



gender action for peace and security

ASSESSING UK GOVERNMENT ACTION ON WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY IN 2024



For children and
equality for girls



This report has been produced with inputs from member organisations listed above but it does not necessarily reflect the views of all members.

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List of Acronyms

ATT	Arms Trade Treaty	MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
EU	European Union	MERL	Monitoring, evaluation, research and learning
CBPFs	Country-Based Pooled Funds	MoD	Ministry of Defence
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women	MtCO₂e	Million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent
CERD	Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination	NAP	National Action Plan
CERF	Central Emergency Response Fund	NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
CFSP	Common Foreign and Security Policy	NSS	National Security Strategy
COP	Conference of the Parties	ODA	Official Development Assistance
CRSV	Conflict-related sexual violence	OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
CSSF	Conflict, Stability and Security Fund	OPT	Occupied Palestinian Territory
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations	PSVI	Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative
FCAS	Fragile and conflict-affected states	P/CVE	Preventing and countering violent extremism
FCDO	Foreign Commonwealth Development Office	SEAH	Sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment
GAPS	Gender Action for Peace and Security	SO	Strategic objective
GBV	Gender-based violence	UAF	Urgent Action Fund
GESI	Gender, Equality and Social Inclusion	UK	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
GNI	Gross national income	UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
HMG	His Majesty's Government	UNSCR	UN Security Council Resolution
ICAN	International Civil Society Action Network	USD	United States Dollars
IR	Integrated Review	VAWG	Violence against women and girls
ISF	Integrated Security Fund	WHRDs	Women and human rights defenders
JSP	Joint Service Publication	WLOs	Women-led organisations
LGBTQI+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex and Asexual	WMC	Women Mediators Across the Commonwealth
MEAL	Monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning	WPHF	Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund
		WPS	Women, Peace and Security

1. Introduction

This report notes that not all GAPS Members engage across all strategic objectives of the UK's 5th NAP. Instead, their contributions reflect specific expertise in particular issues and contexts. While all Members have contributed, their input has been aligned with their respective organisational focus areas. It does not necessarily reflect the views of all members.

Since 2011,¹ Gender Action for Peace and Security (GAPS) – the UK's civil society network on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) – has provided an annual Shadow Report to His Majesty's Government (HMG). GAPS Shadow Reports provide a civil society assessment of HMG's implementation of its National Action Plan (NAP). This collaborative and collective effort, including drawing from expertise² from country-based teams and partners, provides a comprehensive annual overview of progress, stagnation or regression made in implementation. Each section is accompanied by concrete recommendations.

As a strategic partner and a critical friend, GAPS implores the UK Government to consider the implications of the lacklustre implementation of the first two years of the NAP 2023–2027³ and to consider its legacy for this 25th year of WPS implementation. Given global backsliding in women's rights and gender justice, as well as highly polarised and increasingly militarised geopolitical contexts, the UK's commitment and multilateral leadership as the penholder at the United Nations Security Council on this agenda is particularly critical. Responsibility for the WPS agenda sits across the Ministry of Defence (MoD) and the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), as well as its delivery partners, the Home Office, Ministry of Justice and Northern Ireland Office. This existing structure is innovative and well-positioned to provide coherent and collective implementation. Even modest yet concerted investment from all implementing departments could make the agenda transformative, bolster meaningful prevention of conflict, and provide a joined-up approach to restore the UK to being a global champion on gender equality. While this report assesses activity in 2024, it is published during the momentous 25th anniversary of the WPS agenda, a milestone opportunity for bringing concerted, consistent and gender-transformative commitment to upholding women's rights and gender equality in conflict contexts. This anniversary demands action and commitment to WPS, which appears at odds with the UK Government's recent cuts, announced and made in 2025.

July 2024 saw a change in government and while the election and subsequent government formation provide context for delays in outlined commitments, which include a robust monitoring, evaluation, research and learning (MERL) framework and a baseline study to inform indicators, progress has been too slow. In 2025, the scale and scope of the crisis for gender equality in conflict contexts demand bolder leadership and action than when the NAP was launched in 2023.

It is exactly this scale, scope and need that is outlined consistently throughout this Shadow Report by GAPS members. The case studies that are an annex and complementary to this report – on Ukraine, the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Sudan, Afghanistan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo – illustrate the transnational and interlinked crises currently faced. These included more frequent, protracted and lethal conflicts;⁴ a well-funded and coordinated⁵ anti-gender and anti-rights movement; the consequences of the climate emergency;⁶ the rapid rise of unregulated technologies;⁷ rising forced displacement;⁸ and increased arms proliferation.⁹

¹ GAPS (2011), [Shadow Report of the First Annual Review of the UK National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security](#)

² GAPS (2024), [Assessing UK Government Action on Women, Peace and Security in 2023](#)

³ UK Government (2023), [UK Women, Peace and Security National Action Plan 2023–2027](#)

⁴ ACLED (2024), [Conflict Index: December – Global conflicts double over the past five years](#)

⁵ GATE (2024), [Recognising, Documenting, and Addressing Anti-Gender Opposition](#)

⁶ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) (2023), [AR6 Synthesis Report: Climate Change 2023](#)

⁷ Amnesty International (2024), [GLOBAL: Tech systems worldwide are fueling gender inequalities](#)

⁸ UNHCR (2024), [Data and Statistics: Global Trends](#)

⁹ International Action Network on Small Arms and International Peace Information Service (IPIS) (2022), [Small Arms and Light Weapons Proliferation and Violence: Estimating its Scale and Forms](#)

Within the analysis of each strategic objective of the NAP, members have recognised some positive steps, including the UK Government's own commitments to reversing rollback and investing in partnerships. But as we publish this report in 2025, the scale and the impact of the rising interlinked transnational challenges are rapidly worsening, which demands bold collective action. In early 2025, the funding landscape for gender, peace and security initiatives deteriorated sharply. Notably, the US has halted and suspended many programmes,¹⁰ while the UK's Labour Government announced the largest reduction in Official Development Assistance (ODA) in the country's history.¹¹ Other donors, including the Netherlands¹² and Switzerland,¹³ indicate a trend away from aid – with no reform or alternative. The decision to cut aid in order to fund defence is not only sacrificing lives but is also shortsighted. It overlooks the essential role ODA plays in global stability and national security through investments in conflict prevention, poverty reduction and equality. This false dichotomy of aid versus defence will not make women and girls safer. Women and girls within all their diversity have been disproportionately impacted in all prior rounds of cuts, and the UK Government holds a responsibility to ensure they do no harm.

As GAPS members, in partnership with WROs and feminist movements from the Global South, we are witnessing the alarming impact these decisions are having, including rapidly shrinking civic space. This means feminist movements and decision-making bodies, including the UK Government, lose expertise, knowledge, accountability, partnership, access and innovation. Yet these are the very tools that are critical to push back against increased insecurity and militarism and the retreat from multilateralism.

This is where the WPS agenda provides a unique opportunity. As a cross-cutting, well-evidenced and long-standing agenda, HMG can use it to put to the forefront an understanding and approach to security that tackles the root causes of conflict such as gender inequality; ensures successful resolution of violence, including by the genuine and meaningful participation of women and girls; and delivers the necessary inclusive relief and recovery that will make conflict recurrence less likely. Investing in gender equality is not niche nor a 'nice to have': it is fundamental for realising women's rights and achieving any type of lasting peace and security.

This will require progressive¹⁴ political will that reinvigorates the UK's vital leadership role on the global stage as the penholder of the WPS agenda, and champions women's rights domestically and globally. It must include ministerial leadership and responsibilities, including at the National Security Council.

If the UK still seeks to be a global leader on upholding gender equality in a world order that claims human rights and international law, then such rhetoric must be backed by meaningful action and resourcing. This year, 2025, is not only the 25th anniversary but also the mid-point of the NAP 2023–2027.¹⁵ This Shadow Report demonstrates that at this crisis moment a 'business as usual' approach will not suffice. The next two years of implementation mark an opportunity for a turning point. Will the UK Government exacerbate rollback or step up with bold action to demonstrate robust leadership that leverages the WPS agenda towards a more just, peaceful and gender-equal world?

10 Chatham House (2025), [First USAID closes, the UK cuts aid: what a Western retreat from foreign aid could mean](#)

11 The Guardian (2025), ['This will cost lives': cuts to UK aid budget condemned as 'betrayal' by international development groups](#)

12 Rutgers (2025) [Netherlands risks setback in women's rights and equality due to budget cuts](#)

13 SWI swissinfo.ch (2025), [Switzerland cuts foreign aid to Albania, Bangladesh and Zambia](#)

14 Lammy, D (2024) [The Case for Progressive Realism](#)

15 UK Government (2023), [UK Women, Peace and Security National Action Plan 2023–2027](#)

2. Response to the UK 2024 UK Government Annual Report

GAPS Director's Response

This Shadow Report responds to the UK Government's 2024 Annual Report on the implementation of its fifth NAP on WPS. It is being written and published in mid-2025- a moment already defined by dramatic shifts globally. While the 2024 report reflects progress made last year, the current context cannot be ignored. The UK has now enacted its biggest aid cuts to date, made the deliberate decision to not retain gender as a standalone strategic priority, and further advanced a narrow, militarised vision of security. Many of the trends and concerns raised in previous GAPS Network shadow reports and publications are no longer warnings but now reality.

2025 marks the 25th anniversary of UN Security Council Resolution 1325. A moment that should have prompted reflection and recommitment has instead been overshadowed by a sharp turn in UK policy. This year has been shaped by a political and financial retreat from gender equality. Increased investment in defence and deterrence has been accompanied by a deprioritisation of conflict prevention, peacebuilding, and addressing the structural root causes of violence and conflict.

These decisions have not occurred in isolation. They reflect a broader redefinition of the UK's approach to peace and security, one that centres national interest, hard security and deterrence, while sidelining the very principles that the WPS agenda was built on. The Government's assertion that gender is now "mainstreamed" and therefore no longer requires to be a standalone priority is not borne out in practice¹. Gender is not meaningfully integrated across Government, and removing it as a strategic priority at a time of rising inequality and violence sends a clear message: that the UK is stepping back from global leadership on women's and girls' rights.

Against this backdrop, the Government's commitments under the fifth NAP on WPS have struggled to hold ground. The promised ambition, transparency and accountability have not been realised. Key implementation tools including the Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) framework and the baseline remain unpublished. The steering board for oversight of NAP implementation is yet to be set up. Mechanisms for engaging with civil society have been inconsistent. And the ability to track the UK's financial commitments to WPS efforts, particularly for women's rights organisations, remains limited.

The 2024 Annual Report offers some welcome continuity. GAPS values the consistent format and continued input from across relevant departments. In addition, the inclusion of reporting from the Ministry of Defence, Home Office, and Ministry of Justice reflects the ongoing efforts to broaden the NAP's domestic scope is welcomed. The addition of new country sections and examples of international engagement such as through NATO, the UN and the OSCE are positive. The inclusion of reporting on Georgia which is not a NAP focus country demonstrates how WPS programming can and should be applied beyond the UK's 12 focus countries. It is encouraging to see sustained efforts to build gender capacity across departments, including through the former Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF) now known as the Integrated Security Fund (ISF) WPS Help Desk. GAPS welcomes the continued operation of the WPS Helpdesk, and its role in providing technical gender expertise to UK Government departments. Its work across themes such as cyber, AI, defence, and climate security demonstrates how WPS principles can be applied to evolving global challenges and it is critical that with the shape of the ISF up for discussion that WPS remains a fund level outcome². The Annual Report does however offer limited evidence of how this expertise has been used to shape UK programming or resourcing decisions particularly at country level. As the Helpdesk continues, it will be vital to ensure its recommendations are not only delivered but also meaningfully acted upon.

¹ Parliament UK (2025) <https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/15886/html/>

² Parliament UK (2025) <https://committees.parliament.uk/event/24279>

The report remains largely descriptive and focused on activities rather than outcomes and provides little analysis of what is working, where challenges persist, or how the UK is adapting to an increasingly difficult operating environment. In a year when ODA cuts have had deep impacts on WPS programming, the lack of detail or reflection on those effects - particularly on focus countries, is a missed opportunity and demonstrates a lack of transparency and accountability.

As indicated in the annual report, conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) more than doubled in 2024, with significant increases in Ukraine, Sudan, and Palestine. GAPS welcomes the UK's continued role in the Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative (PSVI), and the commitment to survivor-centred approaches and accountability. But the report offers little clarity on how the UK has scaled its response in line with the rising need. There is no breakdown of funding, limited visibility on partnerships with women's rights organisations, and minimal reflection on what has or hasn't worked.

