GIWPS Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security

POLICY BRIEF
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**Commitment 2025: UNSCR 1325 25th Anniversary Series**

# Women's Representation in Security and Diplomacy: Reflections on 25 Years

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## KEY FINDINGS

- **Women's representation in international peace and security has expanded substantially,** with rates at least doubling in many leadership and staff roles since the adoption of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda in 2000.
- The number of women in **UN leadership roles has nearly tripled** since 2000, accounting for just over half of senior positions today; the number of **women ambassadors and peacekeepers is nearly four times higher** than in 2000.
- **Gender parity remains elusive,** particularly in the security sector. While numbers have increased, women still represent only 24 percent of ambassadors, 13 percent of defense ministers, and less than 10 percent of peacekeepers.
- **Women's persistent underrepresentation** in security roles, alongside recent dips in representation in a number of UN and national political roles, warns that progress is fragile. Setbacks underscore the urgent **need to invest in women's participation, especially in the security sector,** and to **confront the economic, political, and cultural barriers** that limit women's full and meaningful inclusion—a key driver of sustainable peace.

## Introduction

Women's meaningful participation in peace negotiations and peacebuilding is a key driver of sustainable peace, linked to more effective and sustainable conflict resolution, and long-term stability. The Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda, launched in 2000 through UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325, recognized this by calling for increased women's leadership and participation in decision-making roles to promote and sustain peace.

Approaching the 25th Anniversary of UNSCR 1325, countries have made promising progress towards these goals. There are more women ambassadors and cabinet ministers shaping peace and security outcomes than ever before, and women's representation in peacekeeping has expanded.

Still, a variety of challenges persist. Although women's representation in peacekeeping has grown, it remains low. Women have gained greater representation in senior UN positions and

as ambassadors, but progress is uneven, and in many critical contexts representation remains far from equal. These ongoing gaps signal the need to redouble efforts to expand women's representation in the years to come, and to ensure that gains are durable.

Building on Commitment 2025 (C-25), an initiative led by the governments of Finland and Spain to advance the WPS Agenda and track progress in the anniversary year, this brief analyzes progress and areas of opportunity for advancing women's representation.[1]

This brief presents available metrics of women's representation in key peace and security positions, but it only paints a partial picture. Women's substantive representation is critical beyond numerical representation—**the Agenda requires making women count and not just counting women.** This brief outlines where deeper research and investment will enhance women's meaningful participation across peace and security roles.

## Women's participation in peacekeeping missions nearly quadruples since 2000

Tracking women's participation in peacekeeping missions provides one important metric for progress. Peacekeeping includes a wide range of military, police, and civilian activities, including patrols, checkpoints, law enforcement, operational planning, and community engagement; women's participation in these activities is associated with improved community engagement and overall operational effectiveness.[2] Research identifies that operations can be perceived as more legitimate, and are ultimately more effective, when women are represented.[3] One study found that local populations "feel more comfortable liaising and sharing information with military troops that include women peacekeepers… result[ing] in good intelligence and a reduction in violence in the communities that peacekeepers seek to protect."[4]

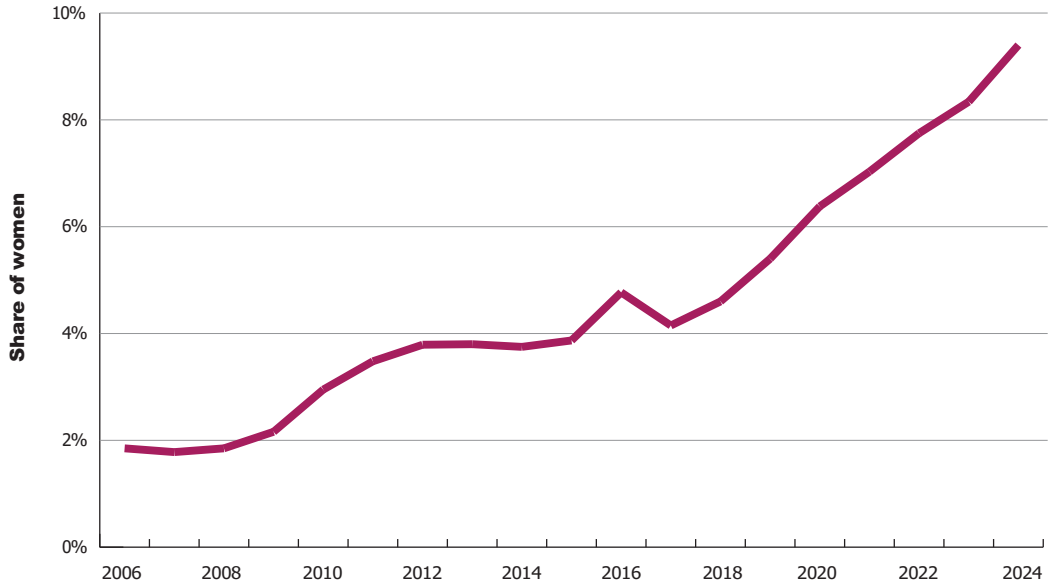
Women's representation is also correlated with fewer complaints of misconduct. A 2016 study of UN missions from 2009–2013 found that increasing the proportion of women peacekeepers from zero to five percent can reduce sexual misconduct allegations by half.[5]

**Women's representation in peacekeeping missions has increased** dramatically over the past two decades, **from just 2 percent in 2006 to nearly 10 percent in 2024** (figure 1). Still, representation is low, falling well behind the UN Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy, which set a goal of 30 percent women's representation in peacekeeping mission forces by 2028.

