

The Women, Peace and Security Survey

REFLECTIONS FROM WOMEN PEACEBUILDERS

by Kristine Baekgaard, Vanessa Rickenbrode, and Jessica M. Smith



GIWPS

Georgetown Institute for
Women, Peace and Security



EMBASSY OF DENMARK
Washington D.C.

SUMMARY

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For a copy of the full report, go to

<https://giwps.georgetown.edu/resource/women-peace-and-security-survey>

Georgetown University's Institute for Women, Peace and Security (GIWPS) seeks to promote a more stable, peaceful, and just world by focusing on the important role women play in preventing conflict and building peace, growing economies, and addressing global threats like climate change and violent extremism. The institute pursues this mission through research that is accessible to practitioners and policymakers, global convenings, strategic partnerships, and nurturing the next generation of leaders. Melanne Vermeer, the first U.S. Ambassador for Global Women's Issues, is the institute's executive director. Hillary Rodham Clinton is the institute's honorary founding chair.

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1412 36th Street NW

Washington, DC 20007 USA

Kristine Baekgaard, Vanessa Rickenbrode, and Jessica M. Smith. 2025. *The Women, Peace and Security Survey: Reflections from Women Peacebuilders*. Summary. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Institute for Women, Peace and Security.

Editing: Communications Development Inc.

Cover design and production: Dilucidar

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Foreword

As we entered the new century in 2000, the world was in transition. The international community was increasingly focused on building peace, strengthening democracy, and promoting women's rights. From Kosovo to Timor-Leste, peacekeeping operations were reshaping the global response to war, while armed conflict in Rwanda and Bosnia-Herzegovina exposed the need to address sexual violence in wartime and protect civilians from mass atrocities. Freedom House recorded several years of steady gains in political rights and civil liberties worldwide. And just five years earlier, 189 governments had endorsed the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, a historic commitment to advancing women's rights. Against this backdrop, the adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 in 2000 marked a historic moment: the first formal recognition by the Security Council that peace cannot be achieved without the inclusion, leadership, and experiences of women.

Twenty-five years later, the world is at another inflection point. But this time, it is one defined by greater fragility and reversals of progress. Conflicts are intensifying and becoming more intractable. The global order is more divided, and international mechanisms for preventing and resolving violence are under unprecedented strain. In this shifting landscape, the hard-won gains of the last two decades, particularly those made by women in fragile and conflict-affected contexts, are being eroded. Democracy is in decline, civic space is shrinking, and backlash against women's rights is accelerating. In 2023, the world witnessed the highest number of armed conflicts since 1946, and in 2024, nearly one in four countries reported backlash against women's rights. These converging crises are not gender neutral; they are profoundly shaping the world in which women peacebuilders operate.

Despite recent challenges, the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda has fostered meaningful and measurable progress over the last two decades. More than 100 countries have adopted National Action Plans for integrating a gender perspective into their peace and security institutions. Civil society organizations, particularly women-led groups, have built powerful movements for peace, advocated for survivors, and held governments and institutions accountable for actions that undermine peace and security. From Colombia to South Sudan, women have negotiated cease-fires, brokered peace, and delivered justice. Amid ongoing conflict, from Myanmar to Ukraine, women advocate for peace, call out abuses, and demand to be included when conflict ends. These victories are not small—they are transformative. Women’s work has reshaped peacebuilding from the ground up. But the gains remain precarious, often unsupported, and frequently unrecognized.

This year marks more than the 25th anniversary of UNSCR 1325. It is a moment for deliberation and resolve. As we confront a world of growing violence and of civic freedoms under siege, the stakes for women peacebuilders have never been higher. This report is both a reflection and a call to action. Centering on the experiences of women peacebuilders from around the world, it highlights spaces where they find influence and meaning, reveals areas where improvement is needed, and offers recommendations for the future of WPS grounded in the voices of women from around the world.

Based on survey responses from 2,744 women in 121 countries—one of the largest samples of women peacebuilders to date—this report charts the landscape of gains and gaps in WPS. Most important, it looks ahead to a future that can and must be different: one in which women’s voices in peace and security are not optional but foundational. As we enter this next era of work, we invite the international community to listen to, learn from, and stand with women peacebuilders everywhere. The moment calls not for caution, but for courage. The world cannot afford to backslide. The future of peace depends on our collective willingness to act.