At a time of increasing global pushback on gender equality and shrinking civic space, feminist movements around the world continue to lead responses to conflict and crisis. The UK's support for this work should be growing, not retreating. Two years into the current NAP, the gap between the Government's stated commitments and the reality of implementation is growing. Feminist civil society and WROs continue to do vital work, often with shrinking resources and without being meaningfully included in decision-making. The current direction of UK foreign and development policy undermines the potential of the WPS agenda. A militarised approach to security cannot address the root causes of conflict, nor can it meet the needs of those most affected by violence.

As this Shadow Report shows, there is still time for the Government to course correct. That means delivering on overdue commitments, reversing the rollback on gender, and ensuring that WPS is meaningfully embedded across policy and programming. As the UK looks to refresh its NAP and PSVI strategy – on which further detail is still awaited – GAPS looks forward to continuing the work with the UK Government to ensure that the commitments, consultation and groundwork that shaped the fifth NAP are not lost but built upon.

3. Coordination, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL)

Effective implementation of the UK's NAP on WPS (2023–2027)¹⁶ requires robust coordination, informed leadership and strategic, transparent processes. It needs clear structures of ownership, consistent management and inclusive decision-making, which will enhance implementation, foster meaningful collaboration with civil society, promote adaptive learning and build skills across departments. These systems are essential for the UK Government to respond to crises and change through rights-based, gender-sensitive approaches that advance both national security and gender equality – domestically and globally.

However, the absence of a consistent, preventative approach has left the UK Government responding to crises – such as those in Ukraine, the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Sudan and Afghanistan – in a reactive and ad hoc manner. This has resulted in missed opportunities for early intervention, undermined leadership and ultimately, increased insecurity. In today's rapidly changing global context, a more agile, coordinated and adaptable approach is urgently needed.

The NAP 2023–2027 contains welcome commitments to developing a monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) framework – promising a baseline study in year 1, followed by a mid-point review and final evaluations. It also requires country teams to develop localised indicators. However, GAPS is concerned that both the baseline study and the MEL framework have been significantly delayed and are currently paused. While some disruption is expected around a General Election, no progress has been made under the current government, even as the mid-term review approaches. These delays hinder accountability, limit opportunities for adaptive learning and stall efforts to align with global best practice in WPS implementation. GAPS urges the UK Government to accelerate the development of a robust MEL framework and publish the baseline study, ensuring a transparent, cross-departmental process with meaningful engagement from civil society – especially WROs and women human rights defenders. Examples of effective MEL frameworks developed collaboratively with government and civil society organisations (CSOs) include the Netherlands WPS NAP MEL framework¹⁷; the Philippines monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning (MEAL) indicator handbook¹⁸; and the Compact on Women, Peace and Security and Humanitarian Action (WPS-HA) MEL reporting¹⁹. These collaborative approaches promote shared ownership, institutionalise implementation and enable strategic alignment across agencies. The UK's MEL framework must integrate with the Integrated Security Fund's (ISF) existing Gender, Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI). Additionally, the NAP lacks a theory of change, which is critical to link its WPS commitments to broader strategic outcomes. GAPS recommends adopting a theory of change to clarify pathways to impact, identify assumptions and measure performance against stated goals.

GAPS also expresses disappointment at the shift from annual to biennial parliamentary reporting on WPS progress. This change reduces transparency and limits opportunities for meaningful scrutiny. GAPS is concerned that infrequent reporting, combined with the lack of a theory of change, MEL framework or localised indicators more than a year into the NAP cycle, could serve to obscure delays. GAPS recommends reinstating annual reporting to reinforce accountability, ensure iterative learning and demonstrate action to meet commitments to utilising available expertise.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ INEE (2025), https://inee.org/sites/default/files/resources/mel_toolkit.pdf

¹⁸ ICWPS Manila (2024) <https://icwpsmanila2024.com/philippines-launches-landmark/>

¹⁹ Generation Equality (2025), <https://forum.generationequality.org/women-peace-security-and-humanitarian-action-wps-ha-compact>

Other mechanisms for evaluation and oversight must also be strengthened. The quarterly Cross-Whitehall Working Group meetings attended by civil society and academic representatives remain critical to implementation. GAPS appreciates its inclusion in these meetings through the Director and the GAPS Network Policy Working Group Co-Chairs. To enhance their impact, GAPS recommends that progress reports should be shared at least two weeks before meetings. While these can remain confidential, early access would enable GAPS to gather feedback from its network and provide informed input, leveraging both thematic and geographic expertise. Sharing progress reports would help build trust with civil society and institutionalise participatory approaches. Despite commitments in the NAP, the Ministerial WPS NAP Steering Board has yet to meet, even two years into implementation. This is a missed opportunity for political leadership, oversight and strategic alignment.

There have been some positive indicators of increasing consultation and transparent engagement with UK-based civil society, including human rights, women's rights and humanitarian organisations. Ahead of the election, the Labour Party engaged in dialogue with civil society on possible feminist approaches to foreign policy. Building on dialogues in feminist foreign and development policies,²⁰ GAPS welcomes these consultative approaches and encourages their continuation now that Labour has been elected into government. In reviewing these policies and determining the UK's new strategic direction, rather than aiming to name a policy 'feminist', GAPS urges adopting feminist principles²¹ across the board to strengthen commitments to gender equality throughout all policy, leveraging existing WPS architecture to enable this. This would include meaningful participation with civil society, especially Global South and country-based WROs and women-led organisations (WLOs) who are experts on sustainable peacebuilding and genuine justice and equality. Such collaboration could help inform UK approaches, ensure their effectiveness and efficiency, and build trust with partners. This would re-position the UK as a global leader on gender equality and provide an essential bulwark against the anti-gender movement.

In order for the UK to deliver on this repositioning it must enhance its consultation practice as consultation is still not embedded as a routine or standard part of policy-making. Additionally, the UK Government's decision to reuse evidence submissions from the International Development White Paper²² for the current development review, without updated consultation, excludes vital perspectives – particularly those from countries in the Global South, and fails to reflect the rapidly evolving global context. Although the FCDO has convened consultations with selected CSOs on situations in Yemen, Myanmar and Sudan, there has been no follow-up or feedback on how this input has informed policy or programming decisions. The absence of transparency around the outcomes of these consultations weakens trust and makes it difficult to assess whether civil society voices or perspectives have influence. It also risks an extractive approach. GAPS urges the UK Government to adopt a more consistent, transparent and inclusive approach to consultation, using tools like the Beyond Consultations tool,²³ to guide best practice and ensure meaningful engagement with civil society across government.

GAPS is also concerned about the lack of consultation in developing the MoD Joint Service Publication 985 (JSP) on human security.²⁴ Unlike in previous processes, GAPS and other key partners were not invited to contribute. This represents a missed opportunity to build trust, ensure transparency and facilitate learning across the sector. Without consultation, it is harder to evaluate the effectiveness of the JSP or share best practices.

To achieve policy coherence and consistent implementation of the WPS agenda, stronger integration across the UK Government's broader conflict, security and development strategies is essential. This includes coordinated action across Whitehall on both the domestic and international implementation of the NAP. The current gender architecture across government remains fragmented, and the new government has an opportunity to address this. As the human security and geopolitical landscape is rapidly shifting, and as the UK looks to set out its new UK National Security Strategy (NSS), it is important that the UK meaningfully engages a broad set of civil society groups in consultations around national

20 GAPS (2023), [Beyond Women, Peace and Security: Developing a Feminist Vision of Foreign Policy](#)

21 Ibid.

22 HMG (2024), [International development in a contested world: ending extreme poverty and tackling climate change. a white paper on international development](#)

23 GAPS, Women for Women, Amnesty International, Womankind Worldwide, Saferworld (no date), [Beyond Consultations](#)

24 Ministry of Defence (2024), [JSP 985 Human Security in Defence](#)

security and defence. The new UK NSS serves as an opportunity to connect existing strategies such as the International Development White Paper and the International Women and Girls Strategy and fragmented gender architecture across government. It can also serve to emphasise the importance of the cross-cutting nature of the WPS agenda across the whole of government and its priorities.

GAPS welcomes the renewed delivery of gender, conflict and stability training across government through the WPS Helpdesk, and commends past efforts that targeted staff working in or on fragile and conflict-affected states (FCAS). These training sessions have been well received, especially by teams that are not traditionally engaged in traditional WPS work. While such training is valuable, it must be embedded within broader systems of reporting. Without a MEL framework, it is difficult to assess whether these efforts are leading to behavioural or policy change. Training must be paired with mechanisms to measure impact and inform iterative improvements, ensuring the UK Government delivers on its WPS commitments. The WPS Helpdesk remains a strong example of how the UK Government can provide tailored knowledge and skills development, and GAPS recommends continued support for its work.

To further strengthen implementation, relevant job descriptions – particularly within the WPS team – must explicitly include WPS or gender expertise. Gender and WPS advisers should be embedded across FCDO, MoD and all co-implementing departments of the NAP (including the Home Office, Ministry of Justice and Northern Ireland Office). This will help institutionalise WPS evidence and knowledge, and sustain commitments through periods of staff transition or political change.

Recommendations

The UK Government should:

- **Establish a theory of change for the 5th NAP** that should clearly outline the challenges the NAP seeks to address, what success looks like, and the assumptions and risks involved. A robust theory of change will provide strategic direction, a long-term view to reduce the drivers of gender inequality, and will support implementation and allow for better tracking of the NAP's progress and effectiveness.
- **Publish the delayed baseline study, the mid-term evaluation and MEL framework.** The UK Government should resume and publish the paused MEL framework and baseline study. It should set a clear timeline and funding for delivery, and commit to an inclusive, public, final evaluation to assess the impact of the NAP and guide future strategies.
- **Institutionalise regular, inclusive consultation processes.** This involves establishing structured and transparent consultation mechanisms with WROs, civil society and local groups. The UK Government should also create a feedback loop to show how input informs policy and programming, and ensure consultations take place at all important stages of NAP implementation.
- **Strengthen cross-government coordination and accountability.** This involves reinforcing the Cross-Whitehall Working Group with a fixed calendar, standing agenda and the advance sharing of progress updates with civil society. The government should standardise annual reporting to the UK Parliament using consistent indicators and an accessible, disaggregated data system to track progress.
- **Embed gender and WPS expertise in staffing and training.** This involves including gender and WPS expertise in relevant job descriptions across departments. The government should expand access to gender- and conflict-sensitivity training and evaluate its effectiveness through behaviour change and policy impact. Following training, it should offer sustained accompaniment support to ensure it is meaningfully integrated into policy and programming design, implementation and MEL, drawing on staff expertise at regional desks as well as gender experts and women's CSOs in the specific context.

4. Funding and Resourcing

Resourcing and investing in the WPS agenda requires long-term, multi-year core funding, designed in consultation with WROs and WLOs; this is crucial to the agenda's implementation. Investing in peacebuilding initiatives is not only a principled commitment, it is economically sound. For every £1 invested in peacebuilding, there is an estimated £13 return through reducing conflict-related costs.²⁵ The leadership of WROs and WLOs in peacebuilding and across the triple nexus is well established. Sustained, direct funding to these groups is a smart and strategic investment that contributes to peace, security and development outcomes.

In 2023, the UK reaffirmed its commitments to gender equality through the fifth NAP, the International Women and Girls Strategy,²⁶ and the International Development White Paper.²⁷ These frameworks rightly emphasise the role of WROs, WLOs, women peacebuilders and human rights defenders. However, the UK Government's approach to ODA has become increasingly unpredictable and restrictive. In 2023, the UK spent 0.58 per cent of its gross national income (GNI) on ODA, totalling £15.3 billion. A significant portion – £4.3 billion – was spent domestically on in-donor refugee costs, reducing what was available for international development work. In 2024, provisional figures show this dropped to £14.07 billion (0.5 per cent of GNI), with £2.8 billion still spent on domestic refugee-related costs.²⁸

In early 2025, the UK Government announced its intention to reduce further aid from 0.5 per cent to just 0.3 per cent of GNI by 2027, to accommodate an increase in defence spending, abandoning previous cross-party and manifesto commitments to return to the 0.7 per cent target when the fiscal situation allowed. This would represent the lowest level of UK aid since 1999.²⁹ The aid budget is also no longer automatically linked to GNI, which introduces long-term uncertainty for civil society, undermining the UK's credibility and reliability as a donor. These cuts are not a distant threat – they are already happening. Partners across the WPS and broader peacebuilding ecosystem are experiencing significant reductions in funding, with some programmes scaled back or terminated entirely. While the government maintains it is spending 0.5 per cent of GNI on ODA, the effective amount available for new or sustained programming is far lower. Once legal obligations for multilateral commitments are accounted for, only a small fraction of ODA remains. Within that, there is currently no earmarked or ring-fenced funding specifically for WPS or for gender equality more broadly. This creates deep uncertainty, undermines long-term planning, and leaves WROs and WLOs, the major drivers of peace, security and gender justice, struggling to sustain their work. This is despite this government claiming to be 'proudly feminist, prioritising women and girls'.³⁰

Resourcing in ways that directly tackle the root causes of conflict – such as gender inequality – is critical for building sustainable, positive peace and reducing the likelihood of future conflicts.³¹ Cuts to conflict prevention and peacebuilding disproportionately affect long-term solutions that address the underlying drivers of instability. While GAPS recognises the UK's ongoing commitments to funding WLOs and WROs, as set out in the UK policy frameworks, the reality of current aid reduction risks undermining these same strategies.

