



HOLDING THE LINE

ON WOMEN, PEACE and SECURITY

NAVIGATING PUSHBACK AND
BACKSLIDING IN A TIME
OF GLOBAL CONFLICTS

Anne-Floor Dekker, Amy Hill, Sorana-Cristina Jude,
Emine Kaya and Katharine A. M. Wright

Authors

Anne-Floor Dekker

Executive Director, WO=MEN: Dutch Gender Platform

Amy Hill

Research Assistant and PhD Candidate,
Newcastle University, UK

Sorana-Cristina Jude

Lecturer in Defence Studies, King's College London, UK

Emine Kaya

Programme Manager, Gender, Peace and Security,
WO=MEN: Dutch Gender Platform

Katharine A. M. Wright

Senior Lecturer in International Politics, Newcastle University, UK
and a Fulbright Scholar and Research Fellow on the Women and
Public Policy Program at the Harvard Kennedy School

Contents

Introduction	4
1. Recognising Pushback	12
2. Strategic Messaging to Hold and Create the Space	16
3. Strengthening Collaboration	22
4. Building Systemic Resilience	26
Conclusion: Holding the Line, Shaping the Future	30
Endnotes	31

Introduction



This year marks a pivotal moment: the 25th anniversary of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda. This landmark resolution structured around the four pillars of participation, protection, prevention and relief and recovery recognised the value of the integration of gender perspectives into peace and secu-

urity decision-making. Yet instead of planning for a celebration, we find an agenda now at a critical crossroads. After early momentum, with nine follow-up Security Council Resolutions to strengthen the agenda, over 100 national action plans to implement it, and NATO policy commitments to translate it into action, WPS now faces serious attacks.

“ WPS is not a peripheral issue. It is central to at least half of the population in conflict affected areas. ”

This guide is grounded in the insights shared during a closed-door session held under Chatham

House Rule during

the 2025 NATO Summit week in The Hague at the offices of WO=MEN: Dutch Gender Platform¹ and funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) via funds held at Newcastle University and King's College London.² Bringing together policymakers, military leaders, academics, and civil society experts, the session explored how the WPS agenda is playing out in real time, including along NATO's Eastern borders, where security pressures are acute, hybrid threats are intensifying, and democratic values and integrity are increasingly under

“ We cannot afford to treat WPS as a luxury in times of crisis – this is when it matters most. ”

strain. Our conversation centres on NATO but the lessons that can be drawn are far wider.

The discussion left no doubt: WPS is not a peripheral issue. It is central to at least half of the population in conflict affected areas. It is therefore also central to the NATO Alliance and its member states credibility, legitimacy, and operational effectiveness. Yet, despite formal commitments, participants highlighted how implementation not only continues to lag behind ambition but that ambition is now being crushed. The growing gap between policy and practice reflects broader pressures on the Alliance, pressures that are external but also internal.

War, militarisation, funding cuts on development assistance and human rights, and democratic backsliding are affecting women's and girls' rights worldwide. It is estimated that more than 650 million women and girls are affected by war, the highest figure since 1990s.³ Conflicts in Afghanistan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Iraq, Libya, Myanmar, Nigeria, Sudan, Somalia, Syria, Ukraine or Yemen have had severe effects on women's and girls' lives. The cutting of aid budgets is affecting millions of people, including women. The closure of the US Agency for International Development (USAID), for example, is projected to deny 11.7 million women and girls access to contraceptive care, leading to 4.2 million unintended pregnancies and an estimated 8,340 maternal deaths from pregnancy-related complications.⁴

While women are facing displacement, food insecurity, health insecurity, and sexual and gender-based violence at unprecedented levels, their rights are increasingly being curtailed due to the rise of anti-democratic regimes. For instance, in 2025 the United Nations verified 3,688 cases of conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence noting a 50 percent increase from the previous year.⁵ To take just a few examples: In Afghanistan, women and teenage girls are mostly confined to the private space. Approximately 79 percent of Afghan women are excluded from education, employment or training therefore undermining the development of the Afghan society for years to come.⁶ In the Sahel region, conflict coupled with climate change has exposed women and girls to displacement, child marriage, and food insecurity.⁷ In Sudan, in less than two years, the number of people at risk of gender-based violence has more than tripled and while women have been on the front line of the conflict they have been excluded from peace talks.⁸ In Gaza, Palestinian women face ongoing deadly attacks and displacement. They face famine and starvation with humanitarian aid being heavily restricted not least through the banning of the UNRWA and other international aid and relief operations in Gaza. Heavily damaged by Israeli attacks, the Gazan healthcare has been devastated and cannot guarantee anymore the protection of Palestinian women's sexual and reproductive rights. At the same time, the delay in the release of Israeli hostages, particularly women, is posing a threat to their lives.⁹