Melanne Vermeer

Executive Director



Kristine Baekgaard

Lead Author



Key survey findings and implications

With 2,744 women respondents in 121 countries, our survey is one of the largest datasets on women peacebuilders and reveals the importance of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda.

The vast majority of women do not use the term *peacebuilder* to describe themselves, identifying instead as activists.

- 53 percent of respondents identify as activists, while 29 percent would call themselves peacebuilders.
- This distinction matters because it expands our view of who is doing peacebuilding work and reveals the need to build broader coalitions that include activists, human rights defenders, and feminist movements to fully mobilize the collective power of peace and security actors.

Women frequently engage in multiple peace and security activities simultaneously.

- 77 percent engage in multiple peace and security activities, reflecting both the breadth of women's contributions and the interrelatedness of peace and security issues.
- WPS efforts must move beyond siloed programming and invest in integrated, flexible approaches that match the reality of women's work on the ground.

Women participate extensively in traditional peace and security activities, such as mediation and peace processes.

- 40 percent participate in mediation, and 37 percent in peace processes, demonstrating women's central role in conflict resolution despite limited formal recognition.
- WPS efforts must continue to prioritize these core areas while expanding to address emerging threats such as climate change and technology.

Women have leading roles in advancing the broader social and structural conditions that sustain peace and security.

- Over half the respondents participate in women's and girls' education or in sexual and gender-based violence services.
- WPS initiatives must recognize and support this expansive work by investing in approaches that bridge formal processes and community-level peacebuilding.

Women report that many of the programs intended to support their peace and security work are falling short.

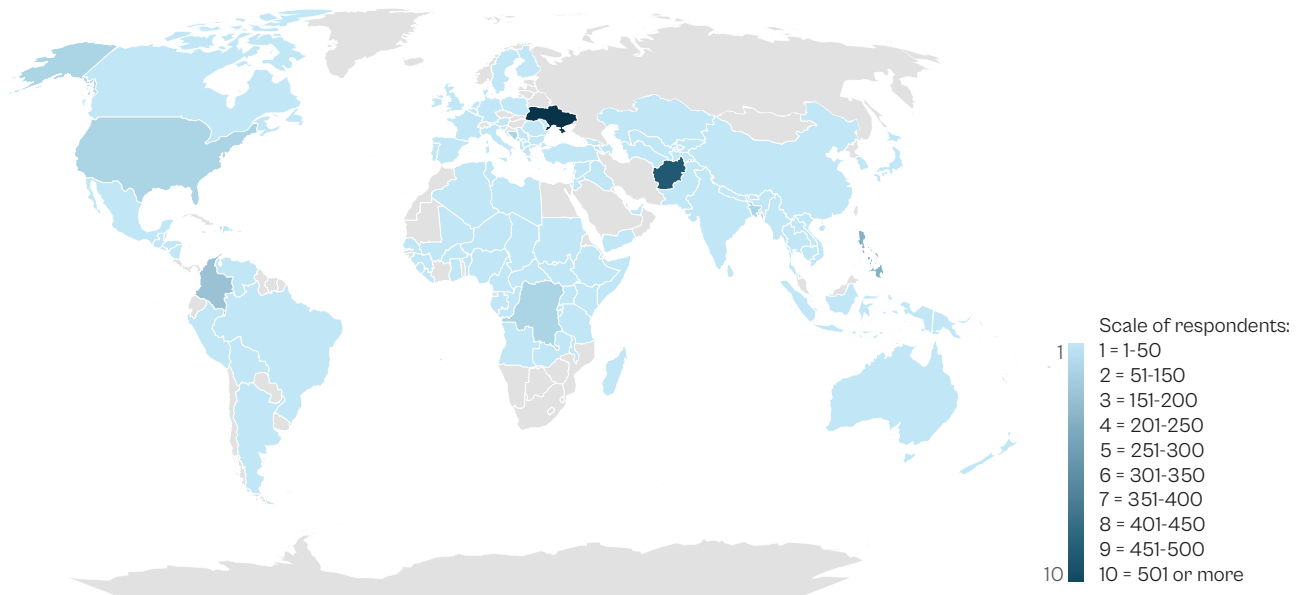
- 35 percent or more rate disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration, environmental and climate resilience, and justice and legal initiatives as ineffective.
 - Because poorly designed programs risk reinforcing marginalization and eroding trust, effectiveness requires designing, implementing, and evaluating initiatives in genuine partnership with women from the outset.
-

