

FROM RESOLUTION TO PRACTICE

25 YEARS OF THE WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY AGENDA

THE ROLE OF THE MEDITERRANEAN WOMEN MEDIATORS NETWORK

Loredana Teodorescu and Giulia Daga
(eds)



IAI Research Studies 13

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edited by
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IAI Research Studies

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Contributors

Ç. Esra Çuhadar is Associate Professor at the Department of Political Science at Bilkent University and Head of Research of the Ottawa Dialogue, University of Ottawa. Çuhadar is a member of the Mediterranean Women Mediators Network (MWMN) and former UN standby team mediation adviser on process design and inclusion. She also previously worked as senior expert on dialogue and inclusion at the United States Institute of Peace and as regional mediator for the World Bank.

Giulia Daga is a postdoc research fellow at the School of International Studies of the University of Trento and an adjunct lecturer in International Relations and Middle East Politics at John Cabot University. She is a former research fellow in the 'Mediterranean, Middle East and Africa' programme at IAI. Her work looks at the links between foreign policy and identity discourses, with a focus on the GCC states' legitimisation and status-seeking strategies. Her other research interests include authoritarian diffusion, EU-MENA relations and small powers' alignment strategies.

Dalal Iriqat is Associate Professor of Diplomacy, Conflict Resolution and Strategic Thinking at the Arab American University Palestine (AAUP) and a founding member of the MWMN. In addition, she is the founding president of the Business & Professional Women Network BPW-Palestine and served as Senior Policy Consultant for the UNDP Human Development Report for Palestine in 2015.

Sophia Papastavrou is a Gender Technical Specialist with World Vision Canada based in Cyprus and a member of the MWMN and the Women, Peace and Security Network – Canada. She has previously worked on consultancies with the OSCE, the World Bank and the United Nations, and served as Gender Technical Lead at World Vision International Middle East and Eastern Europe, covering fragile states and the Syria Response.

Milica Pejanović-Đurišić is full professor in telecommunications engineering at the University of Montenegro. She served as Minister of Defence of Montenegro and as Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the United Nations, and was the first ambassador of independent Montenegro

to France, Monaco and UNESCO. A member of the MWMN, she also serves on the Governance Board of the Atlantic Council of Montenegro.

Gaia Ravazzolo is junior researcher in the 'Defence, security and space' programme at IAI. She previously worked as editor at *Airpress*, a magazine on aerospace and defence policy, and held an internship at the European Security and Defence College, an EEAS body. She completed the Advanced Training Course on "The Role of Women in Peace Processes and Conflict Mediation for the Protection of Human Rights" at La Sapienza University and is a member of Women in International Security.

Loredana Teodorescu is the Head of the Mediterranean Women Mediators Network, President of Women in International Security Italy and Senior Fellow at IAI. Additionally, she advises and cooperates with many think tanks (e.g., leading European and International Affairs at the Luigi Sturzo Institute, as Council member of the European Council on Foreign Relations and member of the Academic Council of the Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies) and organisations, including UN Women and OSCE. Previously, she served as Coordinator of the Secretariat of the Global Alliance of Regional Women Mediator Networks.

María Villellas Ariño is researcher and co-director of the Escola de Cultura de Pau at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona and member of the MWMN. She has contributed to Spanish policy-making processes on Women, Peace and Security, is president of WILPF Spain and is co-author of several publications on armed conflicts and peacebuilding from a gender perspective.