Despite the shrinking funding landscape, there have been positive developments in the UK's support for gender equality and the WPS agenda. Examples include the continuation of GAPS members' 'Resourcing Change' programme,³² which since 2021 has supported 27 WROs in Nigeria, South Sudan and Yemen

25 Institute for Economics & Peace (2017) [The Cost-Effectiveness of Peacebuilding](#)

26 HMG (2023), [International Women and Girls Strategy 2023-2030](#)

27 HMG (2024), [International development in a contested world: ending extreme poverty and tackling climate change. a white paper on international development](#)

28 Bond, (2024), [UK government continues to spend more than a quarter of the UK aid budget in the UK on asylum seeker costs](#)

29 Loft, P., Brien, P (2025), [UK aid: Reducing spending to 0.3% of GNI by 2027/28](#)

30 Lammy, D (2023), ['We will reconnect Britain' – Lammy's foreign policy speech to Chatham House](#)

31 Conciliation Resources (2025) [Impact of UK aid budget cut on conflict prevention and peacebuilding](#)

32 Saferworld (2023), [Resourcing change: Supporting women's rights organisations in fragile and conflict-affected states](#)

with an average of £35,000 in flexible core funding annually, alongside dedicated capacity strengthening and movement-building opportunities. This type of tailored, trust-based funding enables WROs to respond effectively to community needs and strengthens their organisational development, enhancing long-term sustainability.

In addition to this, over the past year GAPS has recognised several new FCDO and ISF funding opportunities such as the Advancing Women, Peace and Security programme in Ethiopia and the ISF programme supporting WPS in Iraq and Afghanistan.³³ These programmes reflect a welcome shift towards standalone WPS programming, which demonstrates that WPS is crucial to achieving security and stability objectives by funding WROs. Encouragingly, many of these opportunities prioritise strong partnerships and skills development with local WROs and WLOs – an approach that aligns closely with UK WPS NAP commitments. However, despite these positive trends, the UK still lacks a dedicated WPS fund. Additionally, there are limited publicly available records that disaggregate gender-focused spending across the ISF, FCDO and the wider UK Government. So, it is not possible to see how current or any new funding has contributed to the delivery of the UK NAP, as it is not being tracked and reported as part of the UK's WPS commitments.

Another recurring challenge with both FCDO and ISF funding opportunities has been the short turnaround times for applications, which limit meaningful consultation and co-design with local partners. Some funding calls also structurally favour an international non-governmental organisation (INGO) lead, counter to the NAP's commitment to provide direct support to WROs. Even where WROs and WLOs receive longer-term funding, they often face challenges in accessing new resources or building donor relationships. WROs may lack the social capital or access to easily be able to engage directly with donors, and this is where FCDO, INGOs and partners can play a crucial role in opening up space and facilitating connections and support. Funding should enable WROs to pursue their self-determined priorities, as well as to pivot to different challenges and opportunities as required. For example, funding can be reactive to insecurity in times of conflict and reactive to climate change in times of rapid or slow-onset climate impacts. Funding should also be intersectional, addressing the needs of different groups – including but not limited to youth, Indigenous, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex + (LGBTQI+), and disability groups – across different and diverse regions. Feminist funds have demonstrated success in this area – for example, the Urgent Action Fund provides rapid, flexible grants to women and LGBTQI+ activists globally, enabling them to respond to emergencies and support community-led initiatives that reflect local priorities and intersectional needs.

The way funding is mobilised and distributed also affects meaningful and sustainable progress towards greater women's leadership, participation and decision-making. The 2023 funding to support women's participation in local, national and regional peace processes, while a welcome opportunity to support women's participation, required 60 per cent of the funds to be spent within the first three months of implementation. Such rapid mobilisation undermines long-term impact and what can be realistically achieved in that time. It also forces small WROs to pivot from their existing work to meet donor timelines. Short-term cycles can also weaken collective advocacy, exclude marginalised voices and undermine movement building. Inflexible and short-term funding cycles create conditions where local organisations struggle to build networks, respond to crises or engage in sustainable strategy development.

A more cohesive approach to WPS and localisation is essential. The 2023 White Paper outlined the FCDO's commitment to locally led development, fostering equitable partnerships through localisation initiatives that centre locally led WROs, placing them at the 'heart of setting development priorities in their communities', as 'progress must be locally owned'.³⁴ Similarly, the UK Dialogue on Locally Led Humanitarian Action report acknowledged barriers faced by WLOs and WROs, particularly in leadership, coordination and accessing funds. However, despite these initiatives the connection between localisation and the WPS agenda remains underdeveloped, and further progress is needed to fully

³³ UK Government, (2024) [UK Integrated Security Fund: Supporting women, peace and security in Iraq](#)

³⁴ HMG (2024), [International development in a contested world: ending extreme poverty and tackling climate change. a white paper on international development](#)

institutionalise these ambitions with the FCDO's policy and practice. This includes creating mechanisms that consistently channel risk-tolerant, multi-year resources directly to WROs and WLOs in conflict- and crisis-affected settings.

The UK Government has an important role to play beyond merely meeting its own funding commitments when resourcing the WPS agenda. It should leverage its convening power to positively influence how other governments and donors, including those within the multilateral system, fund and partner with WROs and feminist movements. GAPS welcomes and recognises this intent in practice through the FCDO joining the Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund's (WPHF) board alongside CSOs. It also encourages further collaboration with mechanisms such as the Urgent Action Fund (UAF) Sister Funds, MADRE and the START Fund. In 2025, the anniversary year of UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325, the UK Government should model bold leadership by establishing a dedicated WPS fund tied to the UK NAP and rooted in transparent and accountable principles – one that is dedicated to resourcing and supporting WROs and WLOs, recognising the essential role they play as frontline workers in their communities.

Finally, while most new WPS funding opportunities have focused on participation as the primary pillar, GAPS urges caution against overemphasis on this at the expense of the other WPS pillars. Without parallel investment in protection strategies, conflict and violence prevention, and inclusive relief and recovery efforts, progress risks being superficial. A balanced approach to all four pillars, which are intrinsically linked, is needed to achieve the transformative impact of the WPS agenda.

Recommendations

The UK Government should:

- **Increase long-term, flexible and core funding for WROs and WLOs.** This involves committing to multi-year, predictable, core funding to WROs and WLOs, including reactive funding for urgent challenges or crises. This would ensure sustainable growth, skills development and the ability for these organisations to pursue self-determined priorities. Flexible funding should also accommodate reactive responses to urgent issues like conflict or climate change, ensuring the effectiveness and sustainability of women's peacebuilding efforts. Programmes such as the Key to Change and Resourcing Change³⁵ provide proven models.
- **Strengthen communication and consultation.** The government should ensure that funding opportunities are accessible by extending timelines, translating calls and resourcing WROs' participation in design processes. Co-creation with local organisations must be standard practice to align with UK WPS and localisation commitments.
- **Establish a dedicated UK NAP WPS fund.** The UK Government should lead by example by establishing a dedicated WPS fund attached to the NAP. This should be integrated across government, to deliver a coordinated and 'whole of government' approach to gender-responsive peace and security. The fund should be grounded in principled, transparent and accountable funding practices, with a focus on supporting feminist movements and WROs. By doing so, the UK Government could not only directly address its funding commitments but also model the leadership needed globally and domestically for bold, long-term support for the WPS agenda, especially considering global cuts.
- **Improve tracking and transparency.** This involves ensuring robust systems to monitor and publish all gender-related spending in FCAS using the Gender Equality Social Inclusion (GESI) Marker, to have more effective, open and transparent reporting on WPS spending.
- **Protect gender equality spending commitments.** Given the announced ODA reductions, the UK Government must commit to at least 80 per cent of programming with gender, while specifically allocating at least 20 per cent of ODA to projects with gender equality as the key objective. This target should remain a minimum benchmark to ensure continued investment in the WPS agenda as well as meeting the UK's international commitments, despite budgetary constraints.

5. The UK's Domestication of WPS

GAPS welcomed the recognition³⁶ that a domestic approach is beneficial to the overall commitment to WPS in the fifth NAP, along with the recognition that foreign and domestic policies do not operate in isolation. This move to include a domestic approach to WPS is necessary to ensure that the UK's commitments to women and girls on, within and across borders are in line with the protection of the rights it is advocating for internationally.

It is essential that the domestic implications of the commitments to the WPS agenda are identified, scaled up and prioritised over the coming year, to strengthen understanding and effective delivery of the NAP 2023–2027³⁷ across departments and devolved administrations. Including the Northern Ireland Office, the Home Office and the Ministry of Justice as implementing partners is a significant and positive development, although more clarity would be welcome regarding how the skills and knowledge of the implementing partners are supported. GAPS welcomes concrete domestic commitments, including the pledge to halve violence against women and girls (VAWG) over the next decade and continued funding – £34 million in 2024 – of the Safer Streets Fund.³⁸ These efforts must be joined up and work in tandem with the WPS agenda to ensure the transformative advancement of gender equality. This is necessary as the inclusion of 'domestication' risks too narrowly focusing on tackling VAWG. Therefore, further action is required to achieve the aim of the NAP to embed more effective and representative solutions to tackle violence and inequality, as well as mechanisms to engage women and girls in decision-making, in domestic systems. This requires a focus on root causes and integrating the four pillars of the WPS agenda comprehensively throughout all UK policy.

The role of the Home Office as an implementing partner for meaningful domestic implementation of the WPS agenda is significant. The Home Office plays a crucial role in bridging the foreign and domestic policy elements of the WPS agenda as it sets immigration and asylum policy. The government has made important strides towards upholding its WPS and Refugee Convention obligations by discontinuing the Rwanda Plan, and it is now important that no alternative deals with other governments are pursued (including for both offshoring and permanent settlement). At present, the Nationality and Borders Act continues to perpetuate the hostile environment in the UK, making it disproportionately difficult for women and girls to claim asylum. Meanwhile, women and girls in the asylum system are at significant risk of ill health, exploitation and abuse due to the punitive conditions. This must immediately be rectified through the repealing of the Nationality and Borders Act and the Safety of Rwanda Act. Appropriate and realistic safe routes must be established, as punitive approaches without providing safe alternatives will create further risks for those seeking safety, especially women, girls and gender-diverse people. The UK must commit to building more just systems, both domestically and globally tackling root causes of injustice, while ensuring people are not forced to move due to profound inequality, rising conflict, deepening poverty or a ravaged climate.

The Home Office must review its asylum and immigration policies and practices to embed gender-sensitive approaches that eliminate all forms of discrimination and gendered harms. While GAPS welcomes the inclusion of the Home Office as an implementing partner in the UK's WPS NAP, its responsibilities must be grounded in a clear, intersectional understanding of gendered violence. For example, providing support to survivors of domestic violence should not be contingent on immigration status. This requires the UK Government to withdraw its reservation to Article 59 of the Istanbul Convention – which is a long-term standing barrier to protection for migrant and refugee women. The previous government maintained that the reservation could not be withdrawn until a study into the Support for Migrant Victims (SMV) pilot scheme was completed. Those findings were published in August 2023, but GAPS understands that there are currently no plans for HMG to review its reservation.

³⁶ GAPS (2023), [UK National Action Plan: GAPS' Response](#)

³⁷ UK Government (2023), [UK Women, Peace and Security National Action Plan 2023–2027](#)

³⁸ UK Government (2024), [Safer Streets Fund](#)

A more coordinated, cross-departmental approach would also strengthen responses to emerging crises. The recent Home Office decision to suspend the processing of Syrian asylum claims, following political developments in Syria in late 2024, was premature.³⁹ It has created unnecessary distress, prolonged uncertainty, and increased the marginalisation of Syrian refugees and asylum seekers. It has also raised broader concerns about eroding refugee protections and the precedent that this may set for other displaced communities. To ensure more rights-based decision-making, the Home Office should establish an inclusive and transparent process for updating country of origin guidance. This must involve civil society actors – including diaspora-led organisations, women’s rights groups, humanitarian agencies, legal experts and researchers – who bring essential contextual expertise and lived experience. Without these reforms, the UK risks entrenching gendered harms within its asylum system and undermining its WPS commitments.

