



gender action for peace and security

# **CASE STUDIES: ASSESSING UK GOVERNMENT ACTION ON WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY IN 2024**

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## Case Studies

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

### 1. The Democratic Republic of the Congo, March 2025

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), women and girls and marginalised groups remain underrepresented in decision-making at all levels of society. In 2022, reforms to the electoral law of DRC clearly stated 50/50 political representation,<sup>1</sup> though in 2023, a total of 12.8 per cent of women were elected into Parliament.<sup>2</sup> Re-elected after a contested ballot, President Tshisekedi did appoint DRC's first ever woman Prime Minister, Judith Suminwa Tuluka, in April,<sup>3</sup> raising hopes for increased women's participation in politics and some level of cultural change. Efforts remain to counter social, structural, cultural, religious and individual norms that hinder women's participation at the local and community levels. Women previously associated with armed groups face additional barriers to political and communal participation.<sup>4</sup> Funding and support for local peacebuilders and women's rights organisations (WROs), who are closest to the crises and working with survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, remain extremely limited. These are set to decline further with the announcements in early 2025 of humanitarian and development funding cuts from the US Government, which provided the vast majority of aid to DRC, as well as other cuts – many deliberately targeting programmes centred on gender, diversity, equity and inclusion, including funding to support women and girls. These groups are already too often excluded from national, regional and international mediation efforts where their voices should be heard; these cuts will make access and including minoritised voices harder.

Ongoing conflicts in DRC, especially in the eastern provinces of Ituri, North Kivu and South Kivu, continue to have devastating effects on women and girls. These were sharply exacerbated early in 2025, when M23 took control of Goma, Bukavu, and large swathes of North and South Kivu. At the time of writing, upwards of one million people had been displaced in the first two months of 2025, in violence that killed at least 7,000 people,<sup>5</sup> including a 'significant' number of civilians and prompting incidents of mass violence against Congolese civilians.<sup>6</sup> Humanitarian organisations recorded a 'massive influx of cases'<sup>7</sup> and 'unprecedented'<sup>8</sup> rates of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) against women<sup>9</sup> and children,<sup>10</sup> and a medical system under strain from attacks,<sup>11</sup> displacement, and increased diseases such as mpox and cholera. These diseases have surged in and around Goma, where most people displaced from M23 activity in eastern DRC seek refuge. Women and girls report being pressured<sup>12</sup> into transactional sex to access employment, healthcare or humanitarian aid, amounting to sexual exploitation, and increased risks of sexual violence and kidnapping compared to men and boys, due to their social and domestic responsibilities. Many women and girls face discrimination or challenges

1 UN Women (no date), [Democratic Republic of the Congo](#)

2 IPU Parline (2023), [Democratic Republic of the Congo](#)

3 RFI (2024) [DRC's new PM and parliament sworn in after months of delay](#)

4 Peace Direct (2025), [Localised Analysis of Conflicts in Beni](#)

5 Al Jazeera (2025), [Fighting in eastern DRC killed about 7,000 people since January, PM says](#)

6 Reuters (2025), [UN rights office warns of summary killings and rape in eastern Congo](#)

7 Physicians for Human Rights (2024), ['Massive Influx of Cases': Health Worker Perspectives on Conflict-Related Sexual Violence in Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo](#)

8 HMG (2023), [UN sanctions perpetrators of conflict-related sexual violence](#)

9 The Guardian (2025), [Hundreds of women raped and burned to death after Goma prison set on fire](#)

10 EuroNews (2025), [Scores of children raped by armed fighters in eastern DR Congo. UNICEF says](#)

11 International Rescue Committee (2024), [A new study by the IRC and partners reveals women and children are bearing the brunt of the ongoing conflict in Eastern DRC](#)

12 Peace Direct (2025), [Localised Analysis of Conflicts in Beni](#)

accessing healthcare, with many avoiding care due to attacks on healthcare centres<sup>13</sup> or facing stigma and ostracisation<sup>14</sup> from families and communities, as well as long-term injuries and trauma. In June 2023, the UK Government sanctioned two Congolese military commanders for their role in CRSV.<sup>15</sup>

Evidence put forward by UN experts suggests that M23 is backed by two of DRC's neighbours, Rwanda and Uganda,<sup>16</sup> with M23 being one of hundreds of armed groups operating in eastern DRC. Yet in May 2024, the UK's Conservative Government adopted the Safety of Rwanda (Asylum and Immigration) Act as a pathway to implementing its Rwanda policy. This raised concerns: multiple bodies, including the UN Panel of Experts on the DRC,<sup>17</sup> the US,<sup>18</sup> France<sup>19</sup> and other countries, have documented Rwandan involvement in supporting M23 in eastern DRC. This evidence was ignored by the government in establishing the UK-Rwanda Treaty on Asylum Partnership and subsequent scheme.<sup>20</sup>

GAPS welcomes the Labour Government's end to the Rwanda scheme; Keir Starmer noted that the Rwanda scheme was 'dead and buried'<sup>21</sup> in his first speech as Prime Minister. In February 2025, the UK Government announced preliminary measures against the Rwandan Government,<sup>22</sup> in response to the M23 takeover of North and South Kivu, and Rwanda's breach of the UN Charter in DRC, as reports emerged of Rwandan Defence Force presence on Congolese territory. With increasing accounts of CRSV and a declining funding landscape, the UK must step up its commitments to Women, Peace and Security (WPS) in the DRC, which until now remain unclear despite its designation as a focus country in the 5<sup>th</sup> National Action Plan (NAP).