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List of acronyms

3IM	Italian Initiative for International Mediation
AI	artificial intelligence
AR	Augmented reality
AUB	American University in Beirut
BPW	Business and Professional Women
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CHP	Republican People's Party
COSV	Coordinamento delle organizzazioni per il servizio volontario
CPM	Centre Professionnel de Médiation
CSO	Civil society organisation
DEM Party	Peoples' Equality and Democracy Party
DLK	Democratic League of Kosovo
DPPA	UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs
DUP	Democratic Unionist Party
EEAS	European External Action Service
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
GAM	Gerakan Aceh Merdeka (Free Aceh Movement)
GBV	Gender-based violence
GIZ	Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
GoP	Government of Philippines
ICAN	International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons
IGO	Intergovernmental organisation
INSTRAW	International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women
IR	International Relations
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
KPGE	Kosovo Programme for Gender Equality
KWN	Kosovo Women's Network
LPDF	Libyan Political Dialogue Forum
LWPP	Libyan Women Platform for Peace
MENA	Middle East and North Africa

MFA DGMO	Ministry of Foreign Affairs Directorate-General for Global Affairs
MHP	Nationalist Movement Party
ML	Machine learning
MWMN	Mediterranean Women Mediators Network
NAP	National Action Plan
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NIWC	Northern Ireland Women's Coalition
NRT	Northern Rangelands Trust
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OFP	Organización Femenina Popular
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PKK	Kurdistan Workers' Party
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
TWBI	Together We Build It
UN	United Nations
UNDP	UN Development Programme
UNFICYP	UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus
UNFPA	UN Population Fund
UNHCR	UN High Commissioner for Refugees
UNIFEM	UN Development Fund for Women
UNMIK	UN Mission in Kosovo
UNSC	UN Security Council
UNSCR	UN Security Council Resolution
UNSMIL	UN Support Mission in Libya
VLW	Voice of Libyan Women
VR	Virtual reality
WAB	Syrian Women Advisory Board
WIIS	Women in International Security
WILPF	Women's International League for Peace and Freedom
WONGOSOL	Women's NGO Secretariat of Liberia
WPHF	Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund
WPS	Women, Peace and Security
YPJ	Women's Protection Units
YPS	Youth, Peace and Security

Foreword

Twenty-five years after the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1325, we find ourselves at a critical juncture. The Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda was born from a simple yet revolutionary recognition: that sustainable peace cannot be built without the full and equal participation of women. Yet today, as we mark this anniversary, we must honestly assess not only how far we have come, but how far we still need to go – and whether we possess the collective will to get there.

I write these words at a moment when the international order faces profound strain. Multilateralism, the very foundation upon which the WPS Agenda was built, finds itself in crisis. Armed conflicts multiply and intensify across regions, while the global architecture designed to prevent and resolve them shows alarming signs of fragmentation. In this volatile security environment, the question is not whether the WPS Agenda remains relevant, but whether we can afford to ignore its principles any longer.

In 2017, in partnership with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Italy, we launched the Mediterranean Women Mediators Network. We did so with clear eyes about the challenges ahead, but also with unwavering conviction about what women bring to the table when given the opportunity to shape peace processes. The Mediterranean – a region marked by protracted conflicts, democratic transitions and persistent instability – offered both urgent need and fertile ground for such an initiative.

The network was conceived not as an abstract platform, but as a concrete mechanism to translate the promises of Resolution 1325 into practice. We sought to create pathways for women to access mediation processes, to build their capacity as mediators and negotiators, and to ensure their voices reached decision-making spaces traditionally closed to them. Most importantly, we aimed to demonstrate that women's participation in peace processes is not merely a matter of justice or representation – though it is certainly both – but a pragmatic imperative for more durable and inclusive peace.

Over these years, the network has achieved meaningful impact. We have trained dozens of women mediators, established connections across divided communities and placed women at negotiating tables where they had

previously been excluded. We have documented how women's involvement fundamentally changes the nature of peace agreements – making them more attentive to issues of justice, reconciliation and social cohesion; more likely to address root causes rather than merely symptoms; and more responsive to the needs of entire populations rather than armed elites alone.

Yet I would be disingenuous to speak only of successes. The challenges we face today are formidable and, in some respects, more daunting than when we began. The backlash against women's rights has intensified in many contexts. Women peacebuilders operate under increasing threats, with shrinking space for civil society and growing authoritarianism constraining their work. Perhaps most troubling, the crisis of multilateralism means that even when women manage to secure seats at the table, the tables themselves are losing relevance as power politics and unilateral action supplant negotiated solutions.