More broadly, the government now has a critical opportunity to align its approach across key strategic frameworks – including the VAWG strategy (2021),⁴⁰ the NAP 2023–2027,⁴¹ the International Women’s and Girls’ Strategy, and the International Development White Paper⁴² priorities – to ensure coherence and effective implementation. The government’s commitment to halving VAWG within a decade must be grounded in meaningful consultations with domestic civil society and local-level organisations. This approach is essential to ensure that policy and programming are evidence based, reflect lived realities and prioritise prevention, rather than relying solely on punitive or reactive measures.

The current NAP, for the first time, includes LGBTQI+ people specifically, which GAPS welcomes. However, inclusion must be accompanied with concrete actions to ensure meaningful and concrete protections for LGBTQI+ women and persons domestically. The 2024 visit of the UN Independent Expert on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity highlighted a ‘toxic environment’⁴³ in the UK, where inflammatory political rhetoric has driven online hate and contributed to rising incidents of harassment, threats and violence. These harms are intertwined with rising misogynistic violence and must be confronted together – including addressing the radicalisation of men and boys and the growing influence of ‘incel’ movements.^{44,45} A structural and intersectional approach is urgently needed – one that includes all women and girls in their diversity and directly names and tackles violent masculinity.⁴⁶ This also means increasing funding for action on VAWG, which received minimal priority in the 2025/26 budget. Implementation of domestic obligations must be rights based and explicitly support migrant women, girls and their communities, particularly in wake of the August 2024 riots⁴⁷ that impacted cities and towns across England and Northern Ireland. These events were fuelled by xenophobia, Islamophobia and anti-migrant sentiment, which have become entrenched through years of hostile, political discourse.

While swift action to deal with perpetrators of hate and violence is welcome, the task remains of rebuilding the confidence and trust of racialised communities affected by these issues in government, the police and wider society. This requires sustained investment, transparency and commitment. It must also include recognising the recommendations and findings of the Baroness Casey Review,⁴⁸ which found the Metropolitan Police to be institutionally racist, sexist and homophobic. Lessons can be learned from WROs in the Global South, who are experts in social cohesion, community building and hate crime prevention, to strengthen UK responses. The WPS NAP provides a valuable tool to bridge domestic and international policy. This should include greater collaboration between the NAP-implementing departments, such as the FCDO and the Home Office, to bring together peacebuilding experts from conflict-affected contexts with affected communities in the UK.

39 UNA-UK (2024), [UK government suspends decision-making in Syrian asylum cases](#)

40 HM Government (2021), [Tackling Violence Against Women & Girls](#)

41 UK Government (2023), [UK Women, Peace and Security National Action Plan 2023–2027](#)

42 HMG (2024), [International development in a contested world: ending extreme poverty and tackling climate change, a white paper on international development](#)

43 UN General Assembly, Human Rights Councils (2024), [Visit to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland](#)

44 The Executive Office (2023), [Research Publication: ‘It’s Just What Happens’ Girls and Young Women’s Views and Experiences of Violence in Northern Ireland](#)

45 Safeguarding Network (2025), [Responding to the incel ideology](#)

46 Conciliation Resources (2021), [Integrating masculinities in peacebuilding: shifting harmful norms and transforming relationships](#)

47 Olusoga, D (2024), [There can be no excuses. The UK riots were violent racisms fomented by populism](#)

48 Baroness Casey of Blackstock (2023), [Baroness Casey Review – Final Report](#)

In Northern Ireland, the aftermath of the 2024 riots is particularly concerning. Despite the return of devolved institutions earlier that year, there has been little to no allocation of resources to support affected communities – particularly women, asylum seekers and refugees living in precarious accommodation. Many have fled violence or persecution only to find themselves without access to crisis, health or mental health support.

The 2024 Concluding Observations⁴⁹ from the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD) delivered a stark assessment of the UK's recent human rights record and offered a clear roadmap for improvement. These findings should be integrated into the delivery of domestic obligations within the NAP to ensure they are gender transformative. This should also align with the UK's obligations under other international frameworks, including the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Major concerns highlighted by the CERD, and echoed by civil society, include the continued criminalisation of people arriving through 'irregular routes', excessive delays in asylum claims, and lack of appropriate accommodation for women asylum seekers, particularly those with children. Additional concerns include insufficient funding to tackle VAWG and the impact of overseas aid cuts, combined with continued arms exports, which exacerbate hardship for women and girls in conflict and contribute to forced displacement.

In Northern Ireland, women have long been at the forefront of peacebuilding and conflict prevention. Properly resourced, these women will enhance security and community resilience. Yet GAPS is deeply concerned about lack of progress on WPS in Northern Ireland, particularly considering the UK Government's decision to appeal⁵⁰ the Northern Ireland High Court ruling on the Legacy Act, despite earlier commitments. Repealing the act is essential to upholding human rights and supporting post-conflict reconciliation. Beyond Northern Ireland, the case also has broader implications for ensuring accountability for British military conduct in conflict settings worldwide. Twenty-six years after the Good Friday Agreement, Northern Ireland's diverse region has seen significant change, including demographic changes with an increasingly ethnically and culturally diverse population, particularly in urban areas. It is no longer accurately defined by a solely binary religious or national identity divide. A meaningful WPS strategy in the region must reflect both the legacy of conflict, transitional justice, and emerging challenges linked to demographic and cultural shifts.

Overall, it is concerning that gender equality has been further deprioritised across the UK, as evidenced by recent decisions across the four jurisdictions. In Wales, a decision was taken in 2024 to scrap a bill that would have introduced gender quotas in the Welsh Senedd, despite having a woman First Minister⁵¹. In Scotland, progress on domesticating CEDAW and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child has stalled. In Northern Ireland, a gender equality strategy, in development since 2020, has been indefinitely postponed alongside an LGBTIQ+ strategy.

It is imperative that gender equality and WPS commitments are upheld consistently across all four nations. Achieving this will require decisive, cross-government action, investing in transformative change and ensuring responsibility to the communities most affected.

49 UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (2024), [Concluding observations on the combined twenty-fourth to twenty-sixth periodic reports of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland](#)

50 BBC (2024), [Government to challenge Legacy Act court ruling](#)

51 WEN Wales (2024), <https://wenwales.org.uk/en/a-missed-opportunity-for-gender-equality-the-case-for-gender-quotas/>

Recommendations

The UK Government should:

- **Integrate the NAP as a core ‘whole of government’ strategy.** This involves integrating the WPS NAP as a core framework guiding coherence between domestic and foreign policy. This must include gender-sensitive policy-making and embed meaningful consultation with UK-based and international civil society, including WROs and local-level organisations.
- **Ensure consistent and inclusive domestic WPS implementation.** The government should recognise devolved competencies while establishing clear minimum standards to ensure consistent protection and rights for women, girls and marginalised groups.
- **Reform asylum and immigration policies.** This involves implementing gender-sensitive and rights-based approaches throughout the asylum process. This includes repealing the Nationality and Borders Act and Safety of Rwanda Act, ending detention of women and girl asylum seekers, expanding safe and legal routes, and withdrawing the UK’s reservation to Article 59 of the Istanbul Convention.
- **Confront gender-based violence (GBV).** The government should strengthen GBV prevention and response efforts across education, justice, and asylum and community safety systems. This includes repealing the Northern Ireland Legacy Act, recognising the intersection of GBV with racism, xenophobia and homophobia, and implementing CEDAW and CERD recommendations to build safer, more inclusive communities.

6. UK NAP on WPS Strategic Objectives

6.1 SO1: Decision-Making

As with all decision-making processes, women affected by conflict have a fundamental right to meaningfully participate in discussions and processes⁵² that impact their lives. These processes include decision-making at every level, from the community to state, national and global. While commitments have been made to engage with civil society and women leaders ahead of important decision-making processes, feedback from women and WROs in conflict-affected contexts continues to be that consultation and engagement are often extractive and disempowering.

As recognised by the UK Government's commitments to Strategic Objective 1 (SO1) of the NAP, the meaningful participation of women, marginalised individuals and civil society actors, including WROs and WLOs, is fundamental to effective and inclusive decision-making and approaches to peacebuilding, development, gender equality and humanitarian response. This includes commitments to ensuring 'opportunities for all', 'championing action to address state fragility and prevent conflict', and 'standing up for our values'. This can only happen when women have the space, support and resources to utilise their leadership, expertise and insight at all levels of peacebuilding and decision-making. While there have been positive actions taken by the UK Government, overall, the first year of the White Paper and the first two years of the NAP have seen slow progress and limited attention on these essential WPS goals.

In 2024 the Labour Government sought to leverage the momentum generated by the former administration to advance the WPS agenda in some areas. Several government officials have signalled a renewed commitment to the objectives laid out in the fifth NAP as part of the wider global movement towards ensuring women and girls are sustainably integrated into the peace and security framework. At a key speech delivered at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), the UK Representative to the UN, James Kariuki, acknowledged the UK's progress in creating an enabling environment for women peacekeepers through programmes like the Elsie Initiative Fund⁵³, addressing systemic barriers that prevent women's meaningful participation in peacekeeping missions. Similarly, GAPS was pleased to see the new government reaffirm its commitment to WPS by appointing responsible ministers in both the FCDO and the Ministry of Defence.⁵⁴ The comments made by the previous Development Minister, Anneliese Dodds, in her op-ed in September 2024⁵⁵ emphasise the government's understanding of the importance of women's participation in responding to, resolving and preventing conflict. This positive intent and understanding of the importance of the WPS agenda was further emphasised in the former minister's comments at UNGA and at Chatham House in October 2024 on the need to effectively support women and girls, reaffirming the UK's intent to lead in embedding women's leadership and participation at the heart of peace processes.

Positively, the UK Government has supported a number of initiatives over several years that have effectively contributed to the long-term strengthening of women's skills, resources and opportunities to more meaningfully participate in decision-making and peacebuilding. This financial support to women's participation has continued through 2024. For example, renewed UK financial support to the Women Mediators Across the Commonwealth (WMC) network⁵⁶ from 2023 has been critical to sustain the network of expert women mediators from all regions of the Commonwealth, originally established with UK funding in 2018. With UK funding in 2023 and 2024, the network was able to support members' deployment and mediation activities in Niger, among others. The widespread impact of the network demonstrates the importance and cost-effectiveness of sustained, consistent funding that enables individuals and networks to build their skills, trust and support structures. Reliable, multi-year funding

⁵² Women for Women International (no date), [She Dares: From Asking to Action](#)

⁵³ The Elsie Initiative Fund (2025), <https://elsiefund.org/>

⁵⁴ UK Parliament (2024), [Departmental Responsibilities: Question for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office](#)

⁵⁵ Dodds, A (2024), [Sudan crisis: Women and girls must be at the heart of global response](#)

⁵⁶ [Women Mediators Across the Commonwealth](#)

going forward will enable the WMC to strategise and plan in a longer-term way, especially as it takes on the host role of the Global Alliance of Regional Women Mediator Networks from 2025.

Similarly, the UK Government provided ongoing funding to the Resourcing Change project.⁵⁷ This form of long-term, flexible and core investment is necessary to achieve the complex, normative change set out in SO1 to ensure a broader, more inclusive and intersectional definition and approach to ‘security’. This broader conceptualisation emphasises human security and a continuum of peace⁵⁸ in which people who are often excluded and marginalised within FCAS – including women and gender-diverse individuals – can define what peace and security mean to them and their communities. The UK Government should gather and replicate the lessons and best practices generated from these flagship programmes. One way to achieve this is by investing in a robust and coherent MERL framework, as referenced earlier in this Shadow Report.

Prior to the General Election, there had been some momentum towards discussing pertinent WPS issues, particularly around meaningful participation and consultation through a number of events such as support to the International Civil Society Action Network’s (ICAN) 10th Women, Peace and Security Forum and the launch of the Women of the South Speak Out Consortium. Under the former Conservative Government, the FCDO commissioned Wilton Park to host an event bringing together WROs, INGOs and UN agencies. This informed a report on Women’s Rights Organisations and Movements in Crisis, which found a lack of meaningful participation of WROs in humanitarian decision-making, despite their essential role as primary responders in emergencies. The report recommended better quality and increased funding to enable WROs and WLOs to sustainably scale up their activities and skills. These findings are equally applicable to the fourth pillar of the WPS agenda on relief and recovery, as they are to broader peacebuilding and conflict resolution efforts.