In Europe, the security landscape has shifted dramatically since 2022. Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, rising militarisation and military spending, strongman (geo)politics, and sophisticated hybrid threats, from cyberattacks to the weaponisation of gender narratives, have placed immense pressure on NATO's frontline states, societal resilience and democratic integrity. The war's toll on Ukraine has been devastating, yet women have stepped up on the front line and in critical support roles to fight back, even as Russia weaponises sexual and gender-based violence in an attempt to terrorise and destroy communities.¹⁰ Meanwhile, from within, NATO faces growing democratic backsliding, shrinking civic space, and direct attacks on core values, including gender equality. Societal resilience and a whole of society approach to defence and security has never been more important, but it has also never been more contested.



The adoption of NATO's revised 2024 Women, Peace and Security Policy¹¹ was a crucial step, reaffirming the need to integrate gender perspectives into defence and deterrence. It established four strategic priorities: gender-responsive leadership and accountability, meaningful participation, prevention, and protection. Since its adoption, women's rights in conflict-affected areas have faced severe challenges. As highlighted above, efforts to suppress gender equality and undermine women's rights have intensified, sparking devastating impacts for women and girls and their communities around the world. However, studies show that peace agreements with women signatories have higher rates of implementation and last longer as Liberia's case has shown.¹² Moreover, women's involvement in local peace processes can lead to positive outcomes. In Yemen, women negotiated civilians' access to water, while Peace for Sudan Platform – a network bringing together 49 women-led organisations – advocated for an

inclusive peace process.¹³ The Chatham House discussion surfaced a stark reality: without political will, sustained resources, and robust accountability mechanisms, even the strongest policy frameworks risk being sidelined.

Despite the ambition of NATO's WPS Policy, the Alliance is already facing significant challenges in maintaining momentum.¹⁴ Even a year after the policy's adoption, signs of backsliding have emerged: the role of the Secretary General's Special Representative on WPS has been quietly subsumed under the Political Affairs and Security Policy Division, and public diplomacy on WPS has gone silent, while the Public Diplomacy Division has been dissolved.¹⁵ These developments reflect a broader trend of rising resistance to WPS across the Alliance, driven by anti-gender narratives and political backlash, particularly in countries such as Slovakia, Hungary, and Türkiye. In the United States, recent rollbacks on diversity and inclusion efforts, alongside

moves to scale back WPS initiatives to only the statutory minimum, have further heightened uncertainty.¹⁶ There is a risk that former supporters are self-censoring – anticipating backlash before it happens and, in doing so, undoing decades of progress on WPS. This growing pushback risks undermining the consistent implementation of WPS commitments, making sustained political leadership, active advocacy, and strong civil-military cooperation more essential than ever to safeguard and advance progress.

There are other warning signs. Funding for WPS and women's rights organisations is globally being significantly cut or deprioritised. Gendered narratives are weaponised in disinformation campaigns with online abuse, harassment,

and gendered disinformation affecting preponderantly women not least those that are seeking public office.¹⁷ Pushback is becoming more organised and more visible, including within some Allied nations. High-level WPS commitments often fail to reach those on the frontlines, whether soldiers in uniform, civil-

ians under threat, or local peacebuilders navigating fragile environments. There is a real danger that the gains of the past two decades, however incremental they sometimes seemed, could be reversed, especially at a time when the Alliance is stepping up war preparedness and defence spending. As one session participant noted, "We cannot afford to treat WPS as a luxury in times of crisis – this is when it matters most."

“ Holding the line on WPS is not just the right thing to do – it is essential for NATO's credibility, effectiveness, and resilience. ”

This guide aims to provide a practical response to these challenges. It distils the collective knowledge and experience of those in the room, offering clear, actionable ways to strengthen WPS in the face of growing political and ideological resistance.

Structured around four core priorities, it offers:

1 **Recognising Pushback**

Understanding and identifying early signs of pushback is critical to protecting WPS. This includes monitoring shifts in political rhetoric, tracking changes in institutional language, noting reductions in funding, and recognising when WPS is being quietly sidelined in policy spaces. Proactive risk assessment enables advocates to spot these trends early and take timely action to prevent further erosion of the agenda.