This is the paradox of our current moment: we have never had more evidence of the value of women's participation in peace processes, yet we have rarely faced a more hostile environment for implementing that knowledge. The WPS Agenda risks becoming a set of aspirations endorsed in international forums but abandoned in practice, where it matters most.

So, what is the value of the WPS Agenda today? I would argue it is precisely in this moment of crisis that its value becomes most apparent. When multilateral systems falter, we need the perspectives and approaches that the WPS Agenda champions – inclusive dialogue, attention to structural inequalities, long-term vision over short-term gains, and recognition that security means more than the absence of armed conflict. When traditional diplomatic channels stall, networks like the Mediterranean Women Mediators Network offer alternative pathways for dialogue and confidence-building.

Women's mediation networks contribute to advancing the WPS Agenda in several critical ways. First, they create solidarity and mutual support among women operating in isolated and often dangerous contexts. Second, they facilitate knowledge transfer and lesson-learning across regions and conflicts. Third, they provide collective advocacy power that individual actors lack. Fourth, they maintain channels of communication across divides when official processes break down. And fifth, they keep alive alternative visions of peace and security when dominant narratives focus solely on military solutions.

For the WPS Agenda to remain relevant in the coming years, we know that we must move beyond rhetoric to transformation. This means not

simply adding women to existing structures, but once more questioning and reimagining those structures themselves. It means recognising that women's exclusion from peace processes is not an oversight to be corrected, but reflects deeper patterns of power that must be challenged. It means understanding that the obstacles women face are not incidental, but systemic – and therefore require systemic responses.

Networks of women mediators must evolve to meet this moment. We need to build stronger alliances with progressive actors within formal institutions while maintaining our independence and critical voice. We must develop new strategies to operate effectively even as multilateral spaces contract. We need to better document and communicate our impact, making the case for women's participation not once but continuously. And we must remain connected to grassroots movements and local peacebuilding efforts, ensuring that our work keeps serving communities more than bureaucratic imperatives.

As I reflect on these 25 years, I am neither naively optimistic nor resigned to pessimism. I am, instead, determined. The Women, Peace and Security Agenda represents an unfinished revolution in how we think about peace, security and justice. The Mediterranean Women Mediators Network, alongside countless similar initiatives worldwide, embodies the determination to complete that revolution – not in 25 years, but in our daily work of building peace: one conversation, one mediation, one transformed relationship at a time.

The challenges ahead are real, but so is our resolve. The crisis of multilateralism need not mean the end of international cooperation, but rather its renewal through more inclusive and democratic practices. The volatile security environment demands not the abandonment of the WPS Agenda, but its more urgent and creative implementation. And the networks of women mediators and peacebuilders represent not a temporary expedient until "normal" diplomacy resumes, but a permanent transformation in how we pursue peace.

This is the work to which we remain committed, and to which I hope this volume contributes – not as a celebration of what has been achieved, but as a call to action for what must come next.

Irene Fellin

Co-founder and member of the Mediterranean Women Mediators Network; NATO Secretary General's Special Representative for Women, Peace and Security

Introduction

Loredana Teodorescu and Giulia Daga

The 25th anniversary of Resolution 1325/2000, which launched the so-called Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, has triggered numerous reflections on the implementation of the Agenda, from progress made to unfulfilled promises, including discussions on how to make it more effective, how to address persistent challenges and how to take into account the changing geopolitical context. The anniversary corresponds to almost ten years of activity of the Mediterranean Women Mediators Network (MWMN), an initiative promoted by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation with Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) and Women in International Security Italy (WIIS Italy) to concretely move from policy to practice and contribute to implementing the Agenda itself. The recurrence has pushed the network's Secretariat to launch a research project to monitor, evaluate and assess both the network's activities and the Agenda more generally, by taking stock of the insights and first-hand experience of its members. In a moment when several detailed reports have already been discussed by UN bodies, independent organisations and academia, this publication seeks to bring forward the concrete lessons learnt from the network's activities, which can provide specific additions to the many existing assessments. An initial documentation of the first years of the network was completed in 2021, with the publication by UN Women of the paper "Understanding the Journey: Past, Present, and Future of the Mediterranean Women Mediators Network", by Irene Fellin, who led the MWMN for the first five years and was instrumental in its creation. Her paper offers a thorough overview of the political conditions that led to the establishment of the network, its rationale and objectives, selection of members, activities and assessment, especially in light of the challenges brought by the Covid-19 pandemic.