13 International Rescue Committee (2024), [A new study by the IRC and partners reveals women and children are bearing the brunt of the ongoing conflict in Eastern DRC](#)

14 Panzi Foundation (no date), [Democratic Republic of Congo has been at the Epicenter of Some of the Most Horrific Conflict-Related Sexual Violence in Modern History](#)

15 HMG (2023) [UN sanctions perpetrators of conflict-related sexual violence](#)

16 BBC (2024), [Two armies accused of backing DR Congo's feared rebels](#)

17 AP (2024), [UN experts: Between 3,000 and 4,000 Rwandan troops are in Congo operating with the M23 rebel group](#)

18 UN (2024), [Escalating Violence in Democratic Republic of Congo Exacerbating Humanitarian Crisis, Special Representative Warns Security Council, Urging Durable Political Solution](#)

19 Ibid.

20 Williams, A (2024), [The new UK government must recognise the violence in DRC](#)

21 Al Jazeera (2024), [Keir Starmer says scrapping UK's Rwanda migrant deportation plan](#)

22 HMG (2025), [UK Statement on response to the situation in Eastern DRC](#)

## Recommendations

The UK Government should:

- Officially repeal the Illegal Migration Act – recognising it is currently on hold indefinitely – and hasten its existing commitment to repeal the Safety of Rwanda (Immigration and Asylum) Act.
- Enforce pressure on all parties to adhere to their responsibilities under international law, including by implementing the newly announced preliminary sanction measures for Rwanda unless conditions are met. This must also include the necessary measures outlined in the NAP 2023–2027, including deploying Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative (PSVI) experts.
- Include humanitarian, women’s rights, and sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and peacebuilding work in Eastern DRC on the shortlist of programmes that will be protected from the recently announced cuts to Official Development Assistance (ODA), due to DRC’s status as a conflict-affected country and the disproportionate and distinct violence experienced by women and girls. The UK Government may wish to consider funds allocated to the suspended Rwanda bilateral aid and schemes to be re-allocated to humanitarian, development and peacebuilding efforts in Eastern DRC. This could provide not only lifesaving assistance but also contribute to wider regional stabilisation and spillover monitoring efforts.
- Maintain and refocus financial and non-financial support for organisations and communities, especially local peacebuilders and WROs, working with people who have experienced SGBV and displaced women and girls. In particular, the UK Government should increase support to communities and organisations responding to women and girls’ needs, including access to care, justice and accountability in the aftermath of SGBV, as well as trauma-informed approaches to care.
- Provide support for women-led organisations (WLOs) and WROs to be meaningfully included in national, regional and international peace and mediation efforts. [The UK’s endorsement of the Luanda and Nairobi peace processes](#)<sup>23</sup> should include clear calls for the participation of women and women peacebuilders, and share lessons from its support of the Colombian peace process.
- Resource, advocate for and assist timely investigations into alleged crimes under the Rome Statute and other gross violations of human rights and humanitarian law, including supporting proceedings with the International Criminal Court, to help provide accountability and access to justice for victims and survivors. This could include replicating support programmes on evidence collection, verification and survivor support provided in Ukraine.

<sup>23</sup> UK Government (2024), <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/the-united-kingdom-is-deeply-concerned-by-the-worsening-conflict-in-eastern-democratic-republic-of-the-congo-uk-statement-at-the-un-security-council>

## 2. Occupied Palestinian Territory, March 2025

Palestinians in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT) have endured ongoing human rights violations and abuses under Israel's occupation in clear violations of international humanitarian law (IHL). These violations include continued settlement expansion, forced displacement without the right to return, blocking of humanitarian aid, indiscriminate and continuous bombing of civilians, the use of starvation as a weapon of war, a prolonged siege on Gaza, and settler attacks in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. The violations have been perpetrated by the Israeli Government and have been impacting the lives and the rights of Palestinians for decades, not just over the past 15 months.

On 26 January 2024, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) issued a legally binding provisional measures for Israel<sup>24</sup> to prevent and not commit acts of genocide against Palestinians and to take all reasonable measures within its power to prevent genocide. The ruling specifically mandated Israel and all states signatory to the ICJ to: (1) prevent and punish public incitement to commit genocide; (2) ensure the provision of humanitarian aid to Palestinians; (3) preserve evidence related to allegations of genocide; and (4) submit a compliance report within one month. As of November 2024, the UK Government had acknowledged the authority of the International Criminal Court (ICC) to investigate alleged war crimes in Palestine and expressed support for the court's independent judicial processes. A first phase of a ceasefire agreement between Israel and Hamas was also reached on 17 January 2025 and reached its expiration date in March 2025.

At this stage, widespread violations of humanitarian law continue, with Israel restricting aid access and intensifying military operations in Gaza. As of the first weekend of March 2025, Israeli authorities made the decision to block all humanitarian goods and supplies into Gaza. This move is a violation of IHL, as the Israeli Government has a responsibility under Article 55 of the Fourth Geneva Convention and IHL as an occupying power.<sup>25</sup> As per IHL, Israel as an occupying power has the duty to ensure the food and medical supplies of the population. The block on humanitarian supplies and the destruction of civilian infrastructure, including health facilities, hospitals and schools, has led to an outbreak of epidemics and looming famine. Following the start of the ceasefire, the humanitarian situation in the West Bank<sup>26</sup> has also worsened considerably, with increased rates of settler violence and military operations, including airstrikes on civilian areas.

These violations have a gendered impact and disproportionately affect women and girls. Palestinian women regularly face violence, threats, intimidation, restrictions on movement and discrimination. Almost 70 per cent<sup>27</sup> of those killed are women and children, while one million women and girls have been displaced. Displacement and humanitarian need significantly impact sexual health and reproductive rights,<sup>28</sup> including pregnancy. They have sharply increased the risk of preventable diseases, including reports of polio.