Support to localisation and civil society strengthening is a foundational building block that can enable civil society, including women-led civil society, to have a greater say in decision-making around peace, reconstruction and recovery. GAPS members encourage the new government to take these findings and integrate them into a clear, coherent approach to civil society engagement and consultation, including WROs, WLOs and women human rights defenders (WHRDs), on WPS policy development and beyond. This recommendation to create and resource a civil society platform was shared with the new Labour Government in GAPS’s ‘100 days’ document,⁵⁹ which also outlined recommendations for the concrete and ambitious implementation of WPS for the new government. Despite indications from the new government, including at the Labour Party Conference, on the importance of WPS and women’s participation, there is a notable absence of detailed Labour policy on how to operationalise its commitments and continuing inconsistency in application inherited from the former administration.

Furthermore, GAPS members called for concerted action to increase women’s and marginalised groups’ meaningful and effective participation in peace negotiations and implementation. This is even more urgent, with consultation needing to extend beyond ‘elite’ groups or those in urban capital areas, given the Secretary General’s recent report on WPS. This showed that ‘data from the analysis of over 50 processes indicate that in 2023, on average, women made up only 9.6 per cent of negotiators, 13.7 per cent of mediators and 26.6 per cent of signatories to peace agreements and ceasefire agreements’. The UK Government should be recognised for its role in prioritising Colombia as a focus country for 2024, as the Secretary General’s report shows ‘the proportion of women signatories drops to 1.5 per cent if agreements in Colombia are excluded’. Other positive examples include efforts pursued by the British Embassy, Khartoum, to support civil society and women-led efforts in peace process negotiations,⁶⁰ which demonstrates a commitment to connect local and civil-society led processes to national and international peace efforts, despite limited success. These participatory and inclusive approaches have,

⁵⁷ Women for Women International (2024), [Increasing Women’s Rights Organisations’ Independent Role in Leading Programming and Advocacy](#)

⁵⁸ Women for Women International, WILPF and Saferworld (2023), [Localising Women, Peace and Security](#)

⁵⁹ GAPS (2024), [The First 100 Days of Women, Peace and Security](#)

⁶⁰ UK Parliament, Hansard (2024), [Sudan. Volume 839: debated on Friday 13 September 2024](#)

however, been limited and inconsistently applied. Opportunities to engage WROs, WLOs and women peacebuilders in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT) and Afghanistan to inform UK approaches to complex contexts were missed, particularly during the Doha talks on Afghanistan, as highlighted in the case study below.

In 2025, the UK will need to engage with several potential peace and post-conflict recovery processes, likely including but not limited to those of the OPT, Ukraine, Afghanistan, Sudan, Syria and Yemen. It will be crucial for the UK Government to take a consistent approach to inclusion and meaningful participation in its diplomatic and funding support, to ensure a range of diverse voices and needs in each of these conflict-affected contexts. The UK should position itself as a key advocate and convenor for the meaningful participation of women and marginalised groups in this pivotal year for peace and conflict. The UK's mission-led government is well placed to apply feminist peace principles and to support rules-based international systems in its conflict prevention and resolution agenda.

In the context of threats to the rules-based order, closing civic space and backsliding of democracy, as well as the global rollback and increased risk of backlash for WHRDs and women leaders engaging in decision-making processes, the UK has an important role to play as a partner and convenor. Ahead of major milestones and peace processes, the UK should ensure support for existing and new platforms and safe spaces⁶¹ for women's participation and engagement. These commitments must include safeguarding practices that provide protection for women who participate. Reprisals against women who participate are on the rise, including sexual harassment, loss of income and opportunity, online threats, and physical attacks and murder. A trend of reprisals is clear: between May 2021 and April 2022,⁶² the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) documented incidents of reprisal and intimidation against 172 women, girls, WHRDs and CSOs working in human rights, who were targeted for their cooperation with the United Nations, and confirmed the killing of 34 WHRDs in conflict settings. Both numbers are likely severe undercounts. Resourcing genuine participation for women and girls must therefore also include protection measures.

Persistent and systemic barriers to women's full and meaningful participation have been well documented, and include resistance from those in positions of power, certain gender and cultural norms that discourage public participation, resourcing constraints, accessibility issues, and a lack of trauma-informed provisions. Evidence shows that holistic, multi-layered support to women, women peacebuilders, WROs, WLOs and activists is most effective in supporting them to achieve their goals sustainably and safely. Siloed support to one area of empowerment can not only be less effective but might increase the risk of harm and backlash for women's rights. Future funding on meaningful participation for decision-making should be careful to integrate participation work with conflict and violence prevention, protection and safeguarding, and gender-responsive crisis response interventions.

61 Women for Women International (no date), [She Dares: From Asking to Action](#)

62 UN (2023), [Women and peace and security: report of the Secretary-General](#)

Recommendations

The UK Government should:

- **Strengthen transparent communication and follow-up with UK-based and international civil society** who have participated in policy consultation. To ensure consultation and participation is meaningful, the UK Government must create more spaces for open engagement and should transparently communicate the outcomes of consultation processes to organisations and individuals who have provided their time and expertise to discussions.
- **Gather lessons and best practice from multi-year investments on women's participation and leadership**, such as WMC and Resourcing Change. It should also use this review to inform future strategic, long-term investment in training, systems strengthening, and direct support to women and women-led organisations in FCAS.
- **Apply a consistent approach across different contexts to championing women's, marginalised groups' and civil society participation in peace negotiations.** It must also ensure this is a priority in all diplomatic engagement and that funds and support are provided to inclusive civil society coalitions and women's groups to equip them to meaningfully and effectively participate in dialogues when opportunities arise.
- **Institutionalise meaningful participation** by:
 - Creating and resourcing a civil society platform to embed structured and ongoing consultations through the Beyond Consultations tool⁶³ with WROs and civil society in the UK and globally.
 - Championing inclusive peacebuilding by consistently prioritising participation of women and marginalised groups in all peace dialogues and implementation processes. This includes setting quotas in peace negotiations and leadership roles. The UK Government should also ensure that decision makers, including policymakers in peace talks and mediation processes, receive gender-responsive training to better address the needs of women and marginalised groups in such processes.
- **Ensure funding to programmes addresses the persistent barriers to women's participation.** It should also include women in programme design and delivery and commit to safeguarding practices and protection for women who do participate.

⁶³ GAPS, Women for Women, Amnesty International, Womankind Worldwide, Saferworld (no date), [Beyond Consultations](#)

6.2 SO2: Gender-Based Violence

Preventing GBV remains both a moral imperative and a critical enabler across the NAP's Strategic Objectives (SOs). GBV is a barrier to women's meaningful participation and leadership in decision-making processes, with violence and threats against women peacebuilders and civil society leaders.⁶⁴ The risk of GBV also increases significantly in times of conflict and crisis. This is particularly the case for climate insecurity, with research showing that a 1°C increase in average annual temperatures has been associated with a 4.5 per cent rise in patterns of physical and sexual domestic violence.⁶⁵ The gendered impacts of climate vulnerabilities and crises mirror the vulnerabilities women face in situations of conflict. Increased conflict amplifies women's risks of poverty, food insecurity, GBV and decreased agency. The interconnectedness of GBV and the UK Government's wider objectives, both within the NAP and beyond, mean an integrated approach that breaks down silos across government is essential for effective action.

In 2023, GAPS welcomed the overall strength of SO2. In particular, we welcomed the NAP's recognition of the root causes and drivers of all forms of GBV as 'gendered power imbalances, gender inequality and the harmful social norms which uphold patriarchal power structures' and its recognition that conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) 'occurs on a continuum of interrelated and recurring forms of violence and must therefore be tackled as part of wider global efforts to end all forms of GBV'. Overall, the UK Government made four commitments in the NAP specifically relating to the delivery of SO2.

First, the UK Government committed to put survivors at the heart of its approach and prioritise those most at risk, taking a survivor-centred approach in all initiatives to support victims/survivors of GBV. This included investing in the flagship What Works to Prevent Violence Programme and funding the Global Survivors Fund.⁶⁶ We welcome that the UK Government has since funded the Global Survivors Fund and Project Soteria and invested in – and continues to champion – a successor initiative to the What Works to Prevent Violence Programme. However, GAPS notes that many of the funding commitments made in the 2023–2027 NAP⁶⁷ were largely already underway and cannot be considered 'new' commitments. Further, GAPS notes that the What Works Programme currently only provides funding in one NAP focus country (Somalia). Overall, across the UK's funding to FCAS in 2023–2024, preventing GBV was not a core focus. This is despite the NAP's acknowledgement that GBV is exacerbated during conflict.

Second, the UK committed to strengthen global action against CRSV, including by delivering on the new PSVI Strategy and working with international partners to deliver on the commitments made at the PSVI Conference. The latter included participants' national commitments made in the CRSV Political Declaration. As GAPS noted following the PSVI Conference in 2022, ultimately the long-term success of the PSVI Conference and Strategy will depend on sustained follow-up and implementation, including on flexible, multi-year funding; a shift of power and resources to local partners and women's rights and youth-led groups; and ongoing political leadership at the highest levels.

We welcome the achievements of the PSVI, including the launch of the International Alliance on PSVI and its positive impact across focus countries; for instance, the contribution of the PSVI programme to legislative changes and governance initiatives in Kosovo.⁶⁸ However, since the conference, progress has been challenging to monitor. Neither the previous Conservative Government nor the current Labour Government has provided any publicly available information to allow GAPS to effectively monitor and evaluate implementation of the PSVI Strategy. While we welcome the appointment of Lord Collins as the new Special Representative and his attendance at the International Alliance, the PSVI Steering Board seems to have ceased to exist and there remains no clarity on future funding of the PSVI Strategy. The

64 International Civil Society Action Network et al. (2021), [Protecting Women Peacebuilders: the Front Lines of Sustainable Peace](#)

65 Clugston, N et al. (2024), [Gender Based Violence: Addressing the overlooked barrier to effective climate action](#)

66 What Works to Prevent Violence (2024), [From insight to impact](#)

67 UK Government (2023), [UK Women, Peace and Security National Action Plan 2023–2027](#)

68 House of Commons Defence Committee (2021), [Protecting those who protect us: Women in the Armed Forces from Recruitment to Civilian Life](#) (n10)

£12.5 million in funding to the PSVI Strategy announced in 2022⁶⁹ will come to an end in 2025, with no indication of further funding. GAPS welcomes and recognises the new UK Government's renewed commitments to policy frameworks developed under the previous government and calls on the government to expand this commitment to the PSVI Strategy.

While the UK Government has announced welcome sanctions on perpetrators of CRSV, and has funded initiatives such as the Legal Guidebook on State Obligations for CRSV,⁷⁰ there remains a dearth in UK funding to local partners and women's rights and youth-led groups. In addition, both the previous Conservative and new Labour Governments' approach to high-level leadership on CRSV, including through funding and sanctions, has been at best inconsistent and at worst politically motivated. For example, the UK has rightly called out reports of CRSV committed by Russian forces in Ukraine⁷¹ and the Rapid Support Forces and Sudanese Armed Forces in Sudan.⁷² However, it has refused to name or sanction the Israeli Defence Force for credible reports of CRSV committed against Palestinians.⁷³ The UK has backed the EMBRACE programme in Ukraine funded by the UN Population Fund (UNFPA),⁷⁴ providing support to survivors of sexual violence (including CRSV); and in Sudan, the UK last year announced support to survivors of GBV.⁷⁵ These investments are of course welcome, but the UK cannot claim to be a leader in preventing CRSV without providing increased funding to those on the frontline and more equitably applied sanctions and accountability. So far, no GBV-focused funds have been allocated to Palestine, where global GBV funding remains alarmingly low.⁷⁶

Third, the UK Government also committed to hold itself, and its implementation partners, accountable for sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment (SEAH) and unacceptable sexual behaviours. This included mandatory training for FCDO staff and creating a new MoD sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) champion, to ensure SEA policy is understood and implemented across the armed forces. While we recognise ongoing commitments to resourcing sector responses to SEAH, these must go further. It remains unclear how the current MoD internal spending on the rollout of the SEA champion compares to the budget allocated for the FCDO rollout of the 'Murad Code Project'⁷⁷ throughout its foreign missions. Further, GAPS is unclear on how or whether the FCDO has met its commitments to delivering scalable pilots on how to remove barriers faced by survivors of SEAH when seeking support. It is also unclear on whether the MoD has met commitments on training, equipping and supporting deployed clinical practitioners; allocating a CRSV champion; and integrating the Murad Code.

Finally, as referenced with the Domestic section of this report, the NAP made several domestic commitments on domestic prevention and response to VAWG. However, a recent report by the National Audit Office found that the (largely previous) government's efforts to address VAWG have not yet improved outcomes for victims.⁷⁸ GAPS echoes the calls from the domestic sector,⁷⁹ which have been clear on the need for a renewed and strengthened focus on prevention, a breaking down of silos across government, and a surge in sustainable funding.