This book builds on those findings, by providing an updated overview and assessment of the network's activities, while offering a deeper focus on the local initiatives of the network and putting them into the broader framework of an evolving Agenda. Also, this book seeks to combine a policy-oriented approach, based on providing assessments and recommendations, with a theoretical grounding that assesses the Agenda from a feminist security studies perspective. Using a qualitative methodology – based on informal conversations, a survey, semi-structured interviews with some of the network's members and a review of the state of the art – this research will serve as a milestone for the network, systematising what has been done and laying concrete foundations for the work ahead. It will also help generate debate and reflection, highlighting the impact of women in mediation activities and the added value of networks, starting with the MWMN, and it will identify concrete policy recommendations to enhance their contribution and address the challenges.

Part I is dedicated to identifying the key success stories, challenges and opportunities of the WPS Agenda after 25 years, from different perspectives. Chapter 1 looks at the Agenda from a theoretical point of view, highlighting the main contributions of the academic literature on women, peace and security in pushing and then assessing the UN's trajectory that led to the drafting of the Agenda and beyond. Chapter 2 seeks to evaluate the WPS Agenda from a policy perspective, by concretely identifying gaps and recommendations to policymakers, based both on published reports and on the anonymous contribution of women working in the peacebuilding field who took part in a survey launched by the MWMN Secretariat between 2024 and 2025. Part II (Chapters 3, 4, 5 and 6) seeks to assess the Agenda through the direct voices of the network's mediators, looking at specific areas of implementation, from the role of technology in advancing the participation of women in peace processes, to the challenges of climate change. The chapters offer a diverse overview of tangible achievements, enduring challenges and suggestions for improving the practical implementation of the Agenda, which can offer learning opportunities for the advancement of the Agenda itself.

Part III is dedicated to assessing the impact of the MWMN in fostering and contributing to peace and security across the Mediterranean. First (Chapter 7), it looks at the several initiatives that the network has promoted in recent years in all its thematic areas of intervention. This is enriched by the first-hand reflections of the Head of the MWMN, Loredana

Teodorescu, on the evolution of the network, its impact and potentialities to further unleash. Chapter 8 then delves into the network's impact at the local level in supporting peace and security processes and initiatives in countries across the Mediterranean, drawing mainly on semi-structured interviews with network members and on the materials produced by the network itself.

Lastly (Chapter 9), the volume offers specific and concrete recommendations that synthesise the reflections emerging from all elements of this book.

PART I
THE WPS AGENDA AFTER 25 YEARS

1.

Gender, Security and the WPS Agenda

Gaia Ravazzolo

The Mediterranean Women Mediators Network (MWMN), and more broadly any initiative derived from the Women, Peace and Security Agenda, originates from theoretical and activist processes that for decades have put into question the male-centred way of thinking about and practicing security. Before entering into a discussion on the impact and future of the network, it is thus necessary to contextualise it in the broader setting of feminist foreign policy and feminist security studies. Understanding the nexus between gender and security requires a rethinking of traditional International Relations (IR) theories, which have historically marginalised or ignored the experiences, roles and agency of women in global politics. Feminist perspectives in IR have emerged as a powerful theoretical framework that not only critiques the gender blindness of dominant paradigms but also provides alternative visions of what constitutes security, power and peace (Tickner 1992, Enloe 2014). This chapter outlines the key concepts, debates and contributions of feminist IR theory and explores how gendered understandings of security challenge and expand conventional definitions. The goal is to broadly show the theoretical foundation on which the WPS Agenda and the MWMN rest, and establish the background on which the empirical and policy-focused analysis of this volume is built.

