

**UN WOMEN SERIES:**  
Advancing the Women,  
Peace and Security Agenda  
in Europe and Central Asia



Consultation with women's activists and  
civil society organizations on the  
**WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY  
AGENDA IN CENTRAL ASIA**



**December 2021**

More than twenty years ago, the **United Nations (UN) Security Council** adopted the **first resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (WPS)** that reaffirmed the importance of equal participation and full involvement of women in maintaining and promoting peace and security. It also called for special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence, particularly rape and other forms of sexual abuse, in situations of armed conflict. UNSCR 1325 has been followed by **10 additional resolutions** that outline the obligations of the UN and its Member States and partners to ensure that the needs of women and girls affected by conflicts are addressed and that peace is brokered in an inclusive and sustainable way.

**The UN Security Council convened its annual open debate on UNSCR 1325** and WPS in October 2021. The UN Secretary-General António Guterres said that “women’s organizations overall are not provided with adequate funding while resources for empowerment programmes are constrained.” He reaffirmed efforts to “continue to push for greater and more meaningful participation of women in mediation efforts, as well as for a gendered approach to peace and security.”

Moreover, the **UN Secretary-General’s 2020 WPS Report** noted that without radical action over the next decade to integrate women into all aspects of peace, the world risks a continuous state of insecurity, heightened instability and prolonged conflicts.

## The WPS Consultation for Central Asia

To address the challenges and opportunities to advance the WPS agenda in Central Asia, UN Women organized a Consultation on 23 September 2021, with more than 30 women peacebuilders, mediators, and civil society organizations from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. The **‘Consultation with women’s activists and civil society organizations on Women, Peace and Security in Central Asia’** was part of a series of dialogues on WPS initiated by UN Women in Europe and Central Asia with civil society and women’s organizations that began in Istanbul, Turkey in February 2020 and [online in December 2020](#).

The Consultation for Central Asia offered an occasion to raise the voices and needs of women and youth, to discuss women’s views and solutions at the forefront of decisions on WPS, including the implementation of National Action Plans on UNSCR 1325 in the Central Asian subregion.

The need for the WPS Consultation for Central Asia was evident. Considering the security challenges in the region, women’s participation and leadership in all security related matters are essential to ensure women’s specific security and human rights concerns are adequately addressed. Their participation in peacebuilding and conflict prevention also supports a more lasting peace and builds confidence and trust. In addition, the involvement of women’s civil society groups is crucial for ensuring that peace provisions address social inequalities, especially gender inequality.

Yet, the **WPS Index** shows that the Central Asian subregion has a lower proportion of women in senior leadership positions, and their inclusion in economic and social life is significantly lower compared with other regions. Kazakhstan ranks highest (43rd) and Tajikistan ranks lowest (96th) in Central Asia, amongst more than 167 countries worldwide.

The event illustrated that implementing the WPS agenda remains limited in the region. However, new civil society initiatives demonstrate the importance of gender equality to address peace and security challenges. They present fresh opportunities and venues to enhance women’s participation in peacebuilding. The Consultation also presented a snapshot of the barriers to gender equality as they relate to peace and security across the region. The volatility of the security situation, particularly in Afghanistan, provides challenges to addressing long-standing gender inequalities in the security sector. Moreover, the militarized security agenda notably limits participation of women.

### The WPS Index (2019-2020)

The WPS Index incorporates three basic dimensions of women’s well-being — inclusion (economic, social, political); justice (formal and informal); and security (family, community, and societal levels) which are captured and quantified through 11 indicators to create a global ranking of 167 countries.

#### Ranking/Country:

- 43 Kazakhstan
- 80 Kyrgyzstan
- 89 Uzbekistan
- 96 Tajikistan

*Source: Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security in partnership with the Peace Research Institute in Oslo.*

## Discussion highlights from the WPS Consultation for Central Asia

### CHALLENGES TO IMPLEMENTATION OF THE WPS AGENDA:



**Insufficient political will and lack of knowledge on gender equality and women's rights:** Participants from **Kyrgyzstan** and **Tajikistan** noted an overall lack of knowledge about the WPS obligations within institutions and a complete absence of documents on WPS issues in national languages of the region. A participant from **Kyrgyzstan** said that unless gender equality is placed at the top of the political agenda, progress will remain a challenge.



**Gender disparity:** Gender disparity in security institutions was highlighted as a major obstacle for increasing women's representation in that sector. A representative from **Uzbekistan** expressed her concerns about male dominance in law enforcement and military agencies. "As long as we have male prevalence in all law enforcement and military agencies, we cannot achieve gender equality," she said.