69 UK Government (2023), [Conflict-related sexual violence and the UK's approach](#)

70 Dr Denis Mukwege Foundation (2023), [Legal Guidebook on State Obligations](#)

71 HMG (2024), [This Russian veto condemns Africans to further killing, rape and starvation in Sudan's brutal civil war: UK explanation of vote at the UN Security Council](#)

72 HMG (2024), [International Alliance joint statement in response to the Secretary General's report on conflict-related sexual violence](#)

73 Akkad, D (2024), [Israeli soldiers have been sexually assaulting Palestinian women for decades. Now they're speaking out](#)

74 UNFPA Ukraine (no date), [GBV Response and Prevention Programme](#)

75 HMG (2024) [Development Minister calls for urgent humanitarian action for crisis-hit South Sudan, announcing life-saving support package on first Africa trip](#)

76 Plan International (2024), [Funding to Prevent Gender-Based Violence in Gaza and West Bank Alarmingly Low at Just £3 per Person in 2024](#)

77 Murad Code Project (2024), [Murad Code Project](#)

78 National Audit Office (2025), [Government's efforts to address violence against women and girls have not yet improved outcomes for victims](#)

79 End Violence Against Women (2025), [Government not spending adequately of effectively to end VAWG](#)

Recommendations

The UK Government should:

- **Integrate GBV prevention across existing government strategies and approaches**, including climate resilience and mitigation strategies and conflict and humanitarian strategies.
- **Ensure existing and future funding on GBV prevention**, including through initiatives such as What Works.
- **Ensure global best practice on effective and scalable GBV prevention is applied to domestic efforts.**
- **Clarify its position in relation to continuing the PSVI Strategy** and wider agenda.

6.3 SO3: Humanitarian and Crisis Response

The past year has presented extreme challenges and ethical dilemmas for the humanitarian sector. This highlights the urgency and importance of a principled feminist humanitarian approach that examines the root causes of humanitarian crisis, including GBV and CRSV, and reinforces the localisation and humanitarian leadership of local groups, especially WROs, in emergency response, negotiations and conflict resolution. Last year, 2024, was declared ‘the deadliest year for aid workers’⁸⁰ with a total of 282 fatalities, most of whom were local aid workers in Gaza, Sudan and South Sudan; many were women. The funding environment for local groups, including WLOs and WROs, remains stifled by a lack of transparency and disaggregated data in reporting on funding flows⁸¹ by donors and governments. This makes it almost impossible to monitor and track direct funding that goes to WROs, who are usually the first responders to humanitarian crisis and the most impacted by funding cuts.⁸²

In 2023, the UK allocated only £888 million of its bilateral ODA⁸³ to humanitarian assistance, a 19.9 per cent decrease (£221 million) from £1,109 million in 2022. This decrease is mirrored in the most recent Autumn 2024 budget:⁸⁴ despite repeated assurances of restoring trust in the UK as a leading donor of humanitarian ODA, the UK Government has not provided an increase in current ODA. Instead, UK ODA has declined,⁸⁵ dropping from £15.3 billion (0.58 per cent of GNI) in 2023 to £13.7 billion (0.5 per cent of GNI) in 2024.

This reduction exacerbates the multiple and complex set of challenges that WROs and WLOs are facing as they operate in conflict-affected contexts. These challenges include political unrest, targeting of feminist activists and organisations and criminalising LGBTQI+ groups, violent armed conflict, and mass atrocities and human rights violations, including the use of sexual and gender-based violence as a weapon of war. Such extreme challenges put WROs under constant threat, a situation that remains significantly and critically unaddressed by donors and the humanitarian system more generally. What is needed is sustained and transformative funding, training, and gender-responsive, long-term programming. Instead, feminist-led WROs and WLOs often face systemic and structural marginalisation at multiple stages of humanitarian response, negotiations and design. Their deep expertise, transformative leadership, and knowledge and awareness of the needs of their own communities are constantly, often violently, undermined by different actors at the decision-making table. This reflects the power imbalances that characterise humanitarian architecture, underpinned by patriarchal and colonial legacies.

80 UN (2024), [2024 Deadliest Year for Aid Workers. Security Council Pressed to Ensure Justice. Protection](#)

81 WPS Helpdesk (2024), [Funding for Women's Rights Organisations in Humanitarian Crises](#)

82 CARE (2023), [Latest research shows aid cuts disproportionately affected spending on gender equality and support for women's rights organisations](#)

83 HMG, FCDO (2024), [Statistics on International Development: provisional UK aid spend 2023](#)

84 HMG (2024), [Autumn Budget 2024](#)

85 Bond (2024), [More cuts to the UK aid budget under the new government's first Autumn Budget](#)

Gender-focused programmes require sustained, multi-year investments to achieve meaningful change, such as shifting social norms, meeting the core costs for women-led organisations, and supporting women's leadership in humanitarian and peacebuilding action. Reduced ODA limits the ability to fund these long-term, transformative interventions. This shift can undermine initiatives that address systemic gender inequalities, such as education for girls, GBV prevention and women's economic support.

A proactive approach to crisis prevention, including gender-sensitive early-warning systems, is essential. The UK should prioritise multi-year, flexible funding that centres on the protection, participation and leadership of WROs in crisis settings. This should include the entire crisis lifecycle, and especially decision-making and coordinator efforts. This approach will support longer-term, integrated strategies across humanitarian, development and peacebuilding efforts,⁸⁶ where experience has shown, across contexts, that WROs are best placed to deliver such an integrated methodology. This is because of their position and expertise within communities, the trust they have built, and the diversity of tools, strategies and approaches they have developed in response to ever-increasing threats and challenges – from the climate crisis to civic unrest and human rights violations. Such an approach requires close collaboration⁸⁷ and partnerships⁸⁸ with WROs and WLOs to enhance equality and power-sharing in the funding landscape architecture. Ensuring inclusive processes involves identifying WLOs working on specific thematic issues, mapping their needs and capacities, and developing implementation plans in partnership. Pooled funding mechanisms are critical to these partnerships and collaborative approaches, including the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) and Country-Based Pooled Funds (CBPFs). However, better monitoring and tracking of the quality and scale of funding that goes directly to WROs is urgently needed to enable more systemic and impactful shifts in this area. The Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation (IAHE)⁸⁹ on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls – the first system-wide exercise of this type – works to assess the inclusion of women in humanitarian decision-making processes within humanitarian country teams. This has resulted in increasing the engagement of WLOs and their meaningful participation in the coordination of humanitarian responses.

As such, the UK Government must step up and show leadership by ensuring transparent monitoring and that a greater proportion of its humanitarian funding directly reaches local groups, specifically WROs and WLOs, and it must increase humanitarian funding with direct indicators in line with its commitments within the current WPS NAP. The UK should continue to support humanitarian access and civic space protection, as well as localisation initiatives such as the Charter 4 Change⁹⁰. To achieve this, the UK Government must continue investing in and championing a gender justice approach, including in multilateral humanitarian reform initiatives such as the Grand Bargain and the Generation Equality Forum. At this stage, localisation is under-reported in the UK's Grand Bargain self-reports,⁹¹ with limited details on the percentage of partnership or funding agreements that incorporate multi-year, institutional, capacity-strengthening support for local and national responders, including WROs. This should be aligned with the UK's involvement in the external agendas of the Generation Equality Forum's Women, Peace and Security and Humanitarian Action (WPS-HA) Compact, and the Call to Action on Protection from GBV in Emergencies⁹² as a means to work collectively to improve the engagement, leadership and participation of local leaders, particularly WROs.

86 ActionAid (2022), [Leading the Way: The Nexus through a Feminist Lens](#)

87 CSSF Women, Peace and Security Helpdesk (2024), [Funding for Women's Rights Organisations in Humanitarian Crises](#)

88 GAPS, Women for Women, Amnesty International, Womankind Worldwide, Saferworld (no date), [Beyond Consultations](#)

89 Global Humanitarian Overview (2022), [Part Three](#)

90 Charter 4 Change, [Charter 4 Change](#)

91 Inter-Agency Standing Committee (2024), [Grand Bargain Self Reporting 2024](#)

92 Call to Action GBV (2025), <https://www.calltoactiongbv.com/>

Recommendations

The UK Government should:

- **Increase transparency and track the proportion of UK Government funds reaching WROs**, by publishing spends on ‘quality funding’ (multi-year and flexible), with 25 per cent going to local organisations. This requires an audit of UK ODA cuts and a plan for their reversal, with a return to 0.7 per cent of GNI for ODA, including humanitarian funding.
- **Ensure that partnerships** aiming to build gender equality and promote Sustainable Development Goal 5 in protracted humanitarian contexts **are long term and flexible**. This will facilitate nexus approaches across humanitarian, development and peacebuilding activities.
- **Ensure dedicated long-term, flexible and direct funding for WROs/WLOs** in recognition of the crucial role they play in humanitarian delivery and ensuring all communities experiencing humanitarian need receive the support that matches their situation. Such commitments must be in line with commitments made under the Great Bargain; easy to track and assess; and must be communicated regularly and transparently.
- **Integrate WROs and WLOs in all humanitarian and crisis response** in which the UK is involved, including its involvement through the Ministry of Defence. Collaboration with local-level, community and national organisations is critical to ensure comprehensive delivery, especially to communities with compounded marginalisation – such as women and girls. The participation of WROs and WLOs throughout the lifecycle of crisis response is critical. This must include meaningful inclusion in areas such as decision-making, coordination and evaluation.
- **Join up conflict and atrocity prevention efforts with the prevention pillar**, which is central to the WPS agenda. This includes strengthening crisis prevention, including gender-sensitive early-warning and early-action systems, and ensuring all prevention efforts consider root causes and risks, including of gender inequality.

6.4 SO4: Security and Justice

The UK's approach to WPS in the military and arms sector primarily emphasises three areas: increasing the participation of women in security decision-making; considering the gendered impacts of conventional weapons exports; and making commitments to disarmament, though these tend to be limited to specific types of weapons. This approach lacks a deeper commitment to genuinely advancing gender equality, which would align more closely with steps toward reducing reliance on the military and arms – ultimately aiming for disarmament and demilitarisation to resolve conflicts peacefully.

The UK's policies on the issue, such as the Integrated Review (IR),⁹³ highlighted this through the absence of a comprehensive gender approach. While the 2021 IR acknowledged non-traditional security threats such as climate change and rising authoritarianism, it failed to comprehensively incorporate a gender analysis and instead pushed for more militarisation. The threat assessment underlying the IR approach overlooks the diverse experiences and impacts of security across different genders, as well as the norms that perpetuate violence and conflict. Likewise, the UK's nuclear policy fails to consider the adverse effects⁹⁴ on women and girls, with its decision to increase the warhead stockpile by 40 per cent and move away from disarmament. The 2023 IR Refresh⁹⁵ and the updated Defence Command Paper⁹⁶ further prioritised state-based threats over conflict prevention and addressing root causes. Therefore, at the highest levels of UK security strategy, there has been a notable shift away from a holistic view of security and toward increased militarisation. Although tools like gender-sensitive stabilisation guidance exist at an operational level, the UK must integrate gender equality more comprehensively into its broader security framework to ensure long-term stability and transformation.

GAPS and its members welcome the UK Government's approach to mainstreaming human security across defence strategy and planning, placing a greater emphasis on the security of human beings and aligning with WPS and the NAP. The new Human Security in Defence Strategy,⁹⁷ launched in November 2024, recognises the important alignment with NATO's Human Security themes⁹⁸ and WPS policy⁹⁹ and with the International Framework¹⁰⁰ for human security and the measures the military must adopt to effectively mitigate the harmful impacts of military activities on communities. The strategy emphasises a commitment to ensuring that defence personnel possess the capability, understanding and training necessary to adopt a human security approach. It highlights the importance of coordinated and collaborative engagement with all groups involved, including NGOs and civil society, to foster a unified effort. In addition to protecting civilians, it underscores the need for a deeper understanding of the root causes of crises that affect human security. By capitalising on opportunities for prevention and protection, mitigating harm and developing enduring solutions, the strategy seeks to create a more resilient and secure environment for all. Rightly, the framework observes that populations affected by armed conflict should be actively engaged and considered in all aspects of military operations.