Of the 20 key UN peacekeeping and special political missions active as of June 2024, **UNMIK (Kosovo) is the only mission that surpasses the 30 percent threshold** (figure 2). Another 13 missions surpass 10 percent, which reflects progress but still lags far behind international targets. UNAMA (Afghanistan) and UNOWAS (West Africa and the Sahel) have no women peacekeepers.

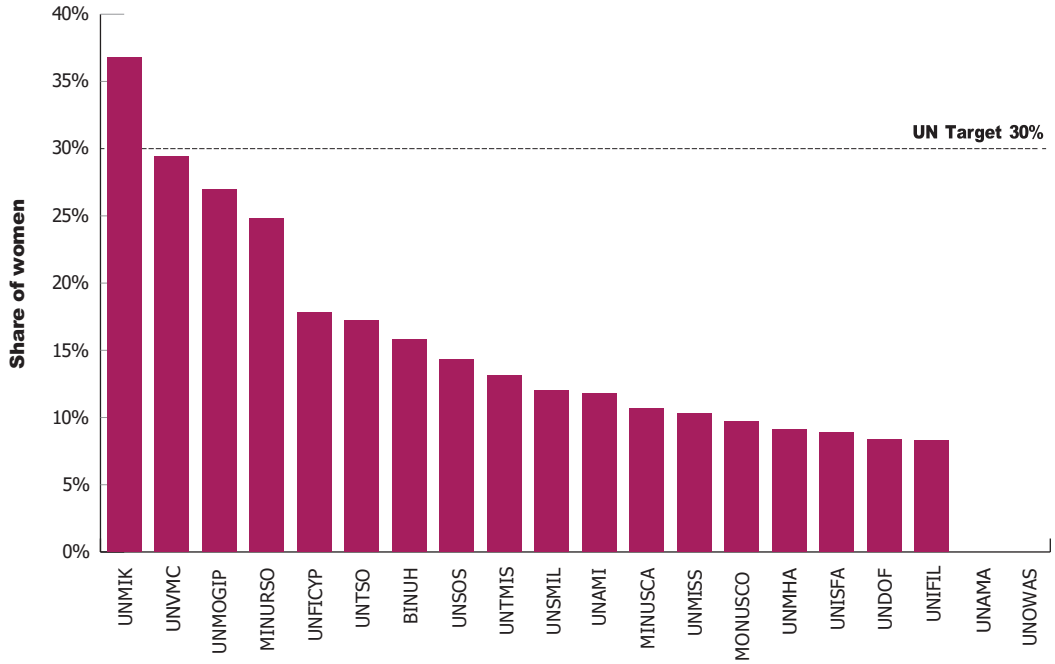
In Afghanistan, the Taliban's restrictions on women working have limited women's inclusion in UN operations, while in Yemen, despite the mission's mandate to champion women's empowerment, the ongoing conflict and deteriorating security conditions have made it "difficult to recruit and deploy women."[6] The absence of women in these forces undermines the potential to provide a holistic perspective and improve community access to operations affecting civilians, particularly women and girls.[7]

## Figure 1: Growth in women's representation in UN peacekeeping missions, 2006–2024




Source: UN Peacekeeping (https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/gender)

## Figure 2: Share of women in UN peacekeeping missions, 2024

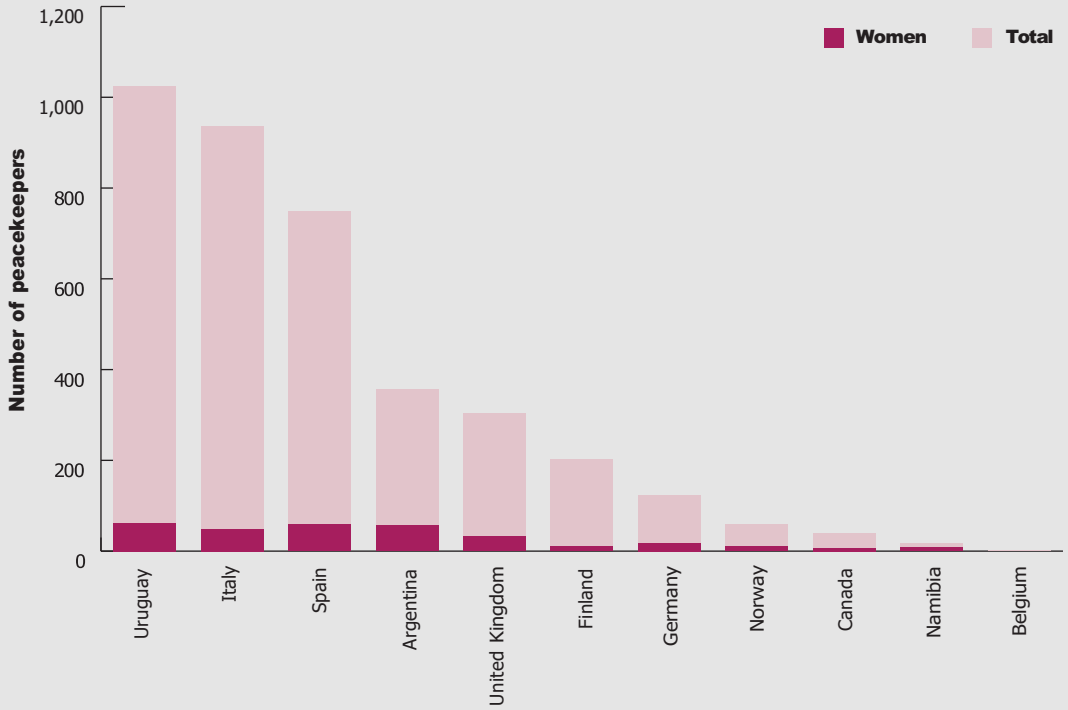



Source: UN Peacekeeping (https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/gender)

