are more likely to experience both internal and external conflicts.⁷³ These findings emphasize the importance of gender equality in preventing conflicts and building lasting peace.

Efforts to enhance the involvement of women in conflict prevention, mediation, and resolution have been crucial, as highlighted by the adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1324 in October 2000. This resolution urges Member States to ensure greater representation of women at all decision-making levels in institutions and mechanisms involved in conflict prevention, management, and resolution. The reasoning for this call for inclusion is rooted in compelling evidence that higher levels of gender equality directly contribute to enhanced security and stability.⁷⁴

In fact, the participation of women in conflict prevention and resolution yields positive outcomes throughout the entire process. Research indicates that when women are actively involved, the likelihood of a peace agreement lasting for at least two years increases by 20 per cent, and the chances of it lasting for fifteen years rises by 35 per cent.⁷⁵ Women's participation brings unique perspectives, experiences, and approaches that contribute to more robust and sustainable peace agreements.

However, despite the clear evidence, the participation of women in formal peace processes remains disappointingly low. From 1992 to 2019, women made up only an average of 13 per cent of negotiators, 6 per cent of mediators, and 6 per cent of signatories in major peace processes world-

wide.⁷⁶ While there have been some advancements in women's participation, approximately 70 per cent of peace processes still excluded women as mediators or signatories. This indicates a lack of women's involvement in leadership roles as negotiators, guarantors, or witnesses.⁷⁷

The struggle to include women in peace efforts was evident in 2020. For instance, women accounted for only around 10 per cent of negotiators in the Afghan talks, approximately 20 per cent in Libya's political discussions, and none in Libya's military talks, and Yemen's recent process. In 2021, there were some positive developments, with women taking on lead mediator roles in two out of the five active UN-led or co-led processes, namely the Geneva International Discussions and the Libyan dialogue. Additionally, women comprised 43 per cent of the staff on United Nations mediation support teams in 2021.⁷⁸

In 2021, women participated as negotiators or delegates representing conflict parties in all United Nations-led or co-led peace processes. However, the representation of women stood at 19 per cent, slightly lower than the 23 per cent recorded in 2020. In Cyprus, on January 15, 2022, the Greek Cypriot leader and the Turkish Cypriot leader agreed to an action plan aimed at ensuring women's full, equal, and meaningful participation in the settlement process or any eventual settlement. Three months later, at the plan's launch, both leaders committed to ensuring that at least 30 per cent of delegates in the technical committees would be women. Despite these efforts, numerous obstacles persist.

Civil society briefers who addressed the Security Council have highlighted instances where men in positions of power actively undermine the inclusion of women. In Yemen, the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General previously offered reserved, non-transferrable seats for Yemeni women, but at that time, the parties refused the reserved seats. As a result, there are still no women among the members of the committees formed as part of the peace process. The lack of women's presence is not limited to United Nations-led processes. For example, during the Nairobi consultations in

April 2022, where nearly 30 delegates from armed groups in the Democratic Republic of the Congo participated, there were no women among them. Similarly, in the Chad peace talks held in Doha in 2022, only one woman was among the 50+ participants.

In 2021, out of the 25 peace agreements analyzed through the PA-X Peace Agreements Database, 8 agreements (32 percent) included provisions that specifically referenced women, girls, and gender. This marks an increase from 26 percent in 2020.⁷⁹ However, it is important to note that this number is only slightly higher than the average observed over the past two decades. The level of comprehensiveness and the range of issues addressed in these provisions varied significantly across the agreements. Several factors influenced the inclusion of gender references in peace agreements. These factors include the stage or type of agreement, the involvement of the United Nations as a third party, the level of women's participation and civil society engagement in the peace processes, as well as the duration of the conflict.

It is worth highlighting that in 2021, some local agreements showcased detailed gender provisions. For instance, the Lou Nuer-Dinka Bor-Murle Action for Peace agreement in Jonglei, South Sudan, embedded gender provisions that were contextually rooted in the community mediation processes preceding the agreement. Notably, the Jonglei agreement also featured three women's representatives who served as signatories on behalf of their communities. Additionally, the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) supported women in Irumu territory, Ituri, in their active participation in a dialogue that led to a significant local peace agreement between the Biru and Hema communities.