93 UK Government (2021), [Global Britain in a Competitive Age: the Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy](#)

94 ICAN (2020) [Gender and Nuclear Weapons](#)

95 UK Government (2023), <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/integrated-review-refresh-2023-responding-to-a-more-contested-and-volatile-world>

96 UK Government (2023), <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/defence-command-paper-2023-defences-response-to-a-more-contested-and-volatile-world>

97 Ministry of Defence (2024), [JSP 985 Human Security in Defence](#)

98 NATO (2022), [Human Security: Approach and Guiding Principles](#)

99 NATO (2024), [NATO Policy on Women, Peace and Security \(2024\)](#)

100 UN Trust Fund for Human Security (2016), [Human Security Handbook](#)

To avoid a security framework designed for a few, which risks further worsening the situation of those who are structurally excluded, such as women and girls and marginalised groups, the UK should prioritise demilitarisation and disarmament and the use of gender-transformative diplomacy and mediation. However, the UK's trend has been to increase investment in arms trade and defence, while reducing development assistance and peacebuilding – effectively reinforcing military solutions. Global military spending climbed by 6.8 per cent from 2022,¹⁰¹ totalling USD2,243 billion in 2023. In 2022, the UK was the fourth-largest spender on defence in the world. The Russian invasion of Ukraine and the threat that this implies for the continent, including the UK, was cited by the Conservative Government to justify an increase of 1.8 per cent between 2023/24 and 2024/25. In the 2023/24 financial year, the UK allocated £54.2 billion to defence, equating to approximately 2.33 per cent of its gross domestic product (GDP) in 2024. In October, the UK's military spending was announced as £56.9 billion for this financial year – 2024/25 – with an additional £2.9 billion for next year and a pledge by the Labour Government to raise defence spending to 2.5 per cent of GDP.¹⁰² Military spending is 4.3 times greater than the budget for overseas aid,¹⁰³ raising serious concerns about the government's refusal to meet the UN target of dedicating 0.7 per cent of GNI to overseas aid, while continuing to exceed its NATO military spending commitments.

At the same time, non-militarised responses to insecurity, both domestically and abroad, should have been prioritised. Despite its promises in the Plan for Change,¹⁰⁴ the UK is shifting focus away from conflict prevention and by extension civilian-led approaches to human security, while increasing investments in militarised responses to crises at home and abroad. This trend must be re-examined if the MoD is serious about advancing gender equality. This is also the case in climate change, as climate experts have warned that securitising and militarising the climate crisis fails to address the root causes and diverts resources and attention away from its driving factors,¹⁰⁵ including the contribution of Global North countries to climate change. This contribution is exacerbated by military operations themselves, as it is 'estimated that the global military carbon footprint is 2,750 million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent (MtCO₂e) or 5.5 per cent of global emissions'.¹⁰⁶

In its national security strategies, while ensuring defence and response capabilities, UK approaches to defence should be seeking to contribute to addressing the drivers of conflict and instability, including inequalities, and particularly minimising the impact on structurally marginalised people. This may include having a role in reforms that promote accountable security forces, engaging with and supporting the security of marginalised groups, and using security assistance as leverage to address drivers of conflict and inequalities. It also includes ensuring the consultation and participation of women and LGBTQI+ communities and other usually excluded groups in security institutions and at decision-making levels, both within the UK – as per the UK NAP's commitment – and internationally. The aim is to ensure that responses to security threats are informed by the needs of women and girls and marginalised groups, which often go unrecognised and can even expose them to greater risks.

101 Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) (2024), [Global military spending surges amid war, rising tensions and insecurity](#)

102 HM Treasury (2024), [Spring budget 2024](#)

103 Parkinson, S (2024), [Military Budget Continues to Grow Faster than Peacebuilding and Overseas Aid Spending](#)

104 UK Government (2024), [Plan for Change](#)

105 The Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy (2023), [Feminist Interventions: Resisting the Militarization of the Climate Crisis](#)

106 Scientists for Global Responsibility (2023), [How big are global military carbon emissions](#)

Representation and participation in UK armed forces (UKAF)

Although a gender equality approach would aim to address the root causes and structural inequalities that exclude women, LGBTQI+ people and other marginalised groups from meaningful participation in security decision-making spaces, their low representation remains concerning. It is important to create an environment where women soldiers/peacekeepers can work effectively, free from discrimination in UK and partner forces. In 2019, the MoD report on ‘Inappropriate Behaviours’ stated that 12 per cent of armed forces personnel had been subject to bullying, harassment or discrimination in the previous 12 months, yet only 6 per cent made a formal complaint.¹⁰⁷ Additionally, the Royal Navy committed to implementing 37 specific recommendations aimed at improving leadership training and work culture. Important measures include regular welfare checks for submarine crews, emphasising mental health support, and establishing robust reporting mechanisms to ensure that victims can report misconduct without fear of reprisal.¹⁰⁸

Without posing any risk to CSOs, UK defence approaches should actively engage with CSOs to ensure diverse women’s voices are included in their decision-making processes. This approach should extend to collaborations with foreign nations as well, to better understand the needs and concerns of women and LGBTQI+ communities in those countries. It is crucial to assess how security forces can support all women’s well-being and address any violence against them, including violence perpetrated by security forces themselves.

The Arms Trade Treaty (ATT)

The proliferation of conventional arms presents a significant and ongoing threat to human security in many parts of the world. Arms transfers into conflict and human rights crisis zones have been shown to have a devastating impact on civilian communities, perpetuating a vicious cycle of violence and insecurity, fuelling violations of international human rights and humanitarian law, and systematic GBV. In contexts such as Afghanistan, Sudan, Yemen and Gaza, civilians continue to suffer from GBV in the ongoing conflicts fuelled by illegal and irresponsible arms transfers, including by states that purport to value and uphold a rules-based international system.

The 2014 ATT¹⁰⁹ broke new ground where in Article 7.4, it obliges states to consider ‘the risk of ... conventional arms ... being used to commit or facilitate serious acts of gender-based violence or serious acts of violence against women and children’ when deciding whether to export those arms. The UK, when revising its national Strategic Export Licensing Criteria in 2021, included references to ‘gender-based violence or serious acts of violence against women or children’ in four of those criteria, including those relating to internal repression, international humanitarian law, and peace and security. ATT states parties, including the UK, have agreed a Voluntary Guide to implementing Articles 6 and 7 of the ATT,¹¹⁰ which includes considering GBV.

The practice of EU member states, all of which are ATT states parties, is expected to be in compliance with the EU Common Position 2008/944/CFSP on arms exports and its elaborative User’s Guide, which is designed inter alia to support members’ implementation of the Common Position criteria.

¹⁰⁷ Wigston M Report on inappropriate behaviours. Ministry of Defence; (2019) Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5d2ef0fce5274a14e68ed651/20190607_Defence_Report_Inappropriate_Behaviours_Final_ZKL.pdf

¹⁰⁸ Ministry of Defence, Report of the Royal Navy non-statutory investigation into allegations of misconduct and inappropriate behaviour within the Submarine Service (4 October 2024) Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/report-of-the-royal-navy-non-statutory-investigation-into-allegations-of-misconduct-and-inappropriate-behaviour-within-the-submarine-service>

¹⁰⁹ ATT (2014), [Arms Trade Treaty](#)

¹¹⁰ ATT (2024), [Voluntary Guide to Implement Articles 6 & 7 of the Arms Trade Treaty](#)

Despite the formal obligations and guidance, and the ATT-related activity and documents, there is very little indication from states, including the UK, about how they apply GBV standards in practice, or how often, if ever, the risk of GBV has been the basis for refusing prospective arms transfers. This is even to the extent that it is difficult to distinguish whether serious assessment is taking place but is not being communicated, or whether there is no proper assessment in the first place.

Several states, including the UK, have at least implied they do in practice assess GBV risks when considering arms export licence applications, but more within the context of other broader criteria (such as human rights and international humanitarian law) than in isolation. However, given the multiple references to GBV in the UK's national criteria, it is surely incumbent on the UK to explain in detail when and how GBV has been factored into its decision-making.

Moreover, with respect to the conduct of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in Yemen and Israeli action in the OPT and Lebanon, there has, for example, in both cases been a clear risk of UK-supplied equipment being used in ways that have prevented and destroyed women and girls' access to health facilities and adequate nutrition. Here, then, indications are that the UK does not always take the risks of GBV seriously in the export licensing risk assessment process. The UK must also consider how the weaponry it sells may itself be used in the destruction and damage of UK-funded humanitarian and development work in conflict settings, as well as indirect and longer-term effects on human development, including exacerbating inequalities and grievances that can trigger conflict recurrence. This is relevant in the death and injury of women and girls who participate in and benefit from UK-funded programming, as well as for material impacts, such as destroyed schools, clinics and other facilities.

The UK argued upon leaving the EU that its extensive export licensing experience makes developing national criterion-specific guidance unnecessary. However, by this logic, where there is a dearth of experience, as appears to be the case for GBV, the need for operational guidance becomes manifest. If such guidance has been developed, then given the doubt and opacity surrounding UK practice, it would be to the government's credit to communicate this fact and publish the guidance, as well as examples of how it has been applied. This would both reassure the UK's Parliament and electorate and other countries, while at the same time having a positive influence in other states.

If currently there is no guidance per se, then the UK Government should work to develop that guidance in consultation with other partners, including organisations working specifically through a gender lens. Meanwhile, assuming that there is actual relevant practice, regardless of whether it is formalised/systematised through guidance, the government should elaborate and publish how it is assessing the risks of GBV within the licensing process, again with examples. It should then provide opportunities for stakeholders to interrogate that practice and potentially propose improvements.

The UK's Strategic Export Controls Annual Reports could also be used to explore this issue, for example by including the GBV risks assessment where relevant as part of the featured country case studies, or by developing a specific GBV thematic multi-destination case study.

Recommendations

The UK Government should:

- **Consolidate the meaningful participation of all women in security policies and practices.** The UK should position itself as a global leader on responding effectively to security threats by taking a gender-responsive approach from the outset and aligning policies with existing UK and NATO commitments to WPS and human security. Policies should recognise and respond to the differentiated experiences and roles of people of all genders and sexual orientations, and the gendered drivers of conflict and violence. Security-related policies and programmes must be developed and implemented in collaboration with, in response to and appropriately account for the needs and concerns of diverse women, girls, LGBTQI+ people and other marginalised groups, including those located in conflict-affected contexts. They must champion and contribute to the full participation of these groups in security-related decisions, negotiations and diplomacy, and in innovation and technological development.
- **Redirect a proportion of military investments to improve social infrastructures, reduce inequalities and mitigate climate change.** It should also increase overall and specifically gender-sensitive spending on civilian peacebuilding, conflict prevention and resolution; and provide a dedicated budget for the UK NAP, increasing the proportion of aid spending with gender equality as a principal objective to 20 per cent, in line with UN targets and the UK NAP.
- **Publish information on UK arms transfer licences refused in full or in part** on grounds related to risks of GBV, and include a GBV risks assessment as part of the featured country case studies in the UK's Strategic Export Controls Annual Reports.
- **Develop guidance** in consultation with external partners **on how to apply the GBV standards** outlined **in the Strategic Export Licensing Criteria**, and promote that guidance in relevant global, regional or other multilateral fora to encourage good practice among other states in this area.

6.5 SO5: Transnational Threats

GAPS has called for a greater focus on implementing the WPS agenda in national and foreign policy decision-making, including in national, regional and wider collective responses to complex, overlapping and evolving transnational threats and challenges across borders. GAPS welcomes the gendered lens offered in the NAP regarding the unequal impacts of these threats on women and girls and stresses that consideration of these threats must happen in coordinated and joined-up ways. The threats overlap in complex ways, and a strengthened and capacitated civil service and government can ensure the UK responds to these challenges as opportunities for global leadership to build justice. GAPS welcomes the UK's approach¹¹¹ to challenging the collective transnational nature of the global rollback on the rights of women, and the gender justice agenda in particular. This rollback¹¹² often goes hand in hand with a rollback on civil liberties and deliberately restricted civic and humanitarian spaces – through a weakening of democratic institutions and practice, and a fracturing of the international rules-based order.

The anti-gender (sometimes referred to as 'pro-family') movements¹¹³ are gaining traction, with many rights-based organisations calling for critical attention to be paid to the resurgence of patriarchal norms in domestic and foreign policies, which are driven by conservative, faith-based and other institutions and policy communities. Amid democratic decline and risks to open societies,¹¹⁴ and the rise in global militarism, this reversal of progress on women's rights and gender justice is particularly worrying. It should encourage the UK Government to seek de-escalatory, non-military policy alternatives.¹¹⁵ While the UK has often supported a rights-based agenda at the UN, its co-sponsorship of the UNSCR¹¹⁶ on Human Fraternity shed a light on a state-centric approach. Amid a rise in authoritarianism and a regression in women's rights, a renewed commitment to the principles of sovereignty and cultural/religious traditions over universality of human rights and human security could further exacerbate the anti-gender, anti-rights trends globally.