2 **Strategic Messaging to Hold and Create the Space**

Strategic communication is essential to safeguard WPS. Advocates must use language deliberately – sometimes naming WPS openly, sometimes adapting terminology to navigate sensitive environments – always with a clear objective in mind. Staying visible in public and policy discourse prevents malign actors from filling the void with distorted narratives. Effective communication links WPS to current security challenges, ensuring it remains relevant and resonant on both institutional as societal level.

3 Strengthening Collaboration

Building and maintaining diverse and inclusive alliances is key to sustaining WPS in contested environments. This involves reaching beyond traditional partners and instruments such as digital and AI tools to engage with new actors across civil society, government, security institutions, and grassroots movements. Cross-sector collaboration expands influence, unlocks resources, and provides access to practical knowledge, making the WPS agenda more resilient to political shifts and disinformation.

4 Building Resilience

Resilience is about adaptability and persistence. By mobilising new leadership, engaging with dissenting voices through constructive dialogue, and drawing lessons from women's movements with experience navigating backlash, WPS advocates can strengthen the agenda's foundations. Resilience requires flexible strategies, inclusive partnerships, education, advocacy and awareness rising, and a long-term focus to ensure WPS remains embedded in security frameworks despite changing political landscapes and societal realities.

At a moment of intensifying insecurity and political flux, holding the line on WPS is not just the right thing to do – it is essential for NATO's credibility, effectiveness, and resilience. This guide is designed to equip practitioners, policymakers, and civil society advocates with the tools they need to protect hard-won gains and advance WPS where it matters most: in defence policy, in military operations, and on the ground where peace and security are built and defended.

1 Recognising Pushback

“ Leadership doesn’t want to draw attention to the subject [of WPS] anymore. ”

- Military contributor

A crucial first step in safeguarding the Women, Peace and Security agenda is recognising and tracking the signs of political and ideological pushback. Monitoring these shifts allows practitioners to respond early and strategically on an institutional level, preventing the dilution or co-option of WPS in an increasingly contested global environment.

Across the transatlantic space, there is a clear trend of shifting political discourse, with two main consequences for WPS. First, we are witnessing a deliberate ideological pushback, where WPS and broader gender equality efforts are directly challenged or framed as incompatible with national security priorities.¹⁸ Second, even in the absence of overt opposition, the prevailing atmosphere of uncertainty and instability leads to WPS being quietly

sidelined or deprioritised. For example, the NATO summit held in The Hague in June 2025 did not include Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) on its official agenda despite it being the 25th anniversary of UNSCR 1325 this year. Together, these dynamics erode political and financial support and weaken the visibility and implementation of WPS commitments.

This pushback manifests in different ways – sometimes through active resistance, other times through passive neglect or avoidance. The result is often the same: diminished (public) space for diverse perspectives in security decision-making, reduced consideration of women’s security needs and women’s participatory/leaders role as decision makers, and fewer opportunities for gender-responsive policies to take hold. A



particularly acute impact is felt in the area of resourcing, with funding for WPS programmes in both governmental and civil society sectors increasingly constrained. This

includes a significant decrease in funding for women's rights organisations in terms of both core funds and ad hoc provision.¹⁹ This funding squeeze not only hampers practical implementation but also signals a broader devaluation of the agenda, making it easier for WPS priorities to be overlooked in national and international security discussions. Moreover, a recent report titled "The Next Wave"

“ Pushback manifests in different ways – sometimes through active resistance, other times through passive neglect or avoidance. ”

by the European Parliamentary Forum for Sexual and Reproductive Rights (EPF) has revealed a dramatic surge in funding for anti-gender and anti-rights movements across Europe and the report warns of a transnational authoritarian shift undermining amongst others the concept of gender as socially constructed, which is foundational to the EU core principles and the WPS agenda specifically. This undermines efforts to integrate gender perspectives into peacebuilding, conflict prevention, and post-conflict recovery.²⁰

Practical Action

Integrate structured WPS risk assessments into your organisational planning cycles. This can include tracking changes in public statements by political and military leadership, monitoring budget allocations for WPS-related programmes, and engaging with civil society organisa-

tions to capture on-the-ground observations of shrinking space for gender equality initiatives. Regularly reviewing these indicators, at least quarterly, can help identify emerging pushback early, allowing for timely advocacy and targeted interventions to keep WPS commitments visible and protected.



WPS risk assessment checklist

How are we identifying where WPS is slipping?