1.1 Feminist theories of international relations and security studies

Mainstream IR theories – such as realism and liberalism – have traditionally focused on the state as the primary actor of international relations and have conceptualised security narrowly in terms of military power and

state survival. These frameworks largely ignore how the very definition of concepts such as state and security have for long been embedded in gendered constructed social hierarchies. At a more empirical level, studies focused on state security often ignore the differentiated impacts of conflict and foreign policy on men and women (Tickner 1992).

Feminist security studies critically question the supposedly objective and rational nature of traditional security discourses, exposing their gendered and hierarchical logics. Indeed, a male-centred understanding of security has for centuries essentialised women, assuming them as inherently peaceful, vulnerable and generally not apt to conduct “high politics”, of which war has been considered the most violent – and inherently masculine – expression. This inequality has been reinforced by centuries of militarised discourses reproducing a masculinised representation of the world of defence and security (Cohn 1987).

While the narrative about the non-violent nature of women can help advocate for their inclusion in peace processes, by highlighting the roles of women as peacebuilders, caregivers, victims and resistors, it can also reinforce stereotypes and depoliticise their roles. Framing women solely as victims of war ignores their participation in militancy and armed resistance or their complex political identities (Parashar 2011). Moreover, the focus on women as victims of war often silences the structural inequalities of everyday life that lead to gender-based violence (True 2012). Indeed, feminist scholars argue that gender is not only relevant to war’s impacts but also to its causes, operations and aftermaths.

Feminist security studies scholarship challenges the state-centric and militarised definitions of security also by focusing on alternative concepts, such as human security. The 1994 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Human Development Report is widely recognised as a pivotal moment in the modern diffusion of the concept of human security, marking a paradigmatic shift from a state-centred to a people-centred understanding of security (UNDP 1994). Conceived as a multidimensional paradigm encompassing economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community and political security, the concept links security to development and exposes the vulnerabilities affecting individuals rather than states. This approach, later reinforced also by the 2003 report “Human Security Now” of the Commission on Human Security co-chaired by Amartya Sen and Sadako Ogata, emphasises the dual pillars of *protection* and *empowerment* as central to human security (UN Commission on

Human Security 2003). In 2012, the General Assembly adopted resolution 66/290, a follow-up to paragraph 143 on human security of the 2005 World Summit Outcome, which established a common understanding that “human security is an approach to assist member states in identifying and addressing widespread and cross-cutting challenges to the survival, livelihood and dignity of their people” (UN General Assembly 2012). Building on this understanding, human security can be seen as a synthesis between state security and human development, reflecting the United Nations’ foundational vision of positive peace (Cadin 2008).

By promoting multi-stakeholder partnerships, localising solutions and focusing on resilience, the human security paradigm has thus become both an analytical and practical tool to confront complex global crises, from violent conflicts to environmental and economic shocks. This reconceptualisation widens the analytical lens to include non-military threats such as sexual violence, poverty, displacement and environmental insecurity, all of which disproportionately affect women (Tickner 1992, True 2012). For example, Christine Sylvester (2002) proposes an “experiential” IR that includes the lived realities of individuals, including women in conflict zones, who are often invisible in high-level diplomatic narratives. Cynthia Enloe (2014) calls to “follow the women” to understand how global politics is produced and reproduced in domestic, informal and non-institutional spaces.

A growing research programme has focused on the specific role of women in peacebuilding processes. Heidi Hudson (2009), through her case studies on Rwanda and Côte d’Ivoire, stresses the importance of applying a gender lens to peacebuilding efforts, arguing that sustainable peace cannot be achieved without addressing gendered power dynamics and inequalities. Her work highlights that post-conflict reconstruction often overlooks women’s specific needs and contributions, even when their participation is mandated by international resolutions. Other feminist analyses of peacebuilding in post-conflict societies (Hudson 2009, Olsson and Gizelis 2015) show that gender equality is not a byproduct of peace but a precondition for its durability.