Gender dimensions of counter-terrorism and violent extremism

GAPS welcomes the UK NAP's inequalities lens on the drivers of terrorism and extremism, and its conflict-sensitive recommendation to ensure that government interventions do not reinforce harmful binary gendered stereotypes. GAPS welcomes a gender-sensitive approach to counter-terrorism and preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) policies. However, securitised and carceral approaches to preventing and addressing issues of violent extremism tend to be grounded in biased and untested assumptions,¹¹⁷ and run counter to feminist principles in both domestic and foreign policy. The implementation of the NAP could benefit from a greater focus on prevention,¹¹⁸ public health and community-based approaches¹¹⁹ that help address root causes and gendered drivers of extremism and go beyond gender binaries as instrumentalised by armed groups (both state and non-state). These gender binaries and stereotypes are instrumentalised in domestic prevention strategies, with these same biases¹²⁰ often mirrored in foreign policy and the UK's strategic global partnerships. WPS offers important tools, such as gender-sensitive conflict analysis, that consider unequal power dynamics and the unequal impacts of both threats and interventions.

111 HMG (2023), [UK women, peace and security national action plan 2023 to 2027](#)

112 CIVICUS Monitor (2023), [The Good, the Bad and the Ugly: Civic Space Dynamics](#)

113 UN Research Institute for Social Development (2023), [The International Anti-Gender Movement](#)

114 Freedom House (2023) [New Report: Global Freedom Declines for 17th Consecutive Year, but May Be Approaching a Turning Point](#)

115 Rethinking Security (2024), [Making the case for de-escalation in the UK's Strategic Defence Review](#)

116 Just Security (2023), [New UN Security Council Resolution on 'Human Fraternity' Raises Human Rights Concerns](#)

117 Royal United Services Institute (2020), [What Can Work \(And What Has Not Worked\) in Women-Centric P/CVE Initiatives](#)

118 HMG (2024), [Independent Review of Prevent: One year on progress report](#)

119 Faculty of Public Health (2019), [Preventing violent extremism in the UK: Public health solutions](#)

120 Amnesty International (2023), ['This is the Thought Police': The Prevent duty and its chilling effect on human rights](#)

The counter-terrorism and countering violent extremism agenda has been increasingly intersecting¹²¹ with gender and WPS issues across the UK and multilateral spaces; however, there is less foreign policy focus on gender (in)justice as a driver of violence and armed conflict. As GAPS continues to make clear, the WPS framework's primary goal¹²² must remain gender justice and women's rights, rather than becoming a tool to achieve national security objectives, while the UK Government must champion efforts to address the structural drivers of armed conflicts. With the UK serving as UN Security Council penholder on WPS and Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, there is an opportunity for greater investment in ensuring the UN applies a gender justice lens in its collective security efforts, centring equality and rights-based approaches in its strategies,¹²³ and ensuring that binary gender roles are not instrumental in the global counter-terror agenda.

Climate change and gender

The climate crisis is seen as a threat to international peace and security, yet the gendered – and other intersectional – dimensions of its impacts are not fully understood or appreciated. There is no graver threat to women's security than climate change, and the leadership and expertise of women and girls are critical in delivering climate action at scale and scope. GAPS welcomes the inclusion of issues such as weapons proliferation, digital spaces and climate insecurity in the new NAP, as this allows for greater dialogue on the gender dimensions of the climate crisis and the UK's response (nationally and collectively). In some situations of extreme inequalities, such as in Afghanistan, the climate crisis is a threat multiplier¹²⁴ that is already having a highly gendered impact, further threatening the equality objectives and wider development aims for whole nations. The UK has committed to global leadership¹²⁵ on the climate crisis – including as host of the Conference of the Parties (COP)26 in 2021 – and GAPS welcomes the UK's human security approach to climate and other transnational threats as outlined in the NAP. Foreign Secretary David Lammy, in his Kew Lecture,¹²⁶ reiterated that the 'climate and nature crisis will be central to all that the Foreign Office does'. However, the lecture, besides a cursory mention of Indigenous women, appears gender-blind. Climate action that does not confront the root causes of the climate crisis, including gender inequality and other intersecting inequality issues such as ethnicity and class, will fail to deliver the long-term, community-owned and transformative climate action that is both progressive and realistically necessary given the scale of the current climate emergency. It also risks perpetuating the same gender-absent approaches of the previous government, as was clear in the Critical Minerals Strategy.¹²⁷ The UK has so far failed to keep the most affected communities and groups, including Indigenous communities and women, at the heart of its climate change narratives. The UK has been a prominent stakeholder in the global climate conferences (COPs) for several years. Following COP29¹²⁸ in Azerbaijan,¹²⁹ civil society expressed disappointment¹³⁰ in the funding decisions and lacklustre attendance, and called for a greater focus on human rights, while divesting from militarism and fossil fuels. COP29 also demonstrated the reach of the anti-gender movement and the threat it poses to intersecting agendas: the Lima work programme on gender and the Gender Action Plan¹³¹ were almost not passed due to opposition to the word 'gender' itself.

121 Patel, S (2022), [Representations of women and gender in DFID's development-security-counterterrorism nexus](#)

122 GAPS (2018), [Prioritise Peace: challenging approaches to Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism from a Women, Peace and Security perspective](#)

123 UN OHCHR (no date) [Special Rapporteur on counter-terrorism and human rights – Special Procedures](#)

124 Afghanaid (2024), [The climate crisis is a threat multiplier](#)

125 HMG (2024), [The government will show global leadership on the climate crisis: UK statement at the UN](#)

126 FCDO and Lammy, D (2024), [The Kew Lecture: Foreign Secretary's speech on the climate crisis](#)

127 HMG (2023), [Resilience for the Future: The UK's Critical Minerals Strategy](#)

128 Climate Change Committee (2024), [COP29: Key outcomes and next steps for the UK](#)

129 Green European Journal (2024), [COP29 in Azerbaijan: A Compromised Climate Conference](#)

130 Women & Gender Constituency (2024), [Centering Gender Justice: An Essential Commitment for COP29](#)

131 Women & Gender Constituency (2024), COP29: ['Rollback is our Red Line' – What's at Stake on Gender?](#)

UK's focus on cyber risks and opportunities for Women, Peace and Security

As the UK NAP rightly points out, cyber interdependencies and threats are growing in complexity and severity, and cyber remains significant in both enabling and preventing progress on gender equality. The power of digital spaces sits primarily with the private sector, given the contested regulatory nature of online spaces and business models that tend to privilege profit over safety. There has been an increase in online targeting of women and girls, feminist movements and others advocating for democracy, open societies and the rights of women and LGBTQI+ people. The UK Government's strategic commitment¹³² to technology and development, as a central part of its national development planning, should come hand-in-hand with political, financial and legal commitment to protect the rights of women and gender-diverse people online and offline through support to human rights and open societies. The UK must improve effective regulation¹³³ of digital markets, especially when engaging Big Tech on its business model and investment in trust and safety.

From Iraq to Turkey and Saudi Arabia, to India and Nigeria, the civil societies of the UK's security partners' are deliberately restricted and targeted for individually or collectively advocating for open and rights-based societies. Online harassment¹³⁴ is disproportionately directed at women, with Big Tech companies, including those with links to the UK, divesting from trust and safety to dangerous levels. This is leading to them becoming vehicles for misogynistic (and racist) content¹³⁵ that can translate from online to physical safety challenges, through technology-facilitated GBV and other pathways. Women human rights defenders are disproportionately negatively affected¹³⁶ by cybersecurity risks and are often specifically targeted, especially in politically volatile and conflict- and crisis-affected contexts and situations where civic space is shrinking. WROs and WLOs experience higher rates of cyber threats and risks compared to non-women-led CSOs – the largest differences being for online harassment, trolling and doxing. Cyber-bombing and impersonating organisations on social media were also found to be important, emerging threats. Cyber threats are gendered in nature, whereby WLOs and WROs are specifically targeted due to the focus of their work and are likely to be attacked with misogynistic and sexualised harassment. Mis- and disinformation, including that shaped by artificial intelligence (AI) such as deep fakes, further compound these risks. As the riots in the UK of summer 2024 demonstrate, these mis- and disinformation campaigns can directly spill over into offline violence.

As with other decision-making spaces in the state and non-state sectors, the UK NAP correctly notes that women are under-represented or otherwise excluded from formal and informal organisations that design and monitor the safety of cyberspace. While the 2023 Online Safety Bill¹³⁷ does recognise the disproportionate impact of cyber insecurity on women and girls, it does not include the specific risks women human rights defenders face because of their gender and work. GAPS encourages considering these dimensions if the UK Government is to ensure that civic space in the country and elsewhere can be protected. Societal inequalities are reflected in online spaces and without due investment (especially by private sector, Big Tech stakeholders) and values-based trade cooperation between the UK and its main economic and security partners, women's rights advocates will continue to face online threats and harassment. This in turn will continue to undermine their ability to participate in an increasingly digitised public policy space.

132 HMG (2024), [Global Strategic Trends: Out to 2055](#)

133 Article 19 (2024), [UK: New government must prioritise freedom of expression](#)

134 She Persisted (2023), [Monetizing Misogyny: Gendered Disinformation and the Undermining of Women's Rights and Democracy Globally](#)

135 Amnesty International (2024), [UK: Big Tech platforms play an active role in fuelling racist violence](#)

136 UN Women (2024), [Cybersecurity Threats, Vulnerabilities and Resilience Among Women Human Rights Defenders and Civil Society in South-East Asia](#)

137 HMG (2023), [Online Safety Act 2023](#)

Recommendations:

The UK Government should:

- **Include the gender/WPS agenda in its threat analysis and response**, and should include non-military tools such as restrictive measures and other arms controls on military trade and aid. The UK should consider expanding support to regional multilateral organisations that are well placed to support human security efforts, including through gender-responsive politico-military engagement.
- **Ensure that human rights and civil liberties remain at the heart of a human-centred approach to any security strategy** – including national, regional and global efforts to address issues of ‘terrorism and extremism’ (as they may be defined by states and institutions). In line with the UK’s human security approach, greater investment should be made through diplomacy, security and development to ensure the UK is not inadvertently reinforcing harmful and discriminatory gender binaries (domestically or internationally), while addressing the transnational threat of violence.
- **Recognise the threat climate change poses to progress around women’s rights and gender justice**. It must adopt a more holistic and intersectional approach in aligning WPS commitments to the UK’s approaches to climate change and reduce the risk of the climate-gender-conflict nexus from becoming unnecessarily securitised.
- **Reconsider its regulatory relationship with Big Tech hosted and/or utilised by UK national infrastructures**. It must ensure that private sector stakeholders are duly investing in trust and safety and engaging in a gender-sensitive dialogue on how online spaces can be made safe for women’s rights and gender justice movements.
- **Engage in a meaningful dialogue with states who claim to take a feminist approach to foreign and development policy** as well as their civil societies, to address underlying drivers behind the regression in women’s rights and human rights movements. Greater ODA investments are needed to enable the civic space needed for (women’s) rights defenders to claim their individual and collective rights.

7. Conclusion

GAPS continues to value its role as a strategic partner to the UK Government and acknowledges the efforts of officials across HMG in implementing the UK's fifth NAP on WPS. In a year, marked by significant political transition and deepening global crises, the urgency of the WPS agenda is more apparent than ever.

As the UK reaches the midpoint of its 2023-2027 NAP and the WPS agenda marks its 25th anniversary, it is vital that rhetoric is matched by action. Despite some positive initiatives, the implementation of the NAP remains hindered by insufficient funding, limited consultation and delayed delivery of key commitments such as the MEL framework and the baseline study. In a context of shrinking civil space, escalating militarisation, and the rollback of women's rights globally, bold leadership and sustained investment are not optional, but essential.

The NAP's success relies on timely delivery of its core commitments – finalising the MEL framework which is crucial for measuring progress and change, ensuring coordinated action across departments, ensuring adequate resources and funding for WROs and feminist movements, and embedding WPS across all domestic and international policy areas. The resumption of the ministerial oversight, improved consultation processes, gender expertise across government, and annual public reporting would represent crucial steps forward for meaningful implementation of UK WPS commitments.

GAPS hopes that the second half of this NAP cycle will mark a significant upscaling in implementation, driven by the political will to deliver on the UK's commitments. This will be key to ensure UK credibility and leadership on WPS. GAPS remains committed to working collaboratively with the UK Government to ensure the WPS agenda is fully implemented, transformative, and capable of meeting the challenges of our time.

Case studies are accessible via the GAPS website

These case studies, while informed by GAPS Members insights and expertise, do not reflect the official positions of GAPS Members.

Scan the QR code below to visit <https://gaps-uk.org/case-studies-assessing-uk-government-action-on-women-peace-and-security-2024/>