- ✓ **Language shifts:** Are key terms (e.g., gender, WPS, diversity, inclusion) being removed from policies, communications, or official documents?
- ✓ **Institutional positioning:** Is there evidence of a deliberate shift in how WPS is positioned within the organisation (e.g., downgrading roles, merging offices, changing reporting lines or criteria for funding)?
- ✓ **Visibility of WPS activities:** Are WPS-related events being cancelled, reduced in frequency, or erased from public agendas?
- ✓ **Leadership engagement:** Have key leaders and officials stopped speaking publicly about WPS or gender equality or publicly denouncing WPS or gender equality?
- ✓ **Signs of backlash:** Are there increasing public or political narratives pushing back against gender equality, WPS, inclusivity or related initiatives?
- ✓ **Resource allocation:** Is there a reduction or withdrawal of funding for WPS programmes or activities, both internally and externally?
- ✓ **Expertise erosion:** Are WPS experts being sidelined or institutional knowledge lost through restructuring, leading to weaker implementation capacity?

Use this checklist during regular reviews to flag early warning signs of WPS backsliding and to guide proactive responses.

2 Strategic Messaging to Hold and Create the Space

“ We are protectors of these frameworks, in an era when the rules are changing. We are the protectors in this dilemma. We need to think strategically, operationally and tactically and ensure communication spans across these themes. ”

- Civil society contributor

In an increasingly contested political space, advancing the WPS agenda requires not only defending existing commitments but actively shaping how WPS is understood and applied. Communication is a critical tool in this effort. Those working on WPS must think beyond routine messaging – recognising that how, when, and to whom we communicate directly influences the relevance, resilience, and reach of the agenda.

Strategic Use of Language

Communication on WPS should be intentional and aligned with specific objectives. Messaging must be targeted, audience-specific, and designed to build alliances, counter disinformation, and link WPS to broader strategic priorities – whether resilience, hybrid threats, or defence. One participant with communication expertise explained: ‘The question should not be about when you communicate [on WPS]. That’s always!’

Language is never neutral. Speaking about WPS, gender equality, or feminist foreign policy is itself a political act, particularly in contexts where these terms are under attack. At NATO, speaking about 'gender' and 'women, peace and security' has become a sensitive topic with Allies avoiding language that could create tensions and hinder collective decision-making on key security and defence concerns.²¹ However, strategic flexibility is essential. There is power in openly invoking WPS terminology, but also value in using alternative framings or "labels" engaging in silent diplomacy where it helps protect the agenda in hostile environments.

A key consideration is the outcome we are seeking: what change do we want to achieve, what progress do we defend and will adjusting our language help or hinder that objective? Adapting terminology cannot mean abandoning principles and frameworks; it needs to be about selecting the most effective route to reach strategic and operational goals. Silence should never mean disengagement.

“ Silence should never mean disengagement. ”

Even when using alternate language, it is critical to remain active in shaping the discourse.

The Risk of Silence

When WPS advocates withdraw from public communication, they leave a vacuum that can be exploited by malign actors. Across the Alliance and beyond, we have seen how adversaries use disinformation to distort the meaning of WPS, framing it as a threat or trivialising its importance. Maintaining active, visible, and credible communication is

essential to prevent the hijacking of WPS narratives and to protect the integrity of the agenda. This can include efforts to

'normalise' WPS through mentioning it in meetings where WPS is not the subject of discussion, but it has relevance to show commitment, in a very matter of fact way. For example, in a meeting on defence spending, 'there are WPS considerations here, e.g.', and then move onto the next point. This is particularly important for political and military leaders to take note of.

Reframing Narratives

Past WPS messaging often relied on operational utility arguments (e.g., increasing force effectiveness), but in a shifting ideological landscape, these may no longer resonate. For example, NATO is no longer engaged as readily in crisis response as it was in Afghanistan, rather its core purpose is deterrence and defence, which requires a different understanding of the utility of WPS. Effective practice requires reframing the agenda to align with current political and security concerns, recognising that ideological pushback cannot always be addressed with logic alone. Tailoring communication to each context maximises impact and sustains relevance.

Practical Action

Ensure that communication about WPS is purposeful, outcome-oriented and

audience-specific. Include the following principles in your communication strategy: inclusivity; emphasis on current relevance and impact; and amplification of different voices and means of communication through vertical and horizontal collaborations between civil society actors, policymakers, media actors, and local communities. Use this checklist throughout the whole cycle of your communication strategy – planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation – to ensure that the visibility of WPS is maintained and its transformative potential is clearly articulated in relation to current security and societal challenges. Finally, develop a comprehensive impact assessment strategy and a robust feedback and accountability mechanism to ensure that communication about WPS remains flexible and relevant amid ideological, financial and political pushback.