Across regions, women highlight education, leadership development, and cooperation mechanisms as among the most effective services to advance peace and security.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Across regions, more than half consider education, leadership development, and cooperation mechanisms to be most effective. • Equipping women with the tools and support needed to lead multidimensional peace and security efforts requires sustained investment in programs that strengthen skills, networks, and social cohesion, even when the programs fall outside traditional WPS frameworks.
Women drive change in their communities, but they have limited influence in formal spaces such as government and international organizations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 62 percent see themselves as able to create change in their households, and 51 percent in their workplaces, but 21 percent report no ability to create change in national government. • While women's influence at the community level is crucial, we must continue to expand efforts to ensure women's meaningful, rather than tokenistic, inclusion in all spaces where decisions are made, including formal institutions.
Women report that their peace and security work is deeply meaningful, but it comes at great personal cost.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 63 percent report gaining new skills through their peace and security work, but 46 percent experience fatigue, and one in four report burnout and worsening mental health as negative consequences of their peace and security efforts, underscoring the strain of sustaining these efforts with limited support. • Addressing challenges that endanger women peacebuilders and jeopardize broader progress toward peace and security, such as burnout, financial strain, and exposure to risk, requires interventions that provide sustained protection, resources, and support to women doing this crucial work.
The risks and opportunities women face are shaped by more than their gender.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WPS work is riskier for vulnerable populations. Migrant, refugee, and displaced women are more than twice as likely as women who are not in these groups to perceive more risks associated with their peace and security work. A one-size-fits-all approach limits impact, so programs should be designed to meet the diverse needs of women from different backgrounds and fully leverage their contributions to advancing peace and security work.
Poverty is one of the most pressing challenges shaping women's experiences of their peace and security work.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One-third identify poverty as one of the biggest challenges in their work, highlighting deep interconnections between peace and development. • This finding fundamentally challenges the idea that WPS and development work are separate: sustained investment in development is essential to unlock the full power of women's contributions to peace and security because without addressing women's poverty and access to livelihoods, WPS work will fall short of its transformative potential.
The issues women identify as most challenging and urgent differ by region.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education in South Asia (highlighted as a core challenge by 46 percent of respondents), women's leadership in the Middle East and North Africa (42 percent), climate-related security concerns in East Asia and the Pacific (15 percent), and infrastructure deficits in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia (26 percent). • WPS implementation will be more successful if it is tailored to local needs and priorities, as identified by women in those contexts.
Across regions, women are calling on the international community to provide long-term funding to support their peace and security work.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 43 percent identify long-term funding as an urgent need to accomplish their peace and security goals; 40 percent also report a decrease in funding for their work over the past two years. • Responding to this call requires donors to offer funding that is sustained, accessible, and flexible, empowering women-led organizations to respond to crises, build lasting peace, and strengthen their communities.

From Kabul to Kyiv: Who are the 2,744 women in our survey?

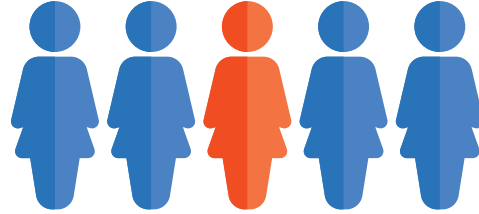
The responses to this survey constitute one of the largest datasets on women peacebuilders, offering a rare, wide-angle view of a community too often excluded from policy debates despite their central role in conflict response and peacebuilding. The final sample includes 2,744 respondents, 98 percent of whom identify as women, spanning 121 countries and diverse contexts (figure 1). We shared the survey with more than 470 women's and peacebuilding organizations to distribute it to a wide variety of women; women peacebuilders in the survey participate in multiple types of organizations as part of their peace and security work: 65 percent participate in civil society organizations, 32 percent in international organizations, and 14 percent in national governments. Organizations in Afghanistan, Colombia, Kosovo, the Philippines, Sudan, and Ukraine played a particularly important role in disseminating the survey to their networks.