### BOX 1. C-25 COUNTRY TROOP CONTRIBUTIONS TO PEACEKEEPING

C-25 countries contribute significant numbers of troops to peacekeeping missions, especially Uruguay, Italy, and Spain. These countries' staffing contributions include more women in absolute numbers than most other UN Member States, though women's relative representation remains low.

**Figure 3: Troop contributions from C-25 countries, 2024**




Source: UN Peace Security Data Hub (https://psdata.un.org/dataset/DPO-UCLATEST)

## Women's UN mission leadership expands, then declines

UN mission heads and deputy heads are responsible for the overall leadership and strategic direction of the mission, and for representing the Secretary General in the field. Women's presence in these leadership positions has visibly expanded since 2000, but recently began to backslide.

**Overall, women's representation in UN mission leadership roles grew substantially to a peak in 2020**, when women comprised over 50 percent of heads of missions. **The share has dipped since then**, with women today only leading **36 percent** of peacekeeping missions.

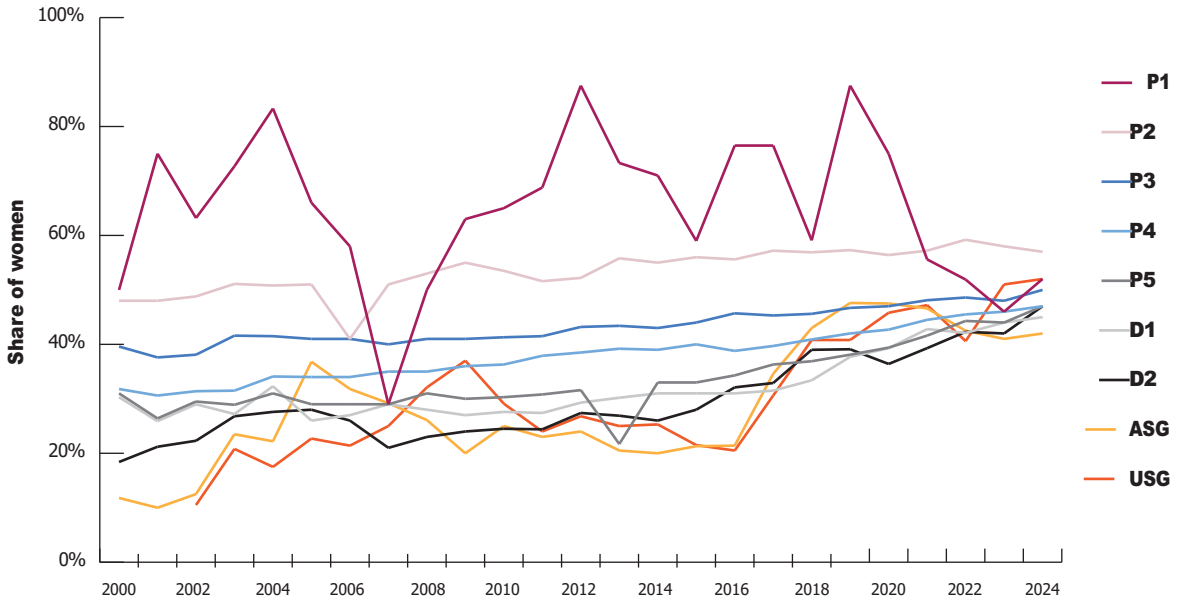
## Women constitute almost half of UN staff across most levels

Women's representation in the UN system has increased across all levels of seniority, especially since 2017. **Women today constitute almost half of UN staff across most levels**, a rate that has **more than doubled since 2010** (figure 4). In top positions of authority, the share of women in director-level, and assistant- and under-secretary-level positions has grown substantially over the past two decades, although all 10 UN Secretaries General have been men.

Women's involvement in senior UN leadership roles can contribute to significant progress toward peace. Their inclusion helps ensure new perspectives in political discussions and decision-making, can bring new skills to the table, and can improve the effectiveness of UN operations by enhancing how UN actors access and engage with communities, including with women.[8]