“ Maintaining active, visible, and credible communication is essential to prevent the hijacking of WPS narratives and to protect the integrity of the agenda. ”



Communication strategy

checklist

How are we proactively safeguarding WPS through communication?

- ✔ **Purposeful language use:** Are we using WPS-related language deliberately and strategically? Have we assessed if alternative language could still achieve our intended objectives without diluting core principles?
- ✔ **Outcome-focused communication:** Are we clear on the end goals of our communication, and do our language choices support those goals?
- ✔ **Maintaining presence and normalising WPS:** Are we ensuring that WPS remains visible in public and policy (digital) spaces particularly ones not focused on WPS, to prevent malign actors from co-opting or misrepresenting the agenda? Is it being mentioned in a matter-of-fact way to present it as an everyday part of action in that area?
- ✔ **Narrative vigilance:** Are we monitoring where WPS is included or excluded from key discussions, and addressing gaps before they widen? For instance, when and to what extent are WPS narratives linked with deterrence, whole of society approach and resilience?
- ✔ **Countering disinformation:** Are we actively challenging gendered disinformation and reinforcing accurate, constructive narratives about WPS?

-  **Reframing benefits:** Are we adapting our narratives to highlight WPS's relevance to current peace and security priorities, such as societal resilience, mitigating risks of emerging and disruptive technologies or countering hybrid threats?
-  **Means of Communication:** What are the means through which we communicate WPS? How diverse and inclusive are our means of communication? How diverse and inclusive is our WPS messaging? Does it reach a diversity of audiences?
-  **Impact:** Have we developed an impact assessment of our communication strategy on WPS? What are the opportunities, challenges, and risks of our communication strategy? Have we accounted for the formal and informal effects of our communication strategy?
-  **Feedback and accountability:** Has our communication strategy on WPS achieved its purpose? Have we actively sought feedback from all our partners, including affected communities? Has our audience provided feedback and have we informed our audience about the input used?

Use this checklist to maintain a proactive, outcome-oriented communication strategy that protects and strengthens the WPS agenda in contested environments.

3 Strengthening Collaboration

“No matter how stark or hopeless it looks, if we collaborate at different levels and layers, we can evolve strategies. Old collaborations might be falling away, but new ones are forming, creating opportunities for change.”

- Civil society contributor

Collaboration remains one of the most effective strategies to hold and create the space for WPS, particularly during periods of political volatility and ideological pushback. To sustain WPS commitments and advance best practice, it is essential to strengthen existing partnerships while proactively building new, cross-sector relationships that operate across local, national, and international levels.

Mobilising New Collaborations

The loss of some traditional alliances also creates space for new collaborations and new alliances to emerge. Best practice requires identifying and nurturing unconventional partnerships – bringing together

civil society, academia, policymakers and military leaders, along with religious groups and youth organisations, where appropriate. These diverse networks are key to developing resilient and adaptable strategies to protect WPS commitments.

Mobilising Institutional Knowledge

In the current polarised political environment, building bridges with moderate voices and even sceptical actors can be a productive strategy. Engaging with dissenters through ‘constructive engagement’ allows for dialogue that may reduce opposition and create space for incremental progress. It is also important to recognise when these conversations

will not have positive outcomes and to step away. Equally important is maintaining relationships with supportive actors on the inside of institutions who, even if constrained by political, societal and financial realities, can still contribute to WPS goals through quieter forms of advocacy or influence. Proactively mobilising institutional knowledge – both within and beyond traditional WPS spaces – strengthens resilience and keeps WPS connected to evolving security dynamics.

Harnessing Cross-Cultural Experience and Diverse Voices

Women's and feminist activism in conflict-affected and securitised environments has a long history, and there is much to learn from these experiences. The adoption of UNSCR 1325 was built on decades of mobilisation of the global women's movements, including as part of the UN Decade for Women and Beijing Platform for Action with 2025 marking its thirtieth anniversary. Current WPS advocates can draw on these lessons,

learning from groups who have developed successful strategies to defend gender equality in and against hostile environments working at an international, national and local level. Engaging with these diverse voices enriches strategy and provides practical, tested tools to navigate present challenges.