Figure 1. The dataset represents women's voices from around the world



Note: The map shows the number of women peacebuilder survey respondents in each country. This distribution reflects the reality that some regions, particularly those experiencing intensified violence or with limited civil society space, were more difficult to access and are less well-represented in the survey. The online nature of our survey resulted in a sample that reflects primarily an urban population, as rural populations are more difficult to reach without on-the-ground infrastructure and support.

Figure 2. Nearly one in five women report living in an active armed conflict zone



Source: Authors, based on data from the 2025 Women, Peace and Security Survey.

Displacement and exposure to conflict shaped many respondents' experiences. Five percent of respondents report living in a refugee camp—with notably higher rates in Sub-Saharan Africa (15 percent) and South Asia (11 percent)—and 12 percent in an internally displaced persons camp, again with higher rates in Sub-Saharan Africa (31 percent). Globally, 19 percent of respondents report living in an active armed conflict zone at the time of the survey, including 33 percent of respondents in Latin America and the Caribbean, 32 percent in Sub-Saharan Africa, 26 percent in the Middle East and North Africa, and 19 percent in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia (figure 2).

Respondents work across the four pillars of WPS—prevention, protection, participation, and relief and recovery

Respondents work across the four pillars of WPS—prevention, protection, participation, and relief and recovery—and beyond, contributing to peace in a variety of ways and at multiple levels. They represent the vibrant, diverse ecosystem of actors who work on peace and security. Notably, while 53 percent of respondents identify as activists, just 29 percent describe themselves as peacebuilders. This distinction matters because it expands our view of who is doing peacebuilding work. It points us toward the need to build broader coalitions that include activists, human rights defenders, and feminist movements, to fully mobilize the collective power of peace and security actors. In this report, we use *peacebuilder* to refer to anyone who contributes to peace, in any way, aiming to capture the full scope of work that women do across a variety of organizations.



Women building peace: Powerful impact through many paths

Across countries and contexts, women are leading efforts to advance peace and security that create real change. The stories and data emerging from our global survey offer a powerful reminder: the successes of the WPS Agenda would not be possible without the women around the world who lead and sustain this work.

