

Practical Guidance for Integrating Climate into WPS National Action Plans

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Emerging security challenges like climate change are increasingly recognized as threats to peace and security. Yet the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda—formally established by United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 in 2000—has been slow to evolve and integrate climate considerations. National Action Plans (NAPs) on Women, Peace and Security are intended to guide WPS implementation at national and local levels but have largely failed to meaningfully address the threat posed by climate change, with many including only a cursory reference at best. To remain relevant and impactful, NAPs must effectively address climate change and its related security risks in their design, drafting, and implementation. This practical guidance note explores effective approaches and best practices to integrate climate-related security risks into NAPs and maximize the potential of these policy tools to advance climate-responsive WPS implementation. These guidelines include framing climate change in the context of emerging and dynamic security threats, going beyond brief references to climate by mainstreaming climate considerations across the NAP, engaging civil society and agencies across the government when drafting the NAP to generate buy-in, and ensuring accountability by designating specific commitments and identifying responsible parties in a well-resourced implementation plan.

Climate Change Threatens Peace and Security

Climate change has increasingly been recognized as a “threat multiplier” that exacerbates existing risks and drivers of instability like resource scarcity and forced displacement.¹ The United Nations peace and security architecture has begun to address this link, including with the establishment of the Climate Security Mechanism (CSM) in 2018 as a joint effort between the UN Development Programme (UNDP), UN Environment Programme (UNEP), and the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA).



Discussions and debates in the United Nations Security Council on climate security have been more frequent since its first debate on this intersection in 2007. To date, the Council has adopted more than 70 resolutions and presidential statements that include the peace and security implications of climate change.² Resolution 2242 (2015) marked the first formal reference to climate security in a Security Council thematic resolution on WPS, placing climate squarely on the WPS Agenda³. In UNSCR 2242, the Council framed the issue in the context of emerging threats, noting “the changing global context of peace and security, in particular relating to...the increased numbers of refugees and internally displaced persons [and] the impacts of climate change.”⁴ The resolution emphasized the need to “increase attention to women, peace and security as a cross-cutting subject in all relevant thematic areas of work on its agenda, including threats to international peace and security,” referring to climate change among these challenges.⁵

The explicit reference to climate in UNSCR 2242 strengthened the formal link between climate security and WPS in the Security Council. This was followed by a slight uptick in references to climate-related security risks in reports on country and regional situations, mandates for peacekeeping operations, and the Secretary-General’s annual reports on WPS. While these references represent important strides in recognizing the relationship between WPS and climate change on paper, progress has lagged in mainstreaming the links across various levels of WPS policy and practice.

The Current State of Climate in WPS NAPS

National Action Plans (NAPs) on WPS have become the primary tool for national-level efforts to implement the WPS Agenda, and their commitments, priority areas, and strategy have evolved in tandem with the scope of the WPS Agenda⁶. Denmark developed the first NAP on WPS in 2005, and over 100 countries have followed.

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To remain relevant and effective, National Action Plans must be responsive to the ever-changing security landscape and emerging threats to peace and security, like climate change. The 2023 annual report of the Secretary-General on WPS found only about 40 percent of NAPs included any reference to climate change, prompting the Secretary-General to explicitly call for a more integrated approach. The Secretary-General underscored the untapped potential for NAPs to go beyond “solely narrative references [to

climate] and instead establish specific actions and targets, including by supporting the role of women peacebuilders in resolving conflicts linked to control of natural resources and ensuring the protection of women environmental human rights defenders.”⁷

More effective and inclusive efforts on climate change, gender, and conflict require strategic policy connections to align programs with resourcing that underscore women’s agency and capacity for leadership in peacebuilding and climate change.⁸ To this end, NAPs on WPS provide a crucial mechanism to strategically address the interconnected issues of the gender-climate-security nexus⁹ by engaging relevant national agencies for more effective WPS implementation. Incorporating narrative references to climate change in NAPs represents a key first step to drawing attention to climate impacts on national WPS priorities, but the effectiveness of the plans depends on the quality and extent of specific actions.

Key Entry Points for Integrated Action

WPS National Action Plans should address climate change and related security risks in their design, drafting, and implementation. The following section outlines three key entry points to promote better climate integration and more impactful NAPs.

Move Beyond Cursory References to Climate

Forty-five countries have active WPS NAPs, and many have now adopted multiple iterations.¹⁰ The overall share of NAPs that include at least one narrative reference to climate change has increased by 36% since 2005. Our analysis finds that NAPs drafted more recently are more likely to mention climate: 64.4% of NAPs in effect through 2024 include a reference.¹¹ This marked increase since 2005 demonstrates a positive trend, but it does not reflect the quality and extent of climate integration into the NAPs. To maximize the effectiveness of climate sensitivity, climate must be mainstreamed throughout the plan with actionable language.