Practical Action

Situate collaboration at the core of protecting WPS. Ensure that you assess, strengthen and rethink existing collaborations; seek new partnerships and allies; and engage with dissenters and opposing views to disseminate and preserve knowledge about WPS. Use this checklist to develop, evaluate and refine your outreach strategy consistently alongside discovering gaps, misconceptions and disinformation about WPS. Disseminate this checklist to your existing, new, and potential partners to mobilise them and ensure consistency within your collaboration strategy.

Collaboration strategy checklist

How are we strengthening and expanding WPS collaborations?

- ✔ **Assessing collaboration:** How effective are current platforms of collaboration between grassroots organisations, civil society, policymakers, military actors and academia? What are the gaps in collaboration? Who has been included and who has been excluded from exiting WPS coalitions?
- ✔ **Building new alliances and bringing together diverse voices:** Are we identifying new partnership opportunities across sectors – such as security or military, civil society, academia, media, religious groups, and youth organisations – to broaden the WPS coalition?
- ✔ **Strengthening local-to-global connections:** Are we creating links between local, national, and international actors to ensure diverse perspectives are reflected in WPS strategies?

“ Collaboration remains one of the most effective strategies to hold and create the space for WPS. ”

-  **Formalising collaboration structures:** Are we moving beyond informal networks to develop concrete, operational collaborations that can sustain impact over time? What tools and resources do we need to formalise these structures?
-  **Engaging moderates and sceptics:** Are we reaching out to moderates or dissenters as appropriate and in a spirit of 'constructive engagement', to reduce resistance and build broader consensus?
-  **Preserving quiet allies:** Are we maintaining relationships with actors who, even if constrained publicly, can support WPS goals through less visible channels? What are the risks in supporting them, and how do we mitigate against them?
-  **Learning from cross-cultural experience:** Are we engaging with, supporting and learning from women's and feminist movements and civil society organisations experienced in advocating under securitised or repressive environments?

Use this checklist to evaluate and expand your collaborative networks, ensuring WPS remains a living, evolving agenda sustained by broad, cross-sector support.

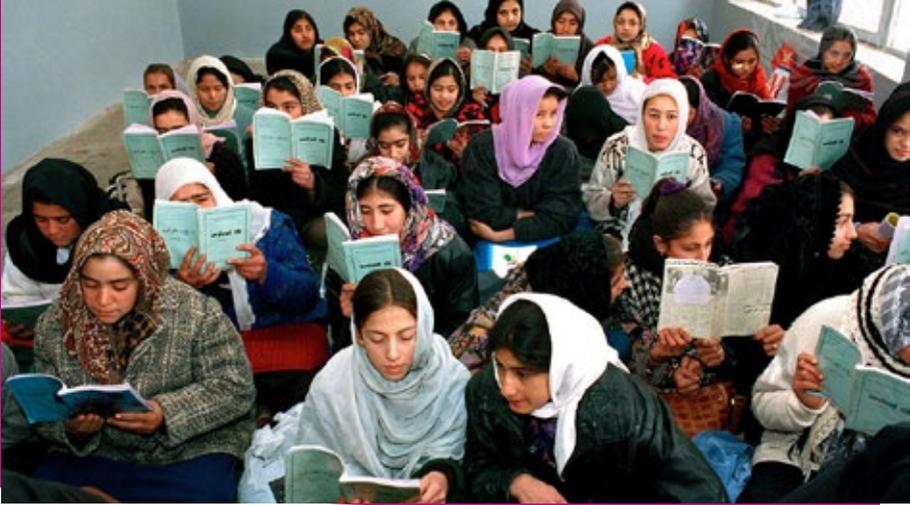
4 Building Systemic Resilience

“ The concept of resilience has never been more important, or contested. ”

- Academic and Civil Society Contributor

In the face of political turbulence and shifting alliances, holding the line on WPS requires a deliberate focus on building systemic resilience, not only in policies but in people, partnerships, and processes. While the loss of prominent champions can leave gaps, it also opens space for like-minded actors to step forward and lead. This moment provides an opportunity to strengthen the WPS agenda by cultivating broader networks of support across civil society, academia, media, policymakers, and military leadership whose expertise speaks directly to gender, security, peace and women's

rights. Moreover, as women peace-builders and community-led organizations already know: a WPS agenda equipped to withstand political pushback engages men²² and considers the role of masculinities, and in so doing responds to the 'manosphere', the rise of strongman (geo) politics, and the proliferation of gendered disinformation.²³ It also empowers youth leadership on the agenda.²⁴ At the same time, we must hold ourselves, our collaborators and stakeholders accountable for our strategies and consistently seeking feedback with the aim to protect WPS during these challenging times.