Despite a general consensus about the gendered history of security studies and the need to rethink the role of women in peacebuilding processes, a feminist research agenda on peace and security remains a very broad objective which still raises criticism and caveats from feminist scholars. Fionnuala Ní Aoláin, Naomi Cahn and Dina Haynes (2011) warn against a one-size-fits-all model of gender inclusion, calling for greater

contextual sensitivity and recognition of intersectional differences. Indeed, efforts to involve women in peace processes are often symbolic rather than substantive, raising questions about the quality of participation and the structural barriers to empowerment. Feminist security studies thus interrogate the production of knowledge itself: whose voices are heard, whose experiences are valued and who gets to define what “security” means. This epistemological critique invites a broader, more inclusive understanding of security and peacebuilding that resonates with lived realities rather than abstract metrics.

Moreover, feminist security studies contain diverse and sometimes conflicting approaches: liberal, post-structuralist, postcolonial and materialist feminisms all offer different emphases and methodologies. Some scholars prioritise engagement with policy institutions to achieve incremental change (e.g., liberal feminists), while others caution against the depoliticising effects of mainstreaming (e.g., poststructuralists and post-colonial scholars). In the sphere of policymaking, critics argue that some governments adopt the feminist label without fundamentally altering the patriarchal or militaristic logics underpinning their foreign policy.

One critical concern is the Western-centric nature of much feminist IR scholarship, which may universalise certain experiences and marginalise voices from the Global South (Mohanty 1984). Postcolonial feminists caution that promoting gender equality abroad may replicate civilising discourses, positioning Western states as saviours of “oppressed women” in the Global South (Mohanty 1984, Abu-Lughod 2013). For instance, campaigns for women’s rights in Muslim-majority countries often ignore local agency and reproduce neo-imperial logics (Abu-Lughod 2013). A decolonial feminist IR thus calls for more plural, situated and reflexive approaches.

Feminist critical theorists have also emphasised that gender cannot be understood in isolation from other axes of power, such as race, class, sexuality and nationality. An intersectional approach reveals how security policies affect different groups of women in different ways, often reproducing colonial and racial hierarchies (Mohanty 1984, Abu-Lughod 2013). Jacqui True (2012) extends this analysis by exploring the political economy of violence, showing how globalised neoliberal policies contribute to gendered insecurity through poverty, exploitation and migration. This structural perspective helps explain why women’s security cannot be reduced to physical protection alone – it is embedded in systems of economic and political inequality.

1.2 *From theory to praxis: Reimagining foreign policy through feminist lenses*

Feminist IR not only aims to theorise the world differently; it seeks to change it. This praxis-oriented perspective emphasises the role of feminist knowledge in transforming policy and institutional practices. Feminist foreign policy as a political agenda was first formally introduced in Sweden in 2014 and later adopted or adapted by countries such as Canada, Mexico, France and Spain. The Swedish model defines feminist foreign policy around three R's – rights, representation and resources – emphasising a commitment to gender equality in all aspects of foreign policy, from development aid to defence and trade. Karin Aggestam and Ann Towns (2019) describe the “gender turn in diplomacy” as a shift toward more inclusive, norm-based approaches to international engagement. Their work outlines how feminist foreign policy challenges traditional diplomatic hierarchies and seeks to transform the conduct and substance of foreign relations.

Indeed, feminist scholars have played a central role in shaping international norms, advocating for greater participation of women in peace negotiations, protection from gender-based violence and the mainstreaming of gender perspectives in peacekeeping operations (Ní Aoláin et al. 2011, Shepherd 2008). Yet, feminist scholarship remains ambivalent toward institutionalisation. While engagement with institutions can open space for change, it also risks co-optation and depoliticisation of feminist agendas. As Shepherd (2011) notes, the translation of feminist principles into UN language often dilutes their transformative potential, replacing radical critique with technical gender mainstreaming.