Despite relentless advocacy and demands by UK civil society and human rights organisations, the UK Government has failed to take concrete actions to pressure Israel into compliance with the ICJ's ruling, uphold its obligations under international law or to use its diplomatic leverage to push for a lasting ceasefire. The UK Government continues to approve most of its arms export licenses to Israel, raising serious concerns<sup>29</sup> about its compliance with the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) and its commitments to gender equality under international law. The ATT, which the UK ratified in 2014, legally obliges state parties to assess the risk of exported arms being used to commit serious violations of international law,

24 International Court of Justice (2024), [Order of 26 January 2024](#)

25 International Committee of the Red Cross (2024), [What does the law say about the responsibilities of the Occupying Power in the occupied Palestinian territory?](#)

26 OCHA (2025), [Humanitarian Situation Update #283: West Bank](#)

27 United Nations (2024) [Two mothers killed each hour in Gaza conflict: UN Women](#)

28 CARE (2024), [Birth under bombs: 9 months of hell in Gaza](#)

29 Al Haq, International Service for Human Rights and WILPF (2024), [Joint submission to the UN Human Rights Committee](#)

including war crimes and gender-based violence (GBV). Such violations have been well-documented in the OPT. See the section in the full Shadow Report on the Arms Trade Treaty for detailed overview and recommendations.

The OPT was not named as a focus country within the UK NAP and therefore commitments made in the NAP – including focus countries having a WPS focal point, gender strategies at posts in the country and GESI analyses – are not applied. However, the NAP makes it clear that non-focus countries can and should be considered and the OPT must not be an exception. The UK's failure to implement its WPS NAP in the OPT, specifically in Gaza, will further exacerbate the suffering of Palestinian women and girls. Reports of CRSV committed by Israeli forces have been documented across the OPT. A 2025 report of the independent Commission of Inquiry<sup>30</sup> has detailed the violations and crimes against humanity that Israel has committed against Palestinian women and girls in Gaza, from direct targeting and killing to denial of humanitarian aid. It also highlighted that Palestinian women and girls have died from complications related to pregnancy and childbirth due to the conditions imposed by the Israeli authorities impacting access to reproductive healthcare. Palestinian women and girls also face heightened risks of GBV, displacement and economic deprivation due to the conflict.

Despite this, the UK Government has failed to integrate WPS principles into its policy on the OPT or to use its diplomatic power to protect Palestinian women and girls from the gross and systemic violations committed against them by Israel. It leaves them without the gender-sensitive protections that the UK applies in other conflict zones and, through its role in creating the PSVI, to ensure justice, dignity and accountability for all survivors. By refusing to apply its own NAP principles, the UK Government is undermining its credibility as a global advocate for women's rights in conflict settings.

## Recommendations

The UK Government should:

- Enforce immediate compliance with the ICJ provisional measures, using diplomatic pressure to push for a full and sustainable ceasefire and full, unfettered humanitarian access. This includes using all available diplomatic measures to ensure the Israeli authorities immediately lift their current blockade of humanitarian supplies in Gaza and to reject the proposed supply distribution scheme by the Israeli and US authorities.
- Fulfill its obligations under international law including, but not limited to, the Genocide Convention and international humanitarian law (IHL), which require immediate action to prevent further violations, ensure accountability, and implement countermeasures to address the ongoing man-made humanitarian crisis and breaches of international law.
- Actively support and promote the participation and leadership of Palestinian women in peacebuilding and crisis response efforts. This involves facilitating their inclusion in decision-making processes regarding reconstruction and any potential political process.
- Suspend all arms sales to Israel, in line with the UK's obligations under the ATT and IHL, including via Third states such as the US, to prevent their use in violations of international humanitarian and human rights law.
- Implement the recommendations from the ICJ's advisory opinion, which declared that the occupation of the Palestinian territory by the Israeli Government is unlawful and demanded removal of all illegal settlements. The UK is under an obligation not to recognise, aid and assist Israel's unlawful presence in the OPT.
- Implement its WPS NAP in the OPT, ensuring that Palestinian women and girls receive the same protections as women in other conflict zones. It should also consider making both Palestine and Sudan focus countries.

<sup>30</sup> UN (2025), [Report of the Commission of Inquiry: Israel's systematic use of sexual, reproductive and other forms of gender-based violence since 7 October 2023](#)

### 3. Ukraine, March 2025

The UK Government has upheld its commitment to review and respond to emerging conflicts through its reaction to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. The fourth NAP did not include Ukraine as a focus country (as the NAP was finalised prior to the full-scale invasion) but has since responded by implementing the UK's WPS commitments in Ukraine. This includes providing funding for WROs, women leaders and those working to support the critical needs for women and children both inside and outside the country. GAPS welcomed the inclusion of Ukraine as a focus country in the UK's fifth NAP, as the multiple and intersecting crises facing women's rights, their participation and their role in the prevention of conflict are clear. With this inclusion, the UK Government must continue and strengthen support to WROs and Ukrainian women, both inside and outside the country, to ensure their meaningful participation and inclusion of their priorities and experiences in all decision-making on future policies and programmes in Ukraine, including all peace negotiations.