Holding the Line with Flexibility

Flexibility is essential to resilience.

WPS advocates must be prepared to navigate changing political dynamics, adapt strategies, and rethink messaging without compromising core objectives.

This means recognising and seizing new opportunities, adjusting language when

needed to maintain

access and influence,

and moving beyond

predictable narratives

to mobilise fresh

sources of support.

Resilient advocates are those that can

evolve, stay responsive, and remain

effective even under pressure.

“Holding the line
requires flexibility,
not rigidity.”

Practical Action

Use this checklist to assess the resilience of WPS in the face of uncertainty.

Integrate it at all stages from planning and implementation to monitoring and evaluation to assess the impact of

your WPS strategy and make it a key requirement for all your stakeholders to

engage with when you collaborate.

Use this checklist to

support the design

of a WPS strategy

that is inclusive,

flexible, adaptable where all stakeholders

have the opportunity to lead, participate

and evaluate your WPS strategy while

leveraging their most appropriate skills at

every stage of the process.

Resilience strategy

checklist

How are we building resilience to safeguard WPS at a time when it is increasing under attack and in danger of annihilation?

- ✔ **Expanding support networks:** Are we identifying and engaging new partners across sectors – including civil society, academia, media, government, military, and political movements – to strengthen our WPS resilience?
- ✔ **Fostering inclusive spaces:** Are our collaborations empathetic, non-judgmental, and inclusive, ensuring participation or protection from a wide range of actors and communities?
- ✔ **Strengthening cross-sector collaboration:** Are we forging diverse alliances to pool resources, share knowledge, and increase collective impact? How do we encourage interaction between our different stakeholders?

“ A WPS agenda equipped to withstand political pushback engages men and considers the role of masculinities. ”

-  **Seizing leadership opportunities:** Are we encouraging like-minded stakeholders to step into leadership roles where gaps have emerged?

-  **Investing in long-term systemic resilience:** Are we building equitable and inclusive systems and networks designed to sustain WPS efforts over time, beyond individual political, financial cycles or leadership changes? What are the crises that may affect the resilience of our WPS coalitions?

-  **Inclusive accountability:** Have we developed an accountability mechanism for evaluating the resilience of our WPS coalition? Have we included stakeholders that have the relevant experience and expertise to lead on specific WPS areas as appropriate to our strategy yet possess the adaptive capacity to respond to uncertainty? Are our stakeholders empowered to lead and are they ready to empower others to lead on WPS?

Use this checklist to assess how your strategies are fostering systemic resilience to safeguard WPS in the face of political and ideological pressures.

Conclusion

Holding the Line, Shaping the Future

WPS has always been contested – and it remains so today. This guide has set out practical strategies to navigate pushback, hold space, and strengthen resilience at a time when the agenda faces growing political, financial and ideological pressures. What is clear is that progress will not hold itself. It will take deliberate action, careful strategy, and collective effort to protect and sustain WPS in the years ahead.

Holding the line is not about standing still. It is about adapting to shifting dynamics, finding new pathways, and mobilising broad-based support to ensure WPS continues to deliver real-world impact. Across civil society, academia, policymaking, and military spaces, there is both an opportunity and responsibility to act. This is not a moment to retreat, but to reassert the value of Women, Peace and Security as central to security, resilience, and democratic integrity.

But there is hope. Our discussions in The Hague demonstrated this is also a moment to reevaluate what WPS means, to reclaim its transformative potential as envisaged by those who advocated for Resolution 1325 both inside and outside the Security Council, and to build coalitions that reflect the realities of today's security environment.

Holding the line now will shape what comes next.