The next sections trace the increased attention dedicated by the United Nations to the issue of women and security, and the way in which UN trajectory has been assessed by the literature.

1.3 *The United Nations' trajectory*

The international trajectory toward recognising the role of women in peace and security has evolved through a series of landmark milestones, beginning with the First World Conference on Women in Mexico City in 1975. This event led to the establishment of key institutions such as the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women

(INSTRAW), and paved the way for the adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1979. CEDAW remains the most comprehensive and legally binding international treaty on women's rights. It defines what constitutes discrimination against women and sets out state obligations to eliminate such discrimination in all areas of life – civil, political, economic, social and cultural. State parties to the convention are monitored by the CEDAW Committee, which also considers individual complaints under its Optional Protocol adopted in 1999. The Convention reflects a holistic approach to women's equality and has provided a legal framework for advancing women's rights globally.

Subsequent UN conferences in Copenhagen (1980), Nairobi (1985) and particularly Beijing (1995) progressively strengthened the global gender agenda. The Beijing Conference was a landmark political and social mobilisation that significantly influenced the global gender equality agenda. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action introduced powerful concepts such as gender mainstreaming, women's empowerment and intersectional equality. It identified 12 critical areas of concern, including "Women and Armed Conflict", which emphasised the importance of increasing women's participation in conflict resolution and peacebuilding, as well as protecting women affected by war. This event marked a shift in how the international community viewed gender and peace, framing women's rights as human rights and highlighting the central role of women in achieving sustainable peace. It was within this broader UN-led trajectory for gender equality that the Women, Peace and Security Agenda was conceived. The 1993 World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna also played a relevant role by affirming that women's rights are human rights.

The year 2000 marked a turning point with the adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325), the first resolution to formally acknowledge the link between women, peace and security. The resolution rests on four pillars: participation, protection, prevention, and relief and recovery. It was the result of sustained feminist advocacy and built on years of work by civil society actors, especially women's peace movements.

Adopted unanimously by the UN Security Council on 31 October 2000, Resolution 1325 represents a groundbreaking recognition of the differential impact of armed conflict on women and girls, and the essential role of women in peace processes. The resolution urges member states to

increase the representation of women at all levels of decision-making in national, regional and international institutions; to incorporate gender perspectives into peacekeeping missions; and to provide gender-sensitive training to peacekeepers. The resolution also calls for the protection of women and girls from gender-based violence, including sexual violence in conflict, and stresses the importance of women's contributions to the prevention and resolution of conflicts.

In the years following the adoption of UNSCR 1325, the WPS Agenda has been reinforced by a series of subsequent resolutions that have expanded and deepened its scope. Resolution 1820/2008 recognised sexual violence as a tactic of war and a threat to international peace and security. Resolutions 1888/2009 and 1889/2009 enhanced mechanisms for accountability and promoted women's participation in peace negotiations. Resolution 1960/2010 established monitoring and reporting mechanisms for sexual violence. Resolutions 2106/2013 and 2122/2013 aimed to strengthen implementation and address structural barriers. Resolution 2242/2015 further advanced the integration of the WPS Agenda with global security priorities, urging gender as a cross-cutting issue in counterterrorism and prevention of violent extremism. More recently, resolutions 2467/2019 and 2493/2019 reaffirmed commitments to survivor-centred approaches and full implementation of the WPS Agenda. Together, these resolutions have shaped a comprehensive normative framework that aims not only to protect women in conflict but also to transform peace and security through gender equality and inclusive and meaningful participation.

The international framework was further reinforced with the creation of UN Women in 2011 and the adoption of the Istanbul Convention on preventing and combating violence against women in the same year. The year 2015, with the 20th anniversary of Beijing (Beijing+20), the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals and the publication of the Global Study on Women, Peace and Security, represented a pivotal moment for reaffirming and expanding the Agenda. In 2020, the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Conference and the 20th anniversary of UNSCR 1325 provided a critical opportunity to assess progress and remaining gaps. Most recently, 2025 has marked the 25th anniversary of Resolution 1325 itself - a symbolic milestone that reaffirms the urgency of advancing the WPS Agenda through concrete implementation, especially in the face of ongoing global challenges.