Since the start of the Russian invasion in 2014, and its rapid escalation on 24 February 2022, the armed conflict has had complex and multiple gendered impacts. Conscription and other dimensions of martial law are having gendered impacts as well, and the protracted nature of the humanitarian crisis is likely to have long-term effects on human development indicators. This situation has disproportionately affected some groups who could not avail themselves of full state protection due to their status, as well as national and regional social biases and discrimination. This includes many African and Asian third-country residents who became refugees, many of whom were students in Ukraine, and who have faced multiple racially motivated challenges. Prior to the current crisis, Ukraine had the largest stateless population in Europe.<sup>31</sup> Many of these are Roma, and an estimated 60 per cent of Roma women and children do not have documentation.<sup>32</sup> The Russian invasion continues to brutally disrupt life in Ukraine, causing extensive damage across sectors, impacting lives and livelihoods. Men constitute the vast majority of frontline soldiers and, as a result, many are exposed to horrific violence, leading to wide ranging and long-term challenges around trauma and militarising society as a settlement process remains elusive. Women are often required to shoulder the associated care burdens, which have also increased because of more limited social services because of the war. While burdens have increased, decision-making power within the household is unchanged and unpaid care work remains an issue.

In addition to increasing care responsibilities, there has been a rise in GBV such as domestic violence,<sup>33</sup> CRSV, human trafficking, sexual exploitation and abuse. As a result, survivors face a wide range of risks, such as unwanted pregnancies, and psychological and physical trauma. At the beginning of the humanitarian crisis, local WLOs, WROs and LGBTQI+ organisations were some of the first to respond to communities' needs. Women comprise most frontline workers, volunteers and first responders who support affected populations, either through formal and informal associations or ad hoc groups. The UK committed funding specifically for WROs in Ukraine, in particular those working on the frontline to support women and children, including internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees. Among other national and regional European initiatives, the UK worked with the National Democratic Institute (NDI) in Ukraine to promote women's leadership at the local level during the conflict, establishing gender-focused caucuses in local councils.

There are deep concerns now that with sharp cuts in ODA from the US, as well as from the UK and other European states, many of the good governance programmes and organisations that underpin WPS work will be defunded and decapitated, leaving WPS agendas primarily in the hands of security (as compared to civilian or aid) stakeholders. While WROs and WLOs in Ukraine were among the first to

31 Working Group on Women, Peace and Security (2022), [Gender Analysis of the Situation in Ukraine](#)

32 Oxfam (2023), [Further into the Margins: A regional report on Roma communities displaced by the Ukraine crisis](#)

33 UN Women (2025), [Gender-based violence in Ukraine](#)

provide emergency assistance, as we often see in war around the world, formal participation in and influencing of national decision-making processes has been inaccessible for many women. This is due to centralised, increasingly militarised and male-led power structures. A narrow focus on humanitarian delivery has also meant many WROs and WLOs have not received the necessary resourcing to build capacity and deliver in areas that include prevention, peacebuilding and women's rights issues, such as participation. This has resulted in the sidelining of women's rights and gender equality amid pressing humanitarian and security concerns. As Ukraine continues to respond to the invasion, including in Russia, there are increasing concerns for wider European regional security and the dwindling of trans-Atlantic security guarantees, undermining traditional security alliances on the European continent. This is linked to far-reaching cuts to European aid budgets, with defence spending being prioritised. This trend calls attention to the WPS agenda but also risks defunding the very capacities that support its positive outcomes.

Despite the slow and limited acceptance of Ukrainian voices and WROs in the humanitarian response to the conflict, there have been some positive steps towards increasing inclusion and participation. The UK Government has played an important role in working to ensure the increased prioritisation of WLOs and WROs in national and international fora, with some activists and WRO leaders noticing a shift in UK and global attitudes towards listening to their priorities. Although the approach to UK-facilitated consultations has improved, there is still a long way to go to ensuring long-term system-level change<sup>34</sup> by including a diverse range of Ukrainian voices in the delivery of relief and recovery.

While the UK Government continues to provide military training and support to Ukraine's armed forces, it must ensure that the principles of the WPS agenda are integrated to ensure a human security perspective that includes women and WROs' priorities in the pathway to peace. The UK has shown some commitment to the principles of WPS in Ukraine through the 2022–2023 Conflict, Stability and Security Fund funding bids,<sup>35</sup> which were published primarily for WROs that advance a localised WPS agenda in Ukraine. The aim here was to ensure collaboration across the diversity of WROs working in Ukraine and to guarantee that WROs and CSOs contributed to building a disaggregated evidence base for monitoring human rights abuses and instances of GBV and CRSV. The initial conversations around the Integrated Security Fund that looked to gender inequalities as a UK national security issue provide an opportunity to develop a human security narrative that understands gender equality as a policy priority that must be upheld in foreign as well as domestic policy, including in the UK's approach to Ukraine. As the Ministry of Defence is co-responsible for implementing the NAP and with its increased budget, additional clarity is needed around what role the MoD will play to integrate gender analysis in line with human security throughout its engagement, including programming and training, in Ukraine.

The UK has shown consistent support for Ukraine, including through strongly advocating for the resolution at the UN General Assembly that called for a 'comprehensive, just and lasting peace'<sup>36</sup> and by abstaining on votes for a draft resolution at the UN Security Council tabled by Russia.<sup>37</sup> It has also provided long-term support to the WPS agenda in Ukraine, as well as other security guarantees, such as the UK's NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation) membership and its 'UK-Ukraine 100 Year Partnership'. The UK Ambassador's intervention<sup>38</sup> for the successful resolution raised the matters of just peace, sovereignty and the impact on civilians, although there was no mention of women and girls or the gendered impact of war and the Russian invasion. Furthermore, through its humanitarian funding in Ukraine, the UK Government has enabled an integrated focus on women's participation. For example,

34 Oxfam (2024), [Two Years at the Forefront: Exploring the needs and experiences of women-led, women's rights and LGBTQIA+ led organizations two years into the Ukraine humanitarian response](#)

35 HMG (2022), [Calls for bids: supporting Women, Peace and Security in Ukraine under the Conflict, Security and Stability Fund Programme 2022 to 2023](#)