**Gender-blind training curricula:** The lack of gender-sensitive curricula in training institutions for security personnel was identified as another challenge. "Currently, curricula of military academies and universities are gender-blind. We need to introduce courses on gender equality, sexual exploitation and harassment," noted one participant. As a counterpoint, a representative from **Kazakhstan** said that curricula in the Peacekeepers Training Center in Almaty offered courses on the defense of civilian population, humanitarian law, and a gender targeted course for senior management from the Ministry of Defense. In addition, WPS issues are included in all the courses.



**Gender norms:** One human-rights defender from **Kazakhstan** stressed that women are treated as victims, which is a stereotype based on male-domination that must change. A representative from **Uzbekistan** pointed out that not only men but sometimes women in power also hinder progress towards gender parity and gender equality.

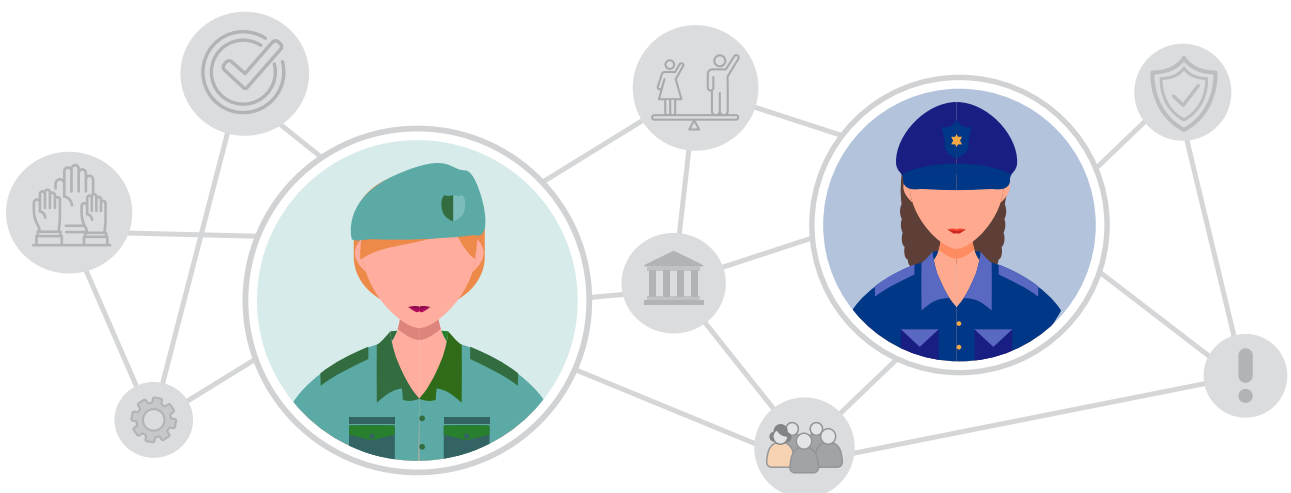


**Sexual and gender-based violence:** A speaker from **Kyrgyzstan** said that with radicalization and extremism on the rise in the region, the threats and human rights violations against women are increasing and women's participation in decision-making is diminishing. "We are, as all women are, in the hands of men," she said. "Currently, it is hard to protect women, considering the violence that exists against them. Without legal sector reform, we cannot bring justice to the victims of domestic violence or rape."

***We are, as all women are, in the hands of men***



**Lack of transparency and information on sexual and gender-based violence within security institutions:** A human-rights defender from **Kazakhstan** emphasized that lack of transparency in the security sector makes it difficult to know about sexual and gender-based violence cases in those institutions. "Since the defense sector is very secretive and not transparent, we don't know if women within the military sector are still being harassed and sexually exploited," she said.



## ADVANCING THE WPS AGENDA:

- ✓ ➔ **Active advocacy:** A participant from **Kyrgyzstan** recommended to “reach out to our President, Members of Parliament, Ministers to further raise awareness of the international frameworks pertaining to gender quality.” A participant from **Tajikistan** added that opportunities to raise their voice during important events and meetings are sometimes missed, as was the case at the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. “We need to be able to unite before such international events are held. That way we can better coordinate ourselves and deliver our position and participate and raise our voices,” she said.
- ✓ ➔ **Quotas:** A human-rights defender from **Kazakhstan** suggested that senior positions within the Ministry of Defence and in security forces should include women to fulfill international obligations and commitments on gender equality and women’s empowerment.
- ✓ ➔ **More platforms for discussion:** Speakers agreed that more platforms are needed for discussions on the WPS agenda, where lessons and best practices can be shared across borders.
- ✓ ➔ **Governments to implement National Action Plans in partnership with women’s organizations:** A participant from **Kyrgyzstan** stressed the need for governments to fully fund the National Action Plans on 1325 and collaborate with women’s organizations on implementing those plans.
- ✓ ➔ **Government responses to the Afghan crisis to include women:** A participant from **Kyrgyzstan** stressed that women should be included in the preparation of government responses to the Afghan crisis, and that donor plans and programmes should consider UNSCR 1325.