While progress has been made in integrating gender provisions into peace agreements, there is still a need to improve the consistency and depth of these provisions across different agreements. Efforts should continue to ensure that gender perspectives are effectively mainstreamed, and that women's voices and experiences are included in the decision-making processes that shape peace agreements.

These statistics highlight the ongoing challenges in achieving gender balance and meaningful participation of women in peace processes. Efforts must continue to increase the representation of women at all levels of decision-making in order to realize the full potential of their contributions to peacebuilding and conflict resolution.⁸⁰ Concrete measures are needed to overcome longstanding barriers and fast-track women's direct participation in peace and political processes. This requires concerted good faith efforts by the Special Envoys of the Secretary-General, Resident Coordinators, Advisers, Representatives, and their teams. It also includes actively engaging women's groups and women-led civil society organizations, integrating gender in political and conflict analysis, and putting specific measures in place to ensure women's equality in these processes.

72 Krause, Jana, Werner Krause and Piia Bränfors, "Women's Participation in Peace Negotiations and the Durability of Peace."

73 Crespo-Sancho, Catalina, "Can gender equality prevent violent conflict?" World Bank Blogs.

74 Council on Foreign Relations, "Women's Participation in Peace Processes."

75 <https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/PI-E-pub-Reimagining-Peacemaking-rev.pdf>

76 Council on Foreign Relations, "Women's Participation in Peace Processes."

77 Ibid.

78 Ibid.

79 PeaceRep, "Gender perspectives in peace agreements: Time for a new approach?"

80 Council on Foreign Relations, "Women's Participation in Peace Processes."

CONCLUSION

This report has examined several current challenges related to gender-based violence and participation of women in key decision-making forums on peace and security, with a focus on sustainable development goals (SDGs) 5, gender equality, and 16, peace, justice and strong institutions.

Sexual violence continues to be used as a tactic of war, torture and terrorism, and women and girls remain the primary victims, suffering long-term trauma and disruption that echoes across generations. In fragile states and situations where individuals are displaced from their homes, women face heightened vulnerability to discrimination and abuse, including trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation, forced prostitution, rape and threats of rape, and forced pregnancies. Amid increased militarization and intensified warfare, we see critical examples of extensive damage to medical infrastructure, which is a clear denial of women's sexual and reproductive health and rights. Discrimination and abuse against women prevent girls and women from living a fulfilled and dignified life and hampers economic development, which underscores the importance of supporting women through economic empowerment. The real prevalence of sexual and gender-based violence is likely much higher than presented in this report. Collecting data remains a challenge, as cases of such violence continue to be underreported due to factors such as stigma, social norms related to honor and shame, fears of retaliation, absence of effective protection mechanisms for survivors and lack of trust in the justice system. It is therefore essential to ensure that survivors are provided with access to justice and reparation mechanisms.

Women have a fundamental right to participate in all political decision making, including peace processes at all levels. Yet, women are often underrepresented or excluded from official peace processes.⁸¹ It is crucial to prioritize the inclusion of women and girls in armed conflict, post-conflict, and humanitarian emergency situations. Their perspectives should be actively considered and integrated into decision-making processes. Women and girls should have equal opportunities to participate meaningfully in designing, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating policies and activities related to conflict prevention, peace mediation, peacebuilding, and post-conflict reconstruction. This inclusive approach should also extend to women and girls who are internally displaced or refugees. Their unique experiences and voices must be considered when shaping responses and solutions. Furthermore, it is essential to ensure that the human rights of all women and girls are fully respected and protected throughout all stages of response and recovery efforts. By centering the perspectives and rights of women and girls, we can foster more inclusive and effective approaches to conflict resolution, peacebuilding, and recovery processes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Prevent sexual and gender-based violence through accountability and justice, and addressing its root causes

Ensure women's sexual and reproductive health and rights through access to medical facilities and services

Support female survivors of sexual violence through economic empowerment, livelihood support and skills-building

Ensure access to justice and reparation mechanisms at the national level for survivors of sexual violence

Pay special attention to the political, security and humanitarian challenges encountered by survivors who became pregnant as a result of conflict-related sexual violence and by their children born of wartime rape

Actively support civil society organizations that promote women's perspectives, experiences, and input, to ensure the inclusion of women at negotiation tables and in peace agreements

Promote the participation of women human rights defenders in peace processes and protect them against reprisals

⁸¹ United Nations Peacemaker, "Women's Participation."

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