36 UN General Assembly (2023), [Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 23 February 2023](#)

37 Security Council Report (2023), [Ukraine: Vote on Draft Resolution on the Nord Stream Incident](#)

38 HMG (2023), [Ukraine resolution underlines the need for a comprehensive, just and lasting peace: UK Statement at the General Assembly](#)

in areas where UK humanitarian assistance has been implemented, women form the vast majority of representatives on IDP local councils. This is a promising entry point that can be built on. With aid cuts, the UK should prioritise asset freezes and asset seizures of sanctioned individuals, including Russian individuals and entities, for aid flows to Ukraine (including dialogue on reparations and justice) and other victims of the Russian aggression. In close cooperation and coordination with the European Union (EU), this approach would indicate important redistributive messages, moving resources from belligerent oligarchs to those who are marginalised and affected by their actions. If done so successfully, the UK and its allies should consider how best practice can be applied to other contexts to ensure the UK's approach is consistent to each conflict context.

The UK should continue humanitarian support that enables an integrated approach to building and strengthening inclusive democratic foundations to ensure women's needs and voices are reflected in national decision-making on issues that impact the future of their communities and their stabilisation.

## Recommendations

The UK Government should:

- Continue to provide support for the strengthening of quality and accessibility of GBV services, including holistic programming that aims to reduce social stigma and develops targeted services for marginalised groups such as older women, women in rural areas, women with disabilities, LGBTQI+ individuals, and all survivors of CRSV. This should include direct funding for Ukrainian WROs and WLOs.
- Ensure that meaningful consultation and inclusive planning for recovery and post-conflict reconstruction and democracy strengthening include women's leadership and meaningful participation,<sup>39</sup> as well as including feminist agendas. Consultation and inclusion of CSOs, including WROs and WLOs, and local IDP councils, should not be an 'add on' at the end of the process; their meaningful participation should be prioritised from the outset of the process.
- Fund and uphold its commitments to the Minimum Initial Services Package<sup>40</sup> on sexual and reproductive health, including access to contraception and safe abortion care (in Ukraine and for the refugee populations), and increase information sharing and awareness.
- Ensure that WPS is more prominently featured in its defence dialogues and wider military support to Ukraine, bilaterally and regionally (for example, via regional institutions such as NATO, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe and others), including in how civil-military cooperation<sup>41</sup> is organised and funded.
- Work to apply the WPS agenda to encourage greater transparency and accountability, as well as democratic oversight, during and after conflict, which consider gender justice (including but not limited to the interests of men and women). Armed conflicts are often a critical juncture for societies, and transformative gender justice approaches should be considered and supported in providing assistance to any political settlement processes between Russia and Ukraine. Ukrainians<sup>42</sup> from across society (and gender spectrums) should be at the heart of peace settlement, mediation and justice (including reparations) processes.

<sup>39</sup> GAPS, Women for Women, Amnesty International, Womankind Worldwide, Saferworld (no date), [Beyond Consultations](#)

<sup>40</sup> HMG (2023), [UK women, peace and security national action plan 2023 to 2027, Strategic Objective 3](#)

<sup>41</sup> Center for Civilians in Conflict (2003), [The Role of Civil-Military Cooperation in Protection of Civilians: the Ukraine Experience](#)

<sup>42</sup> [Ukraine Peace Appeal: Towards a More Informed Solidarity](#)

## 4. Sudan, March 2025

Since 15 April 2023, when conflict erupted in Khartoum between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), a paramilitary group, more than 26,000 people have died as a direct result of the violence. With 80 per cent of hospitals closed, the healthcare system has collapsed after being extensively targeted. Meanwhile, sexual violence against women and girls is widespread, more than ten million people have been displaced, with at least 53 per cent being women and girls, and 25.6 million people are food insecure – including 1.2 million pregnant and breastfeeding women.<sup>43</sup> The violence has an explicit genocidal dimension,<sup>44</sup> where non-Arab communities are being targeted.

The war has triggered a spike of violence against women and girls, with 6.9 million at risk of GBV<sup>45</sup> and an increase of 288 per cent in reports between December 2023 and December 2024,<sup>46</sup> including of sexual exploitation and trafficking, intimate partner violence, rape, and abduction. Alongside widespread looting, shooting and killing, both warring parties are using GBV as a weapon of war, targeting women and girls as part of their methods to secure control.<sup>47</sup> They also conduct forced marriages and target women who are visible in the public sphere, such as health workers or street vendors. With the deterioration in all services and supplies due to the war, women and girls lack access to GBV services and sexual and reproductive healthcare.

The ongoing crisis in Sudan has worsened gender disparities in food access, particularly affecting female-headed households,<sup>48</sup> which are 16 per cent more at risk than their male-headed counterparts. Gender norms restrict women's participation in sustainable livelihoods, whereas men can use various strategies to manage economic stress, including accessing income sources such as wage labour and mining. Coping mechanisms for women include exchanging sex for food or being forcibly married.<sup>49</sup> Access to education for girls in Sudan is another significant issue, with more than 2.5 million school-aged girls unable to return to school.<sup>50</sup> This situation heightens the risk of them facing child marriage and female genital mutilation.

WROs and networks have been at the frontlines, working to provide humanitarian aid and calling for peace.<sup>51</sup> Among these, Women's Emergency Response Rooms (WERRs) are essential for highlighting the unique needs of women and girls and providing specialised services to effectively address these concerns. Due to their peacebuilding activities, women activists, women peacebuilders and human rights defenders are at high risk of targeted violence.<sup>52</sup> WROs and WERRs also now have the additional role of supporting communities facing the impacts of climate change, which is an added burden – especially considering their limited access to funding and the shrinking civic space.<sup>53</sup>

Despite their pivotal role and contextual knowledge, WLOs were only receiving 2 per cent<sup>54</sup> of the Sudan Humanitarian Fund (SHF) by December 2024. At the same time, only 6.7 per cent of the funding needed for protection in 2024 had been secured.<sup>55</sup> Meanwhile, just 1.8 million of the 6.7 million individuals requiring GBV prevention and response services were being targeted, with only around 164,000 people reached,<sup>56</sup> representing less than 10 per cent of the target.