## LOCAL INITIATIVES FOR A CIVILIAN PEACE AGENDA:

The event offered participants the opportunity to highlight ongoing bottom-up initiatives that have been successful in enhancing women’s roles in peace and security and foster lasting peace in the region. One speaker explained that during the Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan border conflict, a platform of dialogue was created that united civil society organizations from both countries. However, due to political leadership stances in each country, the work of the platform has subsequently stopped. “It is important to be able to finish the work we have started,” said a participant from Tajikistan.

Others at the Consultation offered a range of local approaches to foster peace and security. They discussed the benefits of offering gender training for senior management in organizations and institutions, developing an ‘anti-conflict culture’ and ‘ending conflicts culture,’ and engaging men and boys in all conflict prevention efforts. Participants also emphasized that governments maintain good relations with civil society organizations. They discussed ways to expand the exchange of opinions and knowledge about the WPS agenda between civil society groups and government, notably with the Ministry of Defence and law enforcement agencies.

Participants also urged the creation of networks of civil society organizations at both regional and country levels and noted the importance of engaging youth with the WPS agenda. In addition, national adoption of UNSCR 1325 must be complemented with awareness-raising at local levels, and in both rural and urban areas.



### A CALL FOR IMMEDIATE SUPPORT TO AFGHAN WOMEN AND GIRLS:

Participants agreed that the deepening Afghan crisis should be a concern to authorities in the region and globally because it highlighted women as the first victims in the violation of fundamental human rights. The participants also shared their concern over the deterioration of the security situation in the region, due to the Afghan crisis. They said that such a trend is likely to reinforce gender norms and roles that will hinder women's role in addressing the security challenges of the region.

Participants stressed that humanitarian action and assistance must address the specific needs of Afghan women and girls. They noted the importance of recognizing and respecting human rights, especially, women's rights, and engaging Afghan women in any peacekeeping processes. They also suggested immediate security and safety mechanisms for Afghan women in politics and women's activists. In addition, they urged the continuation and intensification of study and training programmes for Afghan female students in Central Asia. Finally, they called for the creation of women's centres to protect the rights of refugee women and children.

## Summary of main recommendations

Participants issued messages and action points for implementing the WPS agenda and for building solidarity and support for women across Central Asia. They recommended removing barriers to women's meaningful participation in peace processes at formal and informal levels. They underlined the importance of ensuring safety for women human rights defenders and peace activists. They also urged that women's networks should be guided by feminist principles of peace and that they apply diversity and inclusion in all aspects of their work. Their specific recommendations included:

### For Governments/ Security Sector Institutions:

- ▶ Ensure funding and implementation of National Action Plans on UNSCR 1325 in collaboration with women's organizations.
- ▶ Localize and decentralize WPS commitments and raising awareness on UNSCR 1325 implications at local level.
- ▶ Include WPS as cross-cutting issue in Military Academy curricula.
- ▶ Establish gender training for senior management in the Ministry of Defence.
- ▶ Introduce mandatory courses on sexual exploitation and sexual harassment for military and security personnel.
- ▶ Include more women in senior positions within the Ministry of Defence and in security forces to fulfill international obligations and commitments regarding gender equality and women's empowerment.
- ▶ Include women in the preparation of government's response to the Afghan crisis.

### For UN Agencies:

- ▶ Create regional platforms for further discussion on the WPS agenda, sharing lessons learned and best practices across borders.
- ▶ Ensure representation of women in formal and informal peace processes, and in international conferences on peace, security, and humanitarian action.
- ▶ Engage men and boys in all conflict prevention efforts.
- ▶ Establish consultation meetings between state and government institutions and civil society organizations to discuss cooperation and expansion of the WPS agenda, including expanding partnerships of women's organizations with law enforcement agencies.
- ▶ Address the specific needs of women and girls in humanitarian action and assistance and further engage refugee women within any peacekeeping process.
- ▶ Establish study and training programs for Afghan female students in Central Asia and women's centres to protect refugee women and children.
- ▶ Use immediate security and safety mechanisms for Afghan women in politics and women's activists.