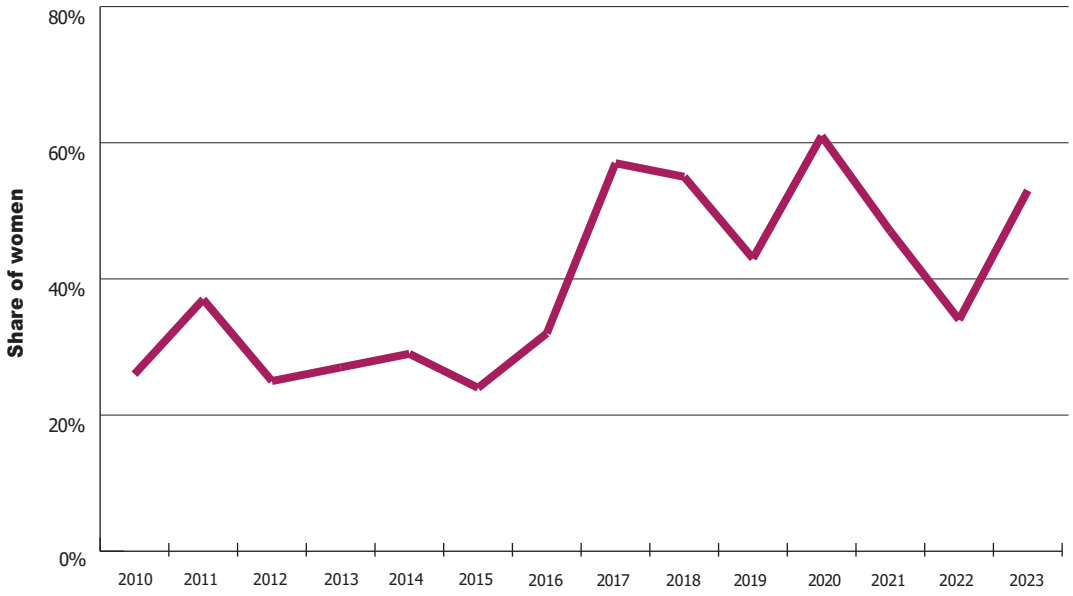
Within the UN system, **the share of women who are Assistant Secretary Generals, Under Secretary Generals, and Deputy Secretary Generals increased from 26 percent in 2010 to 53 percent as of 2023.** However, this trend has been non-linear, with multiple dips and spikes over the period (figure 5). **Women's representation in senior UN leader roles peaked at 61 percent in 2020** before falling to 34 percent in 2022, then surging past 50 percent in 2023, signaling the ongoing need to monitor and invest in women's representation in the UN system. This variation where parity is met but does not remain constant potentially may reflect a range of normative and economic barriers to women's leadership across domains.[9]

**Figure 4: Women at different seniority levels in the UN system, 2000–2024**




Source: UN General Assembly Report, database searched in June 2025 (https://casquebleu.org/index.php?title=Composition_of_the_Secretariat)

**Figure 5: Women's representation among senior UN leadership, 2010–2023**




Note: Senior appointments include Assistant Secretary Generals, Under Secretary Generals, and Deputy Secretary Generals.
Source: UN General Assembly Reports (https://casquebleu.org/index.php?title=Composition_of_the_Secretariat)

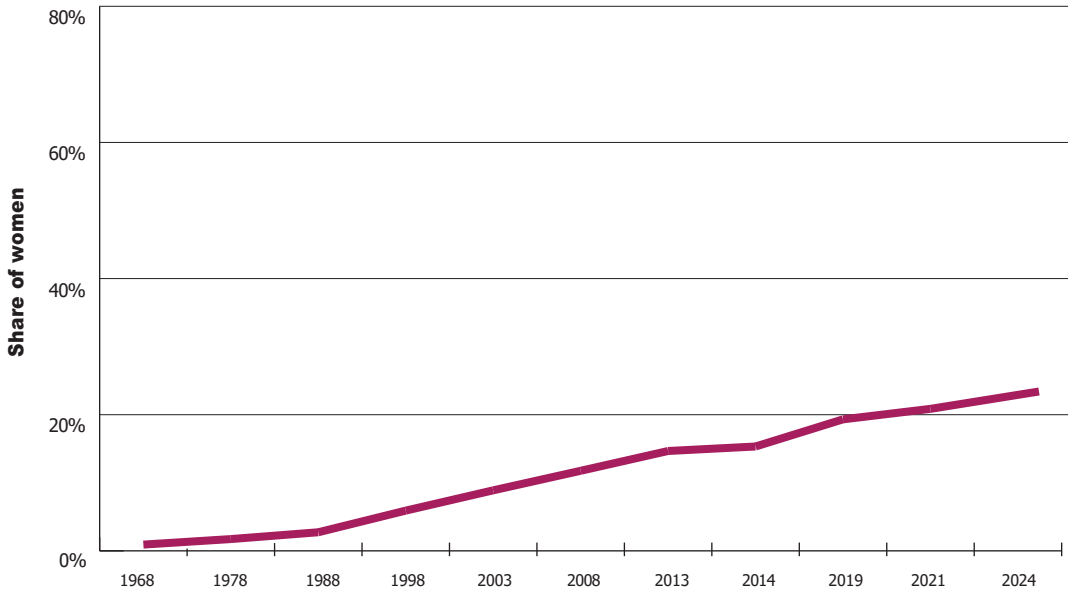
## Women's ambassadorships rise by 20 percentage points

Women's representation in ambassadorships can demonstrate seriousness around women's political inclusion. Women ambassadors represent diverse viewpoints (and do not follow stereotypes of being "softer" or "dovish"), and their inclusion can influence diplomatic practice. A study of women ambassadors in the UN Security Council found their inclusion widened overall participation at the Council and improved communications. Women's ambassadorial representation was linked with an increase in invitations of female experts and civil society experts to brief decision-makers, in turn improving the responsiveness of political decisions to wider constituencies.[10]

**The global share of women ambassadors** has increased dramatically—**rising from only about 1 percent in 1968 to nearly 25 percent in 2024.** This includes an increase of nearly 20 percentage points since the adoption of UNSCR 1325 in 2000 (figure 6).