43 The New Humanitarian (2024), [Health services non-functional as women bear the brunt of Sudan's war](#)

44 Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect (2025), [Urgent alert on the risk of genocide in North Darfur, Sudan](#)

45 UN Population Fund (2024), [Sudan Situation Report #18 – November 2024](#)

46 UN Women (2024), [Gender alert: No excuse: Calling for an end to gender-based violence in Sudan](#)

47 Strategic Initiative for Women in the Horn of Africa (2024), [Gezira State and the Forgotten Atrocities: A Report on Conflict-related Sexual Violence](#)

48 UN Women (2024), [Gender alert: Women and girls of Sudan: Fortitude amid the flame of war](#)

49 Care International (2024), [Because they are women](#)

50 UN (2024), [Women and girls in Sudan disproportionately impacted by ongoing conflict](#)

51 Saferworld (2024), [Support to Sudanese women responding to conflict and crisis](#)

52 UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) (2024), [Sudan: Experts call for immediate support for survivors of gender-based violence and an end to targeting of women first responders and human rights defenders](#)

53 International Service for Human Rights (2024), [Sudan: calling for protection of women defenders amidst rising attacks against them](#)

54 UN Women (2024), [Alarming 288 per cent rise in demand for gender-based violence services in the last 12 months in Sudan](#)

55 CARE (2025), [Sudan conflict: Lifesaving healthcare and nutrition for women and children](#)

56 UN Women (2024), [Gender alert: No excuse: Calling for an end to gender-based violence in Sudan](#)

## *The UK WPS NAP commitments are partially upheld in Sudan*

Despite Sudan not being listed as a focus country in the fifth UK NAP on WPS, the NAP commits the UK Government to being flexible in where it works and to respond to crises as they emerge. In 2024, the UK made some steps to comply with the WPS NAP Strategic Objectives 1, 2 and 3 in Sudan. The UK has continued to denounce CRSV in Sudan, via the UN Security Council. In October, the UK supported a one-year renewal of the mandate of the UN Human Rights Council Fact-Finding Mission to investigate human rights abuses. In September, the UN Security Council also renewed the arms embargo on Darfur.<sup>57</sup>

Last year, Parliament's Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy criticised the decision<sup>58</sup> to wind down the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund's programme in Sudan in 2021. The programme included<sup>59</sup> localising UN Security Council Resolution 1325 in Blue Nile State and also aimed for 'Reduced conflict at local level through conflict prevention and mitigation, peacebuilding and reconciliation, with special focus on sexual and gender-based violence.' While the International Development Committee was told<sup>60</sup> that some aspects of this fund were transferred to the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO), it is unclear whether the parts of the programme addressing SGBV were continued. Since then, the UK Integrated Security Fund has not re-opened its Sudan programme. It is also not clear whether the UK Government has undertaken support for peacebuilding work within Sudan since the outbreak of fighting in April 2023.

## **Recommendations**

The UK Government should:

- Encourage the African Union and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) to engage in immediate and decisive action to facilitate the cessation of hostilities and pressure the warring parties to stop committing GBV abuses. It should also support the call by the Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict and the UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) Assistant Secretary-General for more international engagement<sup>61</sup> to combat sexual violence against women and girls in Sudan.
- Increase the support for humanitarian aid and develop strategies to channel most of the aid through national organisations and groups, including WROs, Emergency Response Rooms (ERRs), WERRs and mutual aid groups currently at the frontlines, to provide urgent humanitarian support to all women, men and children in need. It should also facilitate and fund the involvement of Sudanese WROs, WLOs, women's networks, girl and youth-led groups, and WERRs in humanitarian coordination and planning efforts at the sub-national, national and regional levels. Sudan is rightly a priority country for the UK Government, but it must provide clarity on how programming advancing WPS in Sudan will be protected from the reduction in ODA.
- Foster the participation of women, girls and youth in-country and in the diaspora in any ongoing and upcoming peace process in Sudan. This involves pushing the international community, the SAF and the RSF to ensure the meaningful participation of these groups in negotiating delegations, training women activists, peacebuilders and WROs, and providing training and financial support to strengthen their advocacy campaigns.
- Advocate for the rights of diverse Sudanese women and girl refugees in Chad, South Sudan, Egypt and other neighbouring countries and ensure adequate legal and financial support through governments and refugee-supporting agencies.
- Provide technical and financial support to local initiatives for documenting human rights violations, especially GBV cases, while ensuring their safety from reprisals.

<sup>57</sup> UN Security Council (2024), [Resolution 2750 \(2024\)](#)

<sup>58</sup> House of Commons, House of Lords, Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy (2023), [The Conflict, Stability and Security Fund](#)

<sup>59</sup> HMG (2021), [Conflict, Stability and Security Fund: programme summaries for Africa 2020 to 2021](#)

<sup>60</sup> House of Commons, House of Lords, Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy (2023), [The Conflict, Stability and Security Fund](#)

<sup>61</sup> UN (2024), [Sudan: Scourge of sexual violence amid ongoing conflict demands urgent response](#)

## 5. Afghanistan, March 2025

In August 2021, the Taliban took over control as the *de facto* authorities of Afghanistan. Initial promises made to respect human rights, including the rights of women and girls, have been broken continuously. In the 2023/24 Women, Peace and Security Index, Afghanistan ranked 177 out of 177<sup>62</sup> on women's inclusion and security, meaning Afghanistan and its people experience the sharpest end of the overlapping transnational challenges of gender inequality, the climate emergency and economic insecurity. The United Nations Human Rights Council Special Procedures<sup>63</sup> have stated that deliberate subjugation of women and girls amounts to crimes against humanity, including the crime of gender persecution.