Women frequently engage in multiple peace and security activities simultaneously

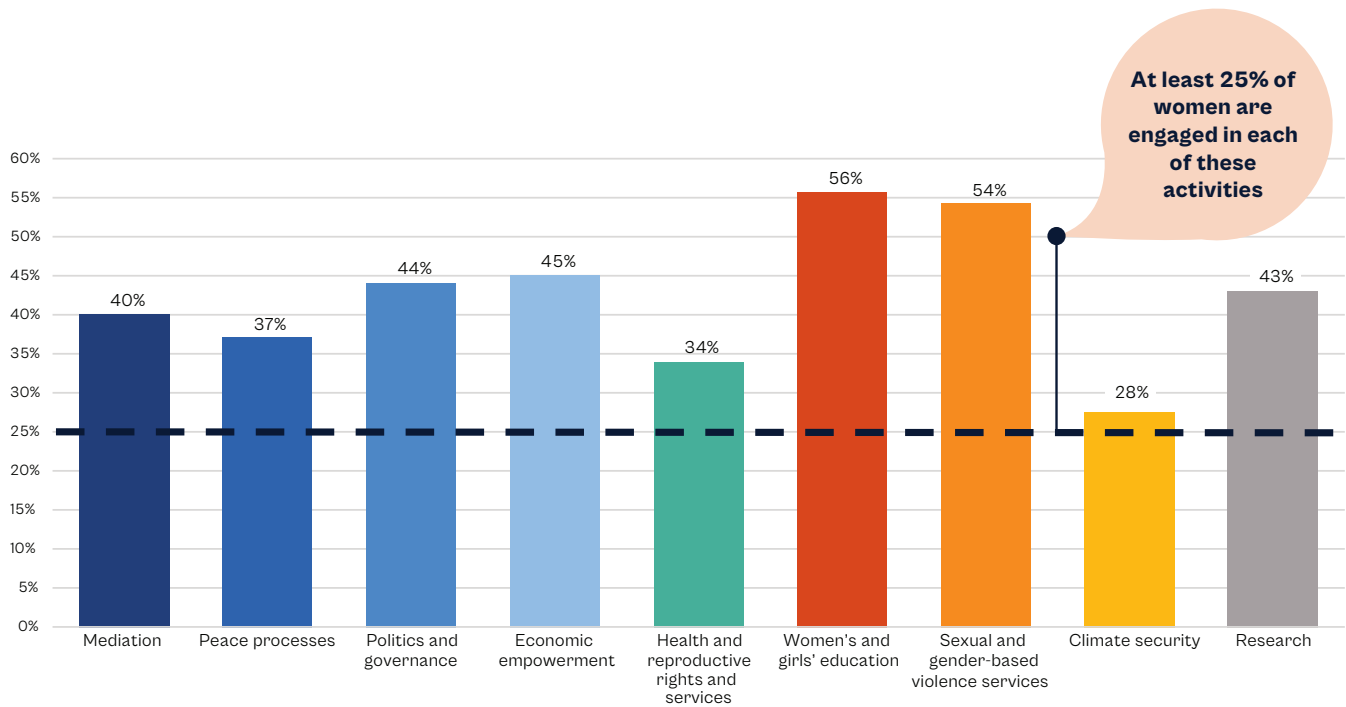
Efforts must move beyond siloed programming and invest in integrated, flexible approaches that match the reality of women's work.

More than three-quarters (77 percent) of respondents report working across multiple peace and security issues, likely reflecting the dual reality that peace and security issues are interconnected and that funding is limited. Scarce resources often mean that women must take on multiple roles and responsibilities within their communities and organizations.

Women participate extensively in traditional peace and security activities, such as mediation and peace processes

Efforts must continue to prioritize these areas while expanding to address emerging threats such as climate change and technology.

A large portion of respondents overall report direct involvement in traditional peacebuilding activities: 40 percent of women participate in mediation, and 37 percent are involved in formal and informal peace processes (figure 3). These figures are even higher in some regions. In Sub-Saharan Africa, 67 percent of respondents report participating in mediation, and 61 percent in peace processes. In the Middle East and North Africa, 63 percent report participating in mediation, and 66 percent in peace processes. In contrast, participation was much lower in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia, where only 26 percent reported engaging in mediation and 12 percent in peace processes.

Figure 3. Women engage extensively in traditional peace and security work across regions

Source: Authors, based on data from the 2025 Women, Peace and Security Survey.

Women also have leading roles in advancing the broader social and structural conditions that sustain peace and security

Initiatives must support this work by investing in approaches that bridge formal processes and community-level peacebuilding.

Beyond mediation and peace processes, women report participating in a wide variety of activities contributing to peace and security, often addressing the social and structural drivers and effects of conflict and instability. Two issues emerge prominently across the full sample: 56 percent report participating in women's and girls' education, and 54 percent in sexual and gender-based violence services. While education is sometimes categorized as "social" rather than "security" work, our data underscore the importance of education in creating pathways for empowerment, civic engagement, and economic independence. Sexual and gender-based violence work addresses the trauma and power imbalances that are often both causes and consequences of conflict.



The state of WPS: Women's experiences advancing peace and security

as women around the world lead efforts in peace and security, they continue to face barriers that limit their impact and often put them at personal risk.

Women report that many of the programs intended to support their peace and security work are falling short

Because poorly designed programs can reinforce marginalization and erode trust, effectiveness requires designing, implementing, and evaluating initiatives in genuine partnership with women.

Disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration initiatives stand out as among the least effective: 36 percent of respondents rate them as very ineffective or somewhat ineffective. *Environmental and climate resilience initiatives* are also viewed poorly: 35 percent of respondents rated these initiatives as very ineffective or somewhat ineffective. *Legal and justice initiatives* also receive consistently poor ratings: 35 percent of respondents report these programs as very ineffective or somewhat ineffective.

Women highlight education, leadership development, and cooperation mechanisms as among the most effective services

Equipping women with the tools and support needed to lead multidimensional peace and security efforts requires sustained investment in programs that strengthen skills, networks, and social cohesion.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, 57 percent of respondents view education programs as effective, while 52 percent highlight leadership skill-building programs as valuable. In Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia, education, sexual and gender-based violence prevention, and social and cultural transformation are rated effective by more than 60 percent of respondents, suggesting strong programmatic infrastructure and potential for scaling. In the Middle East and North Africa, mechanisms for cooperation between actors and leadership development programs are viewed as among the most effective, pointing to promising entry points for improving weaker areas such as disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration, and digital inclusion. Taken together, these findings reveal both the

uneven performance of peace programs across regions and clear opportunities to build on proven approaches that women identify as effective.

Women drive change in their communities, but they have limited influence in formal spaces like government and international organizations

In Women's Own Words

"Women, especially in vulnerable communities, are silent peacemakers. In the course of my work, I have seen many times how simple dialogue, social solidarity, and mutual support among women have prevented violence and disintegration. However, what we need is not just to be heard, but to be actively involved in major decisions for peace and security. True peace comes when women are not only present on the ground, but also at the negotiating table. As an activist woman, I am not a victim of war, but an architect of social peace, and this is a voice that must be heard globally." (Afghanistan)

While women's influence at the community level is crucial, we must continue to expand efforts to ensure women's meaningful inclusion in all spaces where decisions are made, including formal institutions.

Women report the ability to create change in their immediate environments: 62 percent report a strong ability to create change in their households, 51 percent in their workplaces, and 32 percent in their local communities. The positive influence that women report having over their immediate environments does not extend to formal institutions. Just 14 percent of respondents indicate that they work with their national government on peace and security issues. Women who report participating in international organizations have no greater sense of their ability to effect change within their workplace or in broader peace and security contexts than women who do not.

Women report that their peace and security work is deeply meaningful, but it comes at great personal cost

Addressing challenges that endanger women peacebuilders and jeopardize broader progress toward peace and security, such as burnout, financial strain, and exposure to risk, requires interventions that provide sustained protection, resources, and support.

Women pay a high personal cost for involvement in peace and security work, with women across all regions reporting significant fatigue, financial strain, and exposure to risk. Despite this, women continue their work, highlighting both their dedication and the unsustainable demands placed on them. In addition, women face significant threats from engaging in peace and security work, including threats of violence (18 percent in the full sample). These findings highlight the precarious nature of peace and security work for women, particularly in lower-resource and high-risk environments. Addressing these challenges, through better protections, fair compensation, and institutional support, is essential to enable women to continue this work without bearing disproportionate personal costs.



The way forward: Aligning WPS with the priorities of women peacebuilders

As the global landscape becomes increasingly complex and volatile, the WPS Agenda must remain steadfast in addressing persistent issues adversely affecting women while evolving to meet emerging challenges. In determining where to dedicate scarce WPS resources, the international community needs to align its programs with what women say they need.

Poverty is one of the most pressing challenges shaping women's experiences of their peace and security work

In Women's Own Words

"Work in the field of peace and security is not only about the cessation of hostilities. It is about daily, systematic work to restore human dignity, strengthen economic resilience, and include women in decision-making at all levels. In our work, we see that women who receive support, education, and resources are able not only to overcome the crisis but also to become agents of change in their communities. But without sustainable funding, cross-sectoral collaboration, and political will, these efforts have limits. Peace is built not only by negotiation—it is created in small steps: when a woman opens a business, returns to school, creates a safe environment for children, or helps others endure. These are the actions we should support and scale if we are to achieve true security and resilience in society." (Ukraine)

This finding challenges the idea that WPS and development work are separate: sustained investment in development is essential because without addressing women's poverty and access to livelihoods, WPS work will fall short of its transformative potential.