	Total WPS NAPs	# of countries that have adopted NAPs	# of countries with current NAPs
	194	107	45
Mention Climate	55	43	29
Percentage	28.4%	40.2%	64.4%

Analysis of references to climate in WPS NAPs reveals that most feature limited mentions, which often appear in background sections. A single, abstract reference without any specific action or implementation indicators serves as little more than a “box-checking” exercise and is insufficient to guide action and achieve meaningful change. The Danish WPS NAP for 2020-2024 is an example of a plan with a singular acknowledgment of the security threat posed by climate change. The sole reference to climate appears in a case study that explores Denmark’s role as a security actor in the Sahel, where climate change has “further exacerbated” the deteriorating security situation.¹² The background section of Italy’s 2020-2024 WPS NAP also acknowledges the emergence of climate change as a priority in the WPS Agenda through Security Council resolutions and Secretary-General reports, underlining “the implications of climate change” among other areas of focus.¹³ Yet climate change and the corresponding security implications go unaddressed throughout the rest of the action plan and corresponding commitments. Including climate in the implementation frameworks,

for example, offers a significant opportunity to lay the groundwork for integrated approaches that are responsive to the impacts of climate change on WPS priorities.

Countries like Italy and Denmark should take advantage of NAP renewal and revision processes to push for greater climate integration. In contexts where there may be resistance to viewing climate as a security issue, framing its inclusion within the context of contemporary threats to WPS or broader gender equality or development commitments can be a strategic approach. Argentina offers a successful example. After zero mentions in the first iteration, Argentina's second NAP (2021-2025) makes 30 references to climate, including in sections on "new challenges to peace and security: cybersecurity and climate change" and the "interrelationship between the Women, Peace and Security Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals" under the principles of the NAP.¹⁴

While it may not be realistic for countries to dedicate an entire section of the NAP to climate, discussing it alongside other emerging threats like technology can establish climate as a growing priority area for action. For example, the United Kingdom's fifth WPS NAP (2023-2027) frames climate security under transnational threats,¹⁵ advocating for a WPS approach to addressing climate security alongside violent extremism, arms control, and cyber threats.¹⁶ The plan provides a promising model of how countries can position climate-related threats among WPS priorities and security challenges.

Mainstream Climate Across the Four Pillars of WPS

Climate should be mainstreamed through as many sections of the NAP as possible to maximize effectiveness and emphasize the importance of addressing this threat across WPS efforts.

WPS NAPs take different structural forms: some NAPs follow the WPS Agenda's four "pillars"—participation, protection, prevention, and relief and recovery—while others adapt these to their own priority areas or "lines of effort."

Many NAP frameworks include climate under the "protection" pillar, emphasizing women's increased vulnerability to climate-related security risks. However, it is important to recognize that climate is a cross-cutting theme that has implications for all four pillars of the WPS Agenda. The wide impacts of

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climate change and the dynamic role of women in addressing these challenges make climate considerations relevant to the breadth of WPS work. For example, under the "participation" pillar, women remain largely underrepresented in climate policy and decision-making despite evidence that higher representation of women leads to more stringent climate policies.¹⁷ To promote women's participation, plans could include specific actions to increase women's roles in managing disputes over natural resources and resolving conflicts resulting from climate impacts. Promoting women's roles in these processes can serve as an entry point for bolstering their leadership and decision-making power more broadly.

In terms of the “protection” and “prevention” pillars, which aim to prevent and address violence against women, NAPs should account for how climate change increases the risk of gender-based violence, particularly for women in climate-vulnerable contexts and those experiencing climate-related displacement. Building attention to climate change in the protection and prevention aspects of WPS NAPs emphasizes the relationship between climate-related security threats and heightened risks of gender-based violence while highlighting how this can be addressed on a national level.

The “relief and recovery” pillar offers an opportunity to focus on the unique vulnerabilities and challenges women face in disaster relief while also promoting their active participation in recovery efforts. For example, including action on gender-responsive disaster risk reduction and access to aid in climate-related disasters and humanitarian emergencies can be key entry points for action.

The key takeaway is that climate should be integrated across the NAP. The 2023 U.S. Strategy and National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security offers a useful example. The plan integrated climate change into all five lines of effort: “Participation,” “Protection,” “Relief, Response, and Recovery,” “Integration and Institutionalization,” and “Partnerships.”¹⁸ Each LOE addresses both the relevant WPS challenges and the approach the U.S. government will take under the line of effort, including case studies to contextualize how the approach looks in practice. Notably, the U.S. NAP goes beyond relegating climate change to the “challenge” sections. Additionally, the plan mainstreams climate considerations into the logic framework, which calls for an intersectional gender approach in responses to conflict, natural disasters, and the climate crisis.¹⁹ This approach provides a model for mainstreaming climate-responsive WPS actions across pillars or lines of effort, both rhetorically and practically.