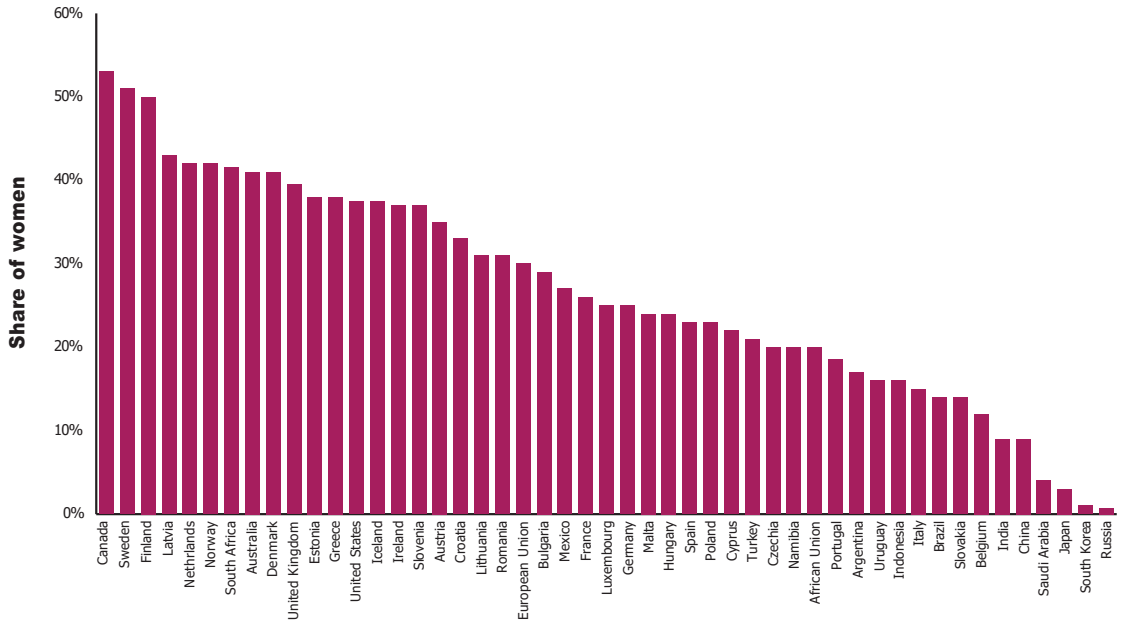
As of 2024, however, there are **only three countries where at least half of ambassadors are women: Canada, Sweden, and Finland** (figure 7).[11]

## Figure 6: Global share of women ambassadors, 1968–2024




Source: University of Gothenberg (https://www.gu.se/en/qendip/the-qendip-dataset-on-qender-and-diplomatic-representation)

## Figure 7: Global share of women ambassadors, 2024

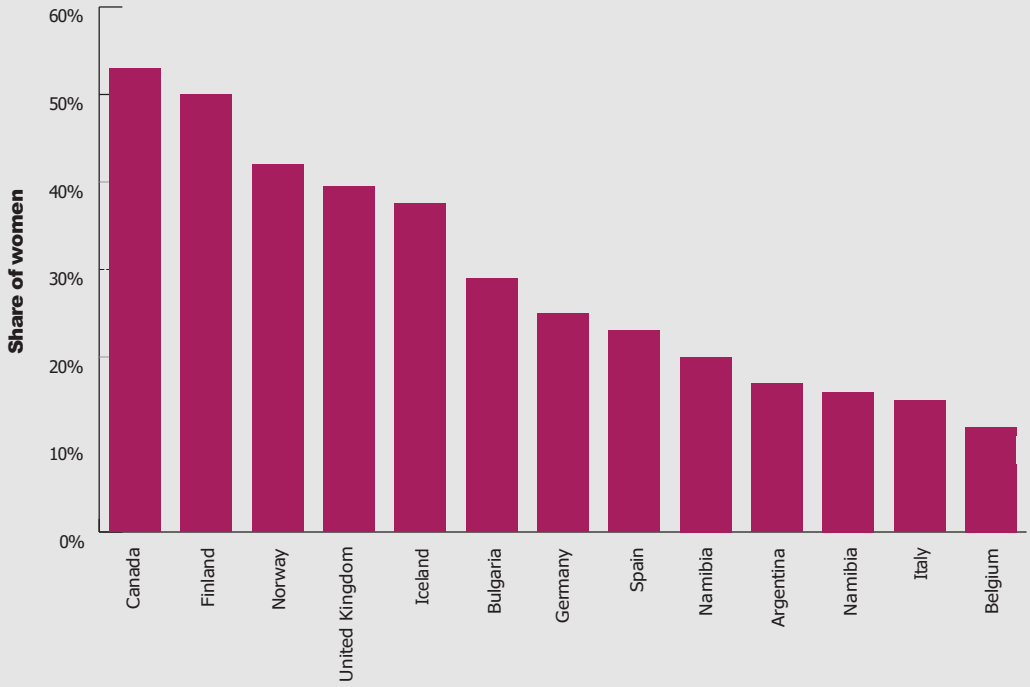



Source: Anwar Gargash Academy (https://www.agda.ac.ae/docs/default-source/2023/2024-women-in-diplomacy-index-2.pdf)