One-third of respondents identify poverty as one of the biggest challenges to address in peace and security efforts. Women peacebuilders consistently report that poverty is not a parallel issue but a core concern of security and peacebuilding. Lack of access to basic financial resources undermines women's safety and mobility and their ability to participate in decision-making, build coalitions, and lead efforts in conflict resolution. Closely tied to poverty are issues of livelihoods, safety, and violence.

Women are calling on the international community to provide long-term funding to support their peace and security work

Responding to this call requires funding that is sustained, accessible, and flexible, empowering women-led organizations to respond to crises, build lasting peace, and strengthen communities.

The message from across regions is unambiguous: long-term, sustained funding is urgently needed to support organizations in accomplishing their peace and security goals, as reported by 43 percent of respondents (figure 4). Time and again, we see the centrality of women's contributions, but without sustained financial support, their ability to build lasting peace is hampered, undermining prospects for sustainable peace and stability overall.

Figure 4. Women consistently point to long-term, sustained funding when asked what they most need from the international community





In Women's Own Words

"Peace and security are not just about the absence of conflict—they're also about justice, inclusion, and the right to live in a healthy environment. In our community, we cannot feel truly secure while coal plant pollution continues to threaten our health, our livelihoods, and our future. That's why our peace efforts are deeply connected to environmental justice and women's empowerment. By protecting our environment and ensuring women have a voice in decisions that affect our lives, we are building the foundation for long-term peace, dignity, and community resilience."
(The Philippines)

Conclusions and calls to action

Women peacebuilders are clear about what works and what stands in their way. Women in our survey gave us a roadmap for the way forward. The WPS community must take up these broader calls to action if it is serious about sustaining women's leadership in peace and security.

1. Recognize and resource the structural conditions for peace and security

Women peacebuilders highlight the root causes and drivers of conflict—poverty, lack of education, social inequalities—as core concerns, yet tackling these conditions is often sidelined as “development” rather than peace and security work. Integrating development-focused initiatives such as livelihoods, income generation, and poverty reduction into WPS programming can unlock the full transformative potential of women's contributions to peace and security.

2. Build broader coalitions beyond peacebuilders

While many women are deeply engaged in advancing peace and security, most identify as activists rather than peacebuilders. Focusing too narrowly on “peacebuilders” risks overlooking the people driving change on the ground. To fulfill the promise of the WPS Agenda, the community must broaden its coalitions, engaging, listening to, and reaching out to activists, human rights defenders, and feminist movements whose work is central to building lasting peace.

3. Support multisectoral engagement rather than single-issue interventions

Women are consistently leading across multiple peace and security domains, including traditional WPS activities such as mediation and peace processes, as well as emerging areas such as climate change adaptation and technology-driven security challenges. WPS programming must move beyond single-issue approaches, recognizing and funding women's ability to address interconnected challenges.

4. Ask uncomfortable questions about power and resources

Women on the ground carry the burden of peacebuilding, yet often do so unpaid, while external actors control funding priorities and program design. The WPS community must interrogate who is being compensated for what work and whose priorities shape funding and policy.

5. Confront the burnout and mental health of women peacebuilders

Women report fatigue, burnout, and uncompensated time as major challenges. While their work sustains peace efforts, the WPS community must find ways to sustain them. This means going beyond program funding to ensure fair compensation, create systems of care and protection, and prioritize the mental health and wellbeing of women peacebuilders.

6. Address intersectional inequalities in women's peace and security engagement

The survey highlights that women with disabilities are 45 percent less likely to perceive opportunities in peace and security work than other women and that migrant, refugee, and displaced women consistently report the most negative consequences associated with peacebuilding. WPS actors must design funding, programs, and participation pathways that address these intersecting barriers.

7. Reconsider how WPS National Action Plans (NAPs) and other international frameworks work in practice

Respondents offered mixed assessments of WPS NAPs: some found them supportive, while others saw little real impact. The WPS community should continue to prioritize consulting women in the NAP process, while ensuring that implementation is locally meaningful.