Generate Buy-in for Implementation and Accountability

In order to move from rhetoric to action, countries should engage diverse stakeholders in the drafting process of the NAP. An inclusive approach is key to generating buy-in and developing strong, well-resourced implementation plans that identify responsible government bodies and climate-specific indicators. The NAP drafting process is an opportunity to consult a wide array of government

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agencies that may or may not view WPS as relevant to their mandates but are integral to achieving peace and security outcomes. For example, climate and environmental ministries should be brought together with foreign affairs and defense ministries to create a whole-of-government approach. The strongest and most effective implementation plans indicate specific government agencies to

lead the execution of each commitment. These agencies must be consulted in the drafting process to determine pragmatic and agency-specific actions that will deliver the best implementation results. The NAP process also presents a unique opportunity for governments to directly engage with diverse civil society actors, including those focused on climate change adaptation and environmental

protection. The perspectives of civil society are critical to ensuring government approaches are aligned with the needs and priorities of those most impacted. With civil society buy-in and a whole-of-government approach, NAPs can develop specific program support, practices, and policies that

promote women’s inclusion and result in more effective outcomes on the ground.

The implementation framework of the NAP should include specific, practical, and measurable commitments for action on climate and other WPS issues.

Including climate in implementation plans is an opportunity to build a foundation for accountability by identifying specific government agencies and outlining their roles and responsibilities. Naming specific actors and their corresponding obligations can generate a greater sense of ownership

and improve follow-through. The implementation framework of the NAP should include specific, practical, and measurable commitments for action on climate and other WPS issues. Using active language, concrete goals, and specific outcomes in the implementation plan can prompt government actors across different sectors to define their roles and bolster accountability in advancing climate-responsive WPS actions and programming.

Argentina’s most recent NAP outlines how climate change will be addressed through specific actions, responsible bodies of government, indicators, and goals in their implementation plan. The fifth UK NAP on WPS (2023-2027) offers another useful model. The NAP lists lead agencies for each commitment made under the climate priority, including the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), Ministry of Defence (MoD), and Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF).²⁰ Such steps remain critical to take climate change beyond rhetoric and enable action through the NAP.

Priority	Commitment	Lead
Ensure gender dimensions are considered when developing approaches to climate security.	Mainstream gender considerations into FCDO policy developments on climate security and enhance our support for women and girls who are impacted by climate change.	FCDO
	Invest in research and pilot projects on gender-transformative approaches to preventing climate related insecurity, violence and conflict through the CSSF Gender, Peace and Security portfolio.	CSSF
	Work towards integrating a gender-sensitive approach to future Defence climate security education and training, academic outreach, analysis and advice.	MOD
	Use our International Climate Finance (ICF) to support women and girls in developing countries to respond to climate change. We are also committed to strengthening our collection and use of data on gender, inclusion and climate including by disaggregating UK ICF ‘people-indicators’ by gender, age, disability, and geography.	FCDO

Source: UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, 2023

Conclusion and Recommendations

National Action Plans on Women, Peace and Security provide a key mechanism for integrating climate-responsive actions into national-level WPS implementation—and doing so will strengthen WPS outcomes. While the WPS Agenda has been slow to formally recognize the link between climate security and WPS, the share of WPS NAPs that reference climate change has been steadily increasing. However, singular or cursory mentions will be insufficient to meaningfully address the serious and immediate threats posed by climate change. Mainstreaming climate throughout a NAP provides a more comprehensive approach to addressing the issue and promoting the empowerment of women as agents of change for climate action and decision-making. Updates to outdated plans present a strategic entry point to include greater emphasis on emerging WPS threats like climate change and should be informed by the priorities and perspectives of civil society. If properly integrated and meaningfully implemented, NAPs have the potential to deliver impactful results for women who are working on the frontlines of climate-related security risks to ensure a more sustainable and secure future and advance the WPS Agenda at local, national, and global levels.

Practical Guidance for Integrating Climate into WPS NAPs

- 1. Create WPS NAPs that are responsive to emerging security threats.** To ensure NAPs function as dynamic and effective policy instruments for the WPS Agenda, they must address emerging security challenges, including climate change. Integrating climate considerations into new and updated NAPs presents an opportunity for countries to better position themselves in the modern security landscape.
- 2. Go beyond cursory or singular references to climate by mainstreaming climate considerations across the NAP.** To realize the full potential of the NAP, action plans should substantively address the vital role women and girls play in catalyzing climate action and integrate climate change considerations across WPS pillars or lines of effort and implementation frameworks.
- 3. Adopt a whole-of-government approach to drafting the NAP with inclusive civil society consultations.** NAP drafters must go beyond consultations with “the usual suspects” and engage agencies across the government, including environmental ministries, to generate government-wide buy-in for climate-responsive WPS implementation. Governments should also directly engage with diverse civil society actors, including those focused on climate change adaptation and environmental protection, to ensure NAPs are aligned with the needs and priorities of those most impacted by climate change.
- 4. Ensure accountability mechanisms through specific commitments in the implementation plan and budget.** To go beyond the rhetorical references to climate and enable action, NAPs must detail how climate change will be addressed through specific actions, responsible bodies of government, indicators, and goals. Governments must allocate sufficient resources to ensure effective implementation.

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- 11 Figures are based on a textual analysis of WPS NAPs between 2005-2024 publicly available in English. Analysis included a keyword search of "climate" which totaled 55 NAPs. Data is drawn from WPSNAPS.org at the University of Sydney, available at <https://www.wpsnaps.org/>. "Total NAPs" includes all NAPs developed and adopted. Some countries have adopted multiple generations of NAPs and each one is included in this number.
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