Anne-Floor, Amy, Sorana, Emine and Katharine

September 2025

Endnotes

- 1 *Holding the Line: Practical Strategies for Advancing Women, Peace, and Security in a Time of Pushback*, Monday 23rd June 2025, WO=MEN: Dutch Gender Platform, The Hague.
- 2 The event and the production of this guide were made possible through generous support from the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Impact Acceleration Account, under Grant Ref. ES/X004449/1 at Newcastle University and Grant Ref. 1126653 at King's College London. We also acknowledge additional support from the QR – Policy Support Fund at Newcastle University.
- 3 United Nations, 'Gender equality: UN Women calls for political will and accelerated global action', <https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/09/1165849>.
- 4 Zulfiqar A Bhutta and Stephen Rulisa, 'Implications of the USAID U-turn on women's health globally', *Obstet Med.* 2025 April. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11992587/#:~:text=An%20analysis%20by%20the%20Gutmacher,complications%20encountered%20during%20pregnancy%20and>
- 5 UN Women, 'Facts and Figures: Women, peace and security', 2024, https://www.unwomen.org/en/articles/facts-and-figures/facts-and-figures-women-peace-and-security?utm_source=Equality+Now&utm_campaign=f47950d7fb-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2025_07_24_04_22_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_-114853bf70-238293432
- 6 United Nations, 'Four years on, here's what total exclusion of women in Afghanistan looks like', <https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/08/1165622>.
- 7 Jessica Anania and Dawn Le, 'Conflicts to Watch in 2025: Women, Peace and Security in a More Volatile World', 2025, <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/conflicts-to-watch-in-2025-women-peace-and-security-in-a-more-volatile-world/>.
- 8 UN Women, 2025, 'The impact of Sudan's war on women, two years on', <https://www.unwomen.org/en/articles/explainer/the-impact-of-sudans-war-on-women-two-years-on>
- 9 Anania and Le, 'Conflicts to Watch in 2025'; United Nations, 'In Gaza, mounting evidence of famine and widespread starvation', <https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/07/1165517>.
- 10 UN Women, 2022, 'Rapid Gender Analysis of Ukraine', <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2022/05/rapid-gender-analysis-of-ukraine>
- 11 NATO, 'NATO Policy on Women, Peace and Security', 2024, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_227578.htm.
- 12 Jana Krause, Werner Krause, and Pia Brånfors. 2018. 'Women's Participation in Peace Negotiations and the Durability of Peace', *International Interactions* 44 (6): 985–1016.
- 13 United Nations, 'Gender equality: UN Women calls for political will and accelerated global action', <https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/09/1165849>.
- 14 Katharine A. M. Wright, 2025. 'Moving beyond a 'Hollow Concept': Realising Women, Peace and Security at NATO under a Trump Presidency.' *Defence Studies* 25 (3): 731–39.
- 15 Seb Starcevic, 'Mark Rutte DOGEs NATO with Dozens of Job Cuts', *POLITICO*, 2025, <https://www.politico.eu/article/mark-rutte-doge-nato-staff-warn-cuts-us-ukraine-iran-defense-donald-trump-budget/>.
- 16 Antoaneta Roussi, 'Revealed: NATO downplays climate and gender language to appease Trump', *POLITICO*, 2025, <https://www.politico.eu/article/nato-downplays-climate-and-gender-language-to-appease-trump/>.
- 17 Lucina di Meo, 'Monetizing Misogyny: Gendered Disinformation and the Undermining of Women's Rights and Democracy Globally', #ShePersisted, February 2023, https://she-persisted.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/ShePersisted_MonetizingMisogyny.pdf.
- 18 Susan Hutchinson, 'US Defense Secretary cancels Women, Peace and Security programs', *The Strategist*, 2025, <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/us-defense-secretary-cancels-women-peace-and-security-programs/>.
- 19 Merima Šišić and Derya Binişik, 'Beyond the Cuts: How the Defunding Affects Feminist and Civil Society Organizations', *The Heinrich Böll Foundation*, 2025, <https://www.boell.de/en/2025/03/13/beyond-cuts-how-defunding-affects-feminist-and-civil-society-organizations>.
- 20 European Parliamentary Forum, 'New Report Exposes Funding to Anti-rights Initiatives in Europe Rise to US\$1.18 billion', 2025, <https://www.epfweb.org/node/1152>.
- 21 Roussi, 'Revealed: NATO downplays climate and gender language to appease Trump'.
- 22 David Duriesmith, 'Engaging men and boys in the Women, Peace and Security agenda: Beyond the 'good men' industry', 2017, *LSE Blogs*, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/wps/2017/12/15/engaging-men-and-boys-in-the-women-peace-and-security-agenda-beyond-the-good-men-industry-david-duriesmith-112017/>.
- 23 Alan Greig, 'Men, Masculinities and Feminist Peace: A Peer Exchange on Lessons, Challenges and Collaborations' 2021, https://paxforpeace.nl/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2024/05/MenMasculinitiesFeministPeacePeerExchange_2022.pdf
- 24 Reliefweb, 'Thinking Intergenerationally: WPS and the Youth, Peace, and Security Agenda', 2020, <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/thinking-intergenerationally-wps-and-youth-peace-and-security-agenda>.

HOLDING THE LINE

**ON WOMEN, PEACE
and SECURITY**

Copyright © 2025 WO=MEN
www.wo-men.nl