Since 2021, the *de facto* administration has introduced more than 80 decrees restricting the rights of women. This was further expanded in August 2024 via ratification of the 'Law on the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice',<sup>64</sup> including silencing women's voices in public,<sup>65</sup> excluding women and girls from education,<sup>66</sup> preventing women and girls from attending medical institutions,<sup>67</sup> banning women from working at international organisations,<sup>68</sup> and suspending registration of WROs and WLOs. The *de facto* authorities are also targeting LGBTQI+ Afghans,<sup>69</sup> compounding risks especially for LBT+ Afghan women. These restrictions are severely impeding how national and international organisations operate.

In the country, 23.7 million people<sup>70</sup> require humanitarian assistance to survive. From mudslides to droughts, the impacts of climate change are felt hard in Afghanistan – with women and girls excluded from shaping effective humanitarian<sup>71</sup> and environmental<sup>72</sup> responses, despite being impacted more severely.<sup>73</sup> Afghanistan ranks 181 out of 187<sup>74</sup> of the most climate-vulnerable countries.

Afghan women continue to deliver essential and life-saving services, despite the continuously expanding repression. This includes through formal and registered organisations but also through informal ways – classrooms in people's houses and improvised domestic violence shelters, for example. These critical and diminishing services operate on extremely limited budgets, if any. Afghan women continue to resist: protests are a visible representation<sup>75</sup> of this, as are the creative and less visible<sup>76</sup> ways women navigate the *de facto* authorities to continue their work.

62 Women for Women International (2024), [Lost in Consultation: International Community Failing at Meaningful Engagement with Afghan Women](#).

63 UN (2024), [International community must not normalise Taliban rule in Afghanistan](#)

64 UN Women (2024), [UN Women deeply concerned by new Afghanistan morality law](#)

65 The Guardian (2024), ['Frightening' Taliban law bans women from speaking in public](#)

66 Malala Fund (2025), [Four years without school, rights or justice — How much longer?](#)

67 UN (2024), [Afghanistan: UN condemns Taliban ban on women attending medical classes](#)

68 Al Jazeera (2024), [Afghanistan's Taliban rulers say will close all NGOs employing women](#)

69 Stonewall and ILGA Asia (SAFAR) (2023), [SAFAR Afghanistan Briefing: September 2023](#)

70 Relief Web (2024), [Afghanistan: Humanitarian Update, July 2024](#)

71 Relief Web (2024) [World Humanitarian Day – 19 August 2024: Statement by a group of Afghan women humanitarian workers](#)

72 Women for Women International (2024) [Cultivating a more enabling environment](#)

73 ODI Global (2023), [Afghanistan's freezing winter: humanitarian crisis and the Taliban's ban on women aid workers](#)

74 Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative (2024), [Country Index](#)

75 Amnesty International (2023), [Women, Protest and Power – Confronting the Taliban](#)

76 Spotify (2024), [Climate and Gender: Mind the GAPS](#)

## 6. UK response

The main forum coordinating the international community's response has been through UN-convened meetings led by Special Envoys and Special Representatives hosted in Doha. The UK actively supports the Doha process,<sup>77</sup> Doha 3, which was heavily criticised<sup>78</sup> by Afghan women and their allies for prioritising attendance of the *de facto* authorities and approaches to normalisation<sup>79</sup> over Afghan women's attendance, directly undermining commitments to meaningful participation under the WPS agenda. When select Afghan women received last-minute invitations to join in a side-event capacity, many refused.<sup>80</sup> The UK supports<sup>81</sup> the initiative<sup>82</sup> by Australia, Canada, Germany and the Netherlands to hold Afghanistan accountable for its violations of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which the country ratified in 2003. On 23 January 2025, ICC Prosecutor Karim AA Khan KC announced<sup>83</sup> that his office filed two applications for warrants of arrest for the crime against humanity of persecution on gender grounds, under Article 7(1)(h) of the Rome Statute.

For the UK, the WPS agenda is an important tool to guide principled engagement with the *de facto* authorities. Afghanistan is a focus country under the 2023–2027 WPS NAP,<sup>84</sup> which commits to specific obligations, including establishing WPS focal points, updated gender equality and social inclusion analysis, training to all involved staff, and gender-sensitive business plans. Partially due to changed UK reporting, and no publicly available monitoring, evaluation or learning framework<sup>85</sup> on the current NAP implementation, it is unclear if such commitments are being met in Afghanistan. While the UK Government has committed to ensuring that 50 per cent of those reached by UK assistance will be women and girls,<sup>86</sup> what appears to be an absence of a dedicated Afghanistan strategy<sup>87</sup> is making these commitments fragmented and difficult to assess. In 2024, the £151 million<sup>88</sup> pledged in UK aid was far less than the £286 million pledged in 2022/2023, resulting in critical services to women and girls being suspended. The 2023 Equality Impact Assessment,<sup>89</sup> conducted by the UK on its aid cuts, revealed disproportionate impacts on Afghan women and girls, as well as disabled people. It is unclear if an assessment has already been made of the 2025 aid cuts.<sup>90</sup>

Humanitarian aid to extremely aid-dependent<sup>91</sup> Afghanistan has been steadily decreasing,<sup>92</sup> despite rising humanitarian needs: UN OCHA's Humanitarian Needs Response Plan<sup>93</sup> initially sought \$4.6 billion for 2023, which was scaled down to \$3.2 billion and still fell \$1.59 billion short. Meanwhile, only 15.9 per cent of the 2024 target of \$3.1 billion has been raised.