## BOX 2. C-25 COUNTRY AMBASSADORS

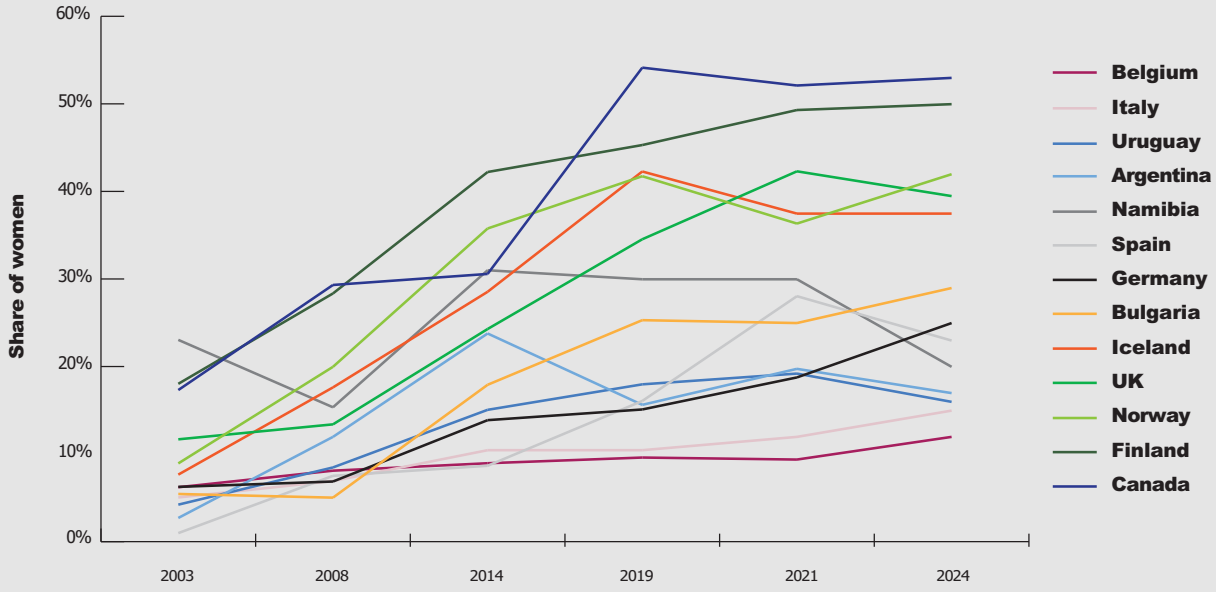
C-25 countries have all grown their share of women in ambassadorial roles since the early 2000s, with many seeing rates nearly double. Among C-25 countries, Canada and Finland achieved gender parity as of 2023 (figures 8 and 9). At or surpassing 50 percent, Canada and Finland have the highest share of women ambassadors among UN Member States, figures that were below 20 percent in 2003 (figure 9).[12] On average, 29 percent of C-25 countries' ambassadors are women.

**Figure 8: Share of women ambassadors in C-25 countries, 2024**




Source: Anwar Gargash Academy (https://www.agda.ac.ae/docs/default-source/2023/2024-women-in-diplomacy-index-2.pdf)

**Figure 9: Growth in share of women ambassadors in C-25 countries, 2003–2024**




Source: Anwar Gargash Academy (https://www.agda.ac.ae/docs/default-source/2023/2024-women-in-diplomacy-index-2.pdf)

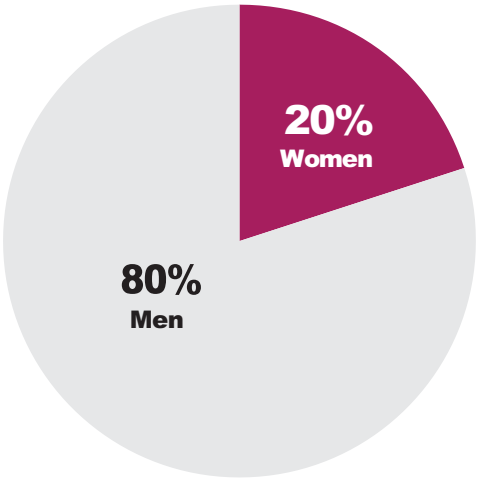
## Women's representation as national cabinet ministers declines, remains low in defense ministries

Women have traditionally been underrepresented in ministerial positions, often relegated to "low-prestige" portfolios with "feminine" characteristics outside of the security sector.[13] Their nomination to cabinet ministerial positions can have pragmatic and symbolic implications, and is linked with women's wider political representation.[14]

Government defense ministries are responsible for many of the decisions that shape conflict outcomes, including budgetary spending, weapons procurement and use, and military command and control. Defense ministries are also increasingly responsible for implementing WPS plans and activities, as a number of governments have shifted budgetary spending from development to defense.[15]