8. Recommit to centering women's expertise and leadership

Building lasting peace means placing women's knowledge, insights, and leadership at the heart of decision-making. Women in our survey expressed an inability to exert influence in formal institutions, underscoring the need for the WPS community to sustain efforts to dismantle barriers to women's full and meaningful participation at all levels, so that programs are shaped by the priorities and expertise of women on the ground.

9. Ensure context-specific support and local adaptation

Peacebuilding looks different in every context. Survey respondents in Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Ukraine highlight how local conditions, from ongoing conflict to restrictions on education, shape the work women can do. International WPS actors must design programs and allocate resources that are responsive to local realities, supporting women to address the challenges they identify as most urgent.

10. Prioritize long-term, flexible, and locally rooted funding

Women are calling on the international community to provide sustained financial support that will enable them to lead peace and security work effectively. Long-term, flexible funding allows women-led organizations to respond to crises, build lasting peace, invest in leadership and skills development, and strengthen networks, ensuring that resources empower rather than constrain their work.

Acknowledgments

This report would not have been possible without the time, insights, and collaboration of countless individuals and organizations committed to advancing peace and women's leadership.

We are deeply indebted to every person who took the time to sit with us and add their voice in the survey. Your insights are at the heart of this work, and this report would not exist without you.

We extend our gratitude to the peacebuilders and women's organizations that shared their expertise, contributed to content, and helped distribute the survey to their networks. Their collaboration was essential:

- **CIASE**, Rosa Emilia Salamanca (Colombia)
- **SIHA Network**, Hala Alkarib (Sudan)
- **Kosovo Women's Network**
- **Ukrainian Women's Fund**
- **Foundation 'The Day After,'** Alina Miakenka, Iryna Drobovych and Anna Nikolaienko (Ukraine)
- **WeAct1325**, Karen Tanada and Elizabeth U. Yang (The Philippines)
- **DROPS**, Mariam Safi (Afghanistan)
- **Global Network of Women Peacebuilders**, Mavic Cabrera Balleza and Jasmin Nario-Galace

We also thank the International Civil Society Action Network (ICAN), Women for Women International, the Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace and Justice, and many other civil society partners for supporting the survey.

We are grateful to all who contributed to the research process, including Kate Lee and Sophie Romana from Althae Strategy on the design of the survey instrument, and our research assistants for their support: Ananya Balakrishnan for help translating qualitative responses and Ava Kawamura for assisting with the literature review. Miki Jacevic also offered critical guidance and supported outreach.

At the Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security (GIWPS), we are grateful to Melanne Vermeer, Executive Director, for her leadership and for trailblazing this field, and to Carla Koppell, Managing Director, for her guidance and input. We extend our thanks to the entire GIWPS team for their thoughtful feedback and partnership and to Anna Tuohey in particular for her invaluable work on the report.

We would like to acknowledge Denmark's tremendous leadership and commitment to the Women, Peace and Security Agenda, including our partners at the Embassy of Denmark in the United States whose generous support made this project possible.

Finally, we extend our deep gratitude, admiration, and solidarity to the peacebuilders around the world who work with courage and persistence every day to build more just and peaceful societies.

This year marks more than the 25th anniversary of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, the first formal recognition by the Security Council that peace cannot be achieved without the inclusion, leadership, and experiences of women. It is a moment for deliberation and resolve. As we confront a world of growing violence and of civic freedoms under siege, the stakes for women peacebuilders have never been higher. This report is both a reflection and a call to action. Centering on the experiences of women peacebuilders from around the world, it highlights spaces where they find influence and meaning, reveals areas where improvement is needed, and offers recommendations for the future of WPS grounded in the voices of women from around the world.

Based on survey responses from 2,744 women in 121 countries—one of the largest samples of women peacebuilders to date—this report charts the landscape of gains and gaps in WPS. Most important, it looks ahead to a future that can and must be different: one in which women's voices in peace and security are not optional but foundational. As we enter this next era of work, we invite the international community to listen to, learn from, and stand with women peacebuilders everywhere. The moment calls not for caution, but for courage. The world cannot afford to backslide. The future of peace depends on our collective willingness to act.



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