Asylum support for Afghans has failed and continues to deteriorate as pathways to countries like the UK<sup>94</sup> face extreme delays or are completely inaccessible. The insufficient and inadequate asylum pathways have been critiqued by civil society, as has the dire state of reception of Afghan refugees in the UK, including distressing reports of homelessness and destitution.<sup>95</sup> In 2021, GAPS convened

77 ICAI (2024), [UK humanitarian aid to Afghanistan](#)

78 Human Rights Watch (2024), [UN Meeting Blocks Afghan Women from Agenda, Participation](#)

79 DROPS Afghanistan (2023), [Shadow Report: A response to the United Nations Security Council's independent assessment report on Afghanistan](#)

80 Amu TV (2024), [Three women activists refuse to attend Doha meeting](#)

81 UK Parliament, Hansard (2025), [Impact of Conflict on Women and Girls](#)

82 Federal Foreign Office (2024), [Launch of an initiative on accountability for Afghanistan's violations of CEDAW declaration](#)

83 International Criminal Court (2025) [Statement of ICC Prosecutor Karim AA Khan KC: Applications for arrest warrants in the situation in Afghanistan](#)

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

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

86 ICAI (2024), [Information note: UK humanitarian aid to Afghanistan](#)

87 Ibid.

88 ICAI (2024), [Aid watchdog visits Afghanistan to examine UK's aid programmes](#)

89 UK Parliament (2023), [International Development Committee reveals real world impact of cuts to UK aid](#)

90 UK Parliament (2025), [UK to reduce aid to 0.3% of gross national income from 2027](#)

91 Human Rights Watch (2024), [Afghanistan: Aid Cutbacks, Taliban Abuses Imperil Health](#)

92 The New Humanitarian (2024), [In a neglected part of Afghanistan, foreign aid cuts lead to hard winter choices](#)

93 Center for Strategic International Studies (2024), [The Future of Assistance for Afghanistan: A Dilemma](#)

94 JUSTICE (2023), [Reforming the Afghanistan Resettlement Schemes: the way forward for ARAP and ACRS](#)

95 Guardian (2023), [Thousands of Afghan refugees in UK set to be made homeless](#)

hundreds of organisations to call on<sup>96</sup> the UK Government to act urgently to protect women at high risk of persecution and death due to their work on WPS in Afghanistan in support of the UK NAP. The absence of meaningful, accessible pathways is putting Afghan refugees – especially women human rights defenders – at high risk, with preventable loss of life at major crossings such as the Channel.<sup>97</sup> While pathways like those of the UK<sup>98</sup> have been stated to be inclusive of some marginalised groups such as women journalists and LGBTQI+ people, these pathways appear to be undeveloped and not operationalised.<sup>99</sup>

## Recommendations

The UK Government should:

- Implement and report on the commitments<sup>100</sup> the FCDO has made to WPS focus countries outlined in the WPS NAP 2023–2027, of which Afghanistan is one. These must include resourcing a WPS focal point; a gender strategy; and an up-to-date gender and social inclusion analysis. A comprehensive monitoring and reporting framework should be implemented for UK Government commitments under the WPS NAP in Afghanistan, ensuring regular updates to Parliament and civil society on progress, challenges and any necessary adjustments to strategies.
- Increase and expand financial and technical support directly to Afghan WLOs and WROs, to ensure they can continue to operate under extremely challenging conditions. Funding to WROs and WLOs should be flexible, core, long term and in line with commitments made under the Great Bargain, the International Women and Girls Strategy and the International Development White Paper.<sup>101</sup>
- Support the legal and human rights communities pioneering international accountability development around ‘gender apartheid’.<sup>102</sup>
- Ensure safe routes for individuals and their dependents wanting to flee, so they are safely able to make an asylum claim in the UK. It should also respond to the gender-specific needs of Afghan women, girls and other minority groups, including through the meaningful operationalisation of Pathway 3 of the Afghan Citizen Resettlement Scheme.<sup>103</sup>
- Adopt rights-based strategies on principled engagement with Afghanistan, which reflect the expertise and experiences of Afghan civil society, especially WROs. Such engagement must not lead to legitimising the *de facto* authorities. These national strategies must be coordinated internationally to ensure international alignment on Afghanistan.
- Ensure and resource meaningful participation of Afghan women representatives in all international and national fora, especially any future Doha or other similar meetings. This must include women from Afghanistan, those forced into exile and, where appropriate, those in the diaspora. The Beyond Consultations tool<sup>104</sup> is an evidenced resource recommended to provide concrete guidance.
- Support the development and implementation of a humanitarian response plan that specifically addresses the needs of Afghan women and girls, ensuring that gender considerations are incorporated into all aspects of relief efforts, including food security and healthcare.

96 GAPS (2021), [Letter to the Prime Minister and Secretaries of State for Afghanistan](#)

97 BBC News (2025), [How many people cross the Channel in small boats and how many claim asylum?](#)

98 HMG (2024), [Afghan citizens resettlement scheme](#)

99 Foreign Affairs Committee (2023), [Letter from the Chair, Alicia Kearns MP, to the Foreign Secretary](#)

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

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

102 Amnesty International (2025), [Shattering Silence: The Urgent Call to Recognise Gender Apartheid and Empower Afghan Women and Girls](#)

103 UK Government, (2022), [Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme Pathway 3](#)

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