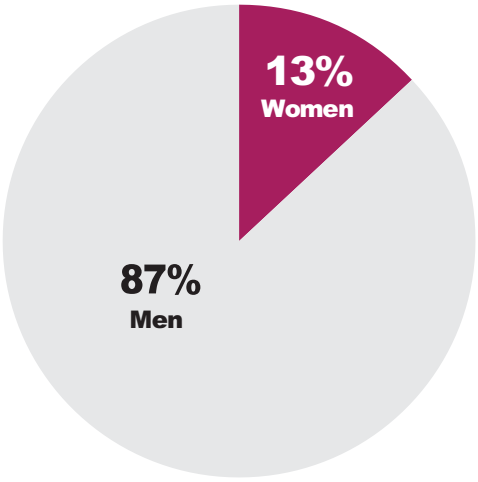
For the first time since the establishment of UNSCR 1325, there has been a **decline in women's representation in cabinet ministries—down to 22.9 percent in 2025 from 23.3 percent in 2024**.[16] Though seemingly small, this decline is especially concerning in domains closest to peace and security, where women's representation already lags behind other sectors. In 2023, **women comprised just 13 percent of national defense committee chairs and 20 percent of foreign affairs committee chairs** (figures 10 and 11).[17]

**Figure 10: Share of women chairs of foreign affairs committees, 2023**




Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union (https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/reports/2024-03/women-in-parliament-2023)

**Figure 11: Share of women chairs of national defense committees, 2023**

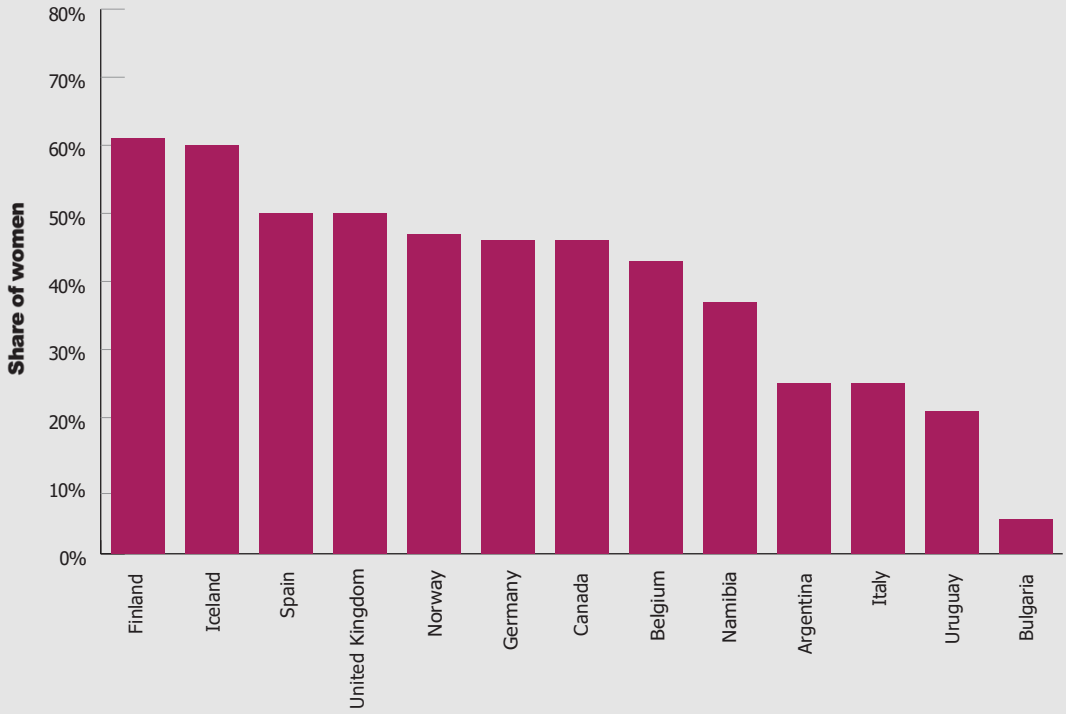



Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union (https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/reports/2024-03/women-in-parliament-2023)

### BOX 3. C-25 COUNTRY CABINET MINISTERS

Among C-25 countries, Finland, Iceland, Spain, and the United Kingdom all have at least 50 percent of cabinet minister positions held by women, as of 2025.

**Figure 12: Share of women in cabinet minister positions in C-25 countries, 2025**




Source: Council on Foreign Relations Women's Power Index (https://www.cfr.org/tracker/womens-power-index)

Data note: This index draws on UN Women's count of the total number of ministers, which includes deputy prime ministers and ministers but excludes vice presidents and heads of governmental or public agencies. UN Women includes prime ministers or heads of government if they hold ministerial portfolios.

## Conclusions

Women are more visible today in peace and security than ever before. There are nearly four times as many women serving as peacekeepers in 2025 than in 2000. Women's representation in senior UN positions nearly tripled between 2000 and 2020, and representation has surpassed 50 percent at several senior levels. There are nearly four times as many women serving as ambassadors than in 2000, with several countries today achieving parity for the first time in their history.

Yet women are still underrepresented in many critical domains, particularly the security sector. It is necessary to understand how investments in women's leadership over the past 25 years have contributed to progress, and where new threats such as digital harassment against women leaders are emerging. Evidence shows that direct efforts to increase representation—including quotas, mentorship and training programs—must be complemented by violence prevention, physical protection, and economic empowerment

programs, to embed lasting change.[18] Further research must examine how different combinations of interventions generate positive outcomes across varied contexts to inform strategies that can advance the WPS Agenda.

Most importantly, additional research is essential to move beyond simply counting women and toward metrics that better capture the impact of women's inclusion on peace and security outcomes. This brief's focus on numbers from available datasets paints a partial picture. Rising numbers do not always ensure meaningful inclusion, nor do they capture inequalities that determine which women are represented.[19] They can also miss informal, localized forms of leadership that are instrumental in advancing peace and security. At this pivotal moment, further research that broadens and deepens our understanding of women's meaningful representation and participation is critical.

## Acknowledgments

The research team would like to acknowledge Elena Ortiz, who developed the early data collection and analysis for this report, and Kim Hart, Anna Tuohey, and Vicka Heidt for review and input. We would also like to thank Susan Quinn for editing and Jocelyn Soly for design. Finally, we are grateful to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation of Spain for their leadership of Commitment 2025 and support for the accompanying research.

## Endnotes

1 Commitment 2025 (C-25) brings together the governments of Argentina, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Italy, Namibia, Norway, Spain, the United Kingdom, and Uruguay, working in collaboration with the Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security to track progress on WPS.

2 Nagel, Robert U., Kate Fin, and Julia Maenza. "Gendered Impacts on Operational Effectiveness of UN Peace Operations." Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security report (May 2021). https://giwps.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Gendered-Impacts-on-Operational-Effectiveness-of-UN-Peace-Operations.pdf

3 Huber, Laura, and Government of Canada's Elsie Initiative for Women in Peace Operations. "The Impact of Women Peacekeepers on Public Support for Peacekeeping in Troop-Contributing Countries." International Peace Institute report (2022). https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/IPI-E-RPT-Impact_of_Women_Peacekeepersweb.pdf

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9 George, Rachel, Marianne Tøraasen and Pilar Domingo. "Challenging Violence Against Women in Public Life." (December 2021) ODI: London. https://www.alignplatform.org/sites/default/files/2021-12/challenging_violence_against_women_in_public_1.pdf; See also a discussion of growing reports of these harms online and their implications for WPS in Baekgaard, Kristine. "Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence: An Emerging Issue in Women, Peace, and Security." Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace, and Security. 2024. https://giwps.georgetown.edu/resource/technology-facilitated-gender-based-violence/.

10 Tryggestad, Torunn L., Anna Marie Obermeier, and Asha Ali. "How Do Women Ambassadors Reshape Diplomacy at the UN Security Council?" Peace Research Institute Oslo commentary (June 24, 2025). https://www.prio.org/comments/1789

11 Inclusive of Group of Twenty (G20), European Union (EU), and African Union (AU) countries.

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13 Davis, Rebecca Howard. *Women and Power in Parliamentary Democracies: Cabinet Appointments in Western Europe, 1968-1992*. University of Nebraska Press (2023); Escobar-Lemmon, Maria, and Michelle M. Taylor-Robinson. "Getting to the Top: Career Paths of Women in Latin American Cabinets." *Political Research Quarterly* 62 no. 4: 685-99 (2009); Reynolds, Andrew. "Women in the Legislatures and Executives of the World: Knocking at the Highest Glass Ceiling." *World Politics* 51 no. 4 (1999); Studlar, Donley T., and Gary F. Moncrief. "Women's Work? The Distribution and Prestige of Portfolios in the Canadian Provinces." *Governance* 12 no. 4: 379–95 (1999).

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15 This is unfolding, for example, in the United Kingdom. See: "UK to Reduce Aid to 0.3% of Gross National Income from 2027." Government of the United Kingdom (February 28, 2025). https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/uk-to-reduce-aid-to-0-3-of-gross-national-income-from-2027

16 "Women's Political Leadership Declines, with Fewer Women in Executive Office in 2025." UN Women press release (June 12, 2025). https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/press-release/2025/06/womens-political-leadership-declines-with-fewer-women-in-executive-office-in-2025

17 Inter-Parliamentary Union. *Women in Parliament in 2023: The Year in Review*. Inter-Parliamentary Union (2024). https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/reports/2024-03/women-in-parliament-2023

18 See a discussion of policies, interventions, and programs aiming to increase women's political representation and leadership in George, Rachel, Emma Samman, Katie Washington, and Alina Ojha. *Gender Norms and Women in Politics: Evaluating Progress and Identifying Challenges on the 25th Anniversary of the Beijing Platform*. Advancing Learning and Innovation on Gender Norms (ALIGN guide). London: ODI, 2020. https://giwps.georgetown.edu/resource/gender-norms-and-women-in-politics-evaluating-progress-and-identifying-challenges-on-the-25th-anniversary-of-the-beijing-platform/.

19 A growing body of research into these challenges notes the imperative of identifying and moving symbolic representation to substance, building on studies such as Sally Parker, "*The Role of Women's Representation in the Rwandan Parliament: Beyond Numbers*", *Women's Studies International Forum* 35, no. 4 (2012): 237–247, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2012.05.004 and in Thania Paffenholz, Nick Ross, Steven Dixon, Anna-Lena Schluchter, and Jacqui True, *Making Women Count - Not Just Counting Women: Assessing Women's Inclusion and Influence on Peace Negotiations* (Geneva: Inclusive Peace & Transition Initiative and UN Women, April 2016), https://www.researchgate.net/publication/298307917_Making_Women_Count_-_Not_Just_Counting_Women_Assessing_Women%27s_Inclusion_and_Influence_on_Peace_Negotiations.