Figure 1 | WPS Agenda Security Council resolutions

Source: Cadin (2022).

1.4 Implementing the Agenda: From National Action Plans to concrete practices

With the aim to implement in practice the goals of the WPS Agenda, National Action Plans (NAPs) have been identified by UNSCR 1325 and subsequent resolutions as the main tools through which member states are made responsible to concretely adopt strategies, actions and outcomes at the national level. As of September 2025, 115 countries have a NAP, a positive figure that shows how the number is increasing year after year. However, not all NAPs have dedicated budgets, and securing dedicated funding remains a challenge for their full implementation. As of 2024, only 29 plans (26 per cent), mostly in low-income countries, included a budget at the time of adoption (UN Women 2025).

The reason why several high-income countries report complexities in financing NAPs is due to decentralisation among various ministries, departments and agencies responsible for aspects of these plans. Moreover, the information available is often insufficient to monitor the allocation of funds and expenditure, making it difficult to assess the total amount allocated to overall implementation. For the first time in five years, there was a recent decrease in the percentage of existing NAPs that include a monitoring framework with indicators – from 86 per cent in 2022 to 81 per cent in 2023.

The available data continues to show limited progress, with a constant risk of reversals when countries' priorities change. In the current global context, it is more important than ever to bridge the gap between stated policy priorities and commitments on women, peace and security and the

funding needed to implement them, particularly in national budgets, which are the most important economic policy document of any government. As also requested by the UN Secretary-General, it is important that entities within the UN system, as well as all multi-partner trust funds, improve their targeting, monitoring and reporting on funding to women's civil society organisations in conflict-affected countries.

With the aim of filling some of the gaps about the actual inclusion of women in peace processes in line with Resolution 1325, and often specifically foreseen by National Action Plans, several national, regional and international women mediators networks¹ have emerged in recent years, under the auspices of the United Nations. These networks have been designed to ensure women's perspectives are represented more effectively in peace processes. Among these initiatives are networks across Africa, the Mediterranean, the Nordic countries, the Commonwealth, the Arab region and Southeast Asia, all of which provide vital platforms for women to engage in conflict prevention and mediation at broader levels.

In September 2019, the Global Alliance of Regional Women Mediator Networks was launched to strengthen connections among these initiatives, unify shared objectives and improve coordination. This alliance plays an essential role in amplifying women's participation and leadership while promoting gender-sensitive approaches to peace-making. It also contributes directly to advancing the Secretary-General's call for a renewed surge in diplomacy for peace.

The UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA), through its Gender, Peace and Security Unit, collaborates regularly with the Global Alliance, creating opportunities for information exchange and joint action. Complementing these efforts, the Department's Standby Team of Senior Mediation Advisers has delivered specialised training to members of regional networks, including FemWise-Africa, with a focus on conflict prevention, negotiation and other priority issues. Together, these initiatives reflect an expanding global movement aimed at ensuring that women's knowledge, leadership and mediation skills are fully recognised and integrated into peace processes at every level.²

¹ The next chapters of the volume will focus more in detail on the role of networks, and in particular the Mediterranean Women's Mediators Network, in their capacity as concrete implementers of the Agenda.

² UN Peacemaker website: *Normative Frameworks*, <https://peacemaker.un.org/en/node/222>; and *Women Mediator Networks*, <https://peacemaker.un.org/en/node/2095>.

1.5 Reflections on the WPS Agenda from academia

UNSCR 1325 has spurred a significant body of academic literature evaluating both its normative significance and practical implementation. Laura J. Shepherd (2008) offers a critical discourse analysis of the resolution, arguing that its production involved competing narratives about the role of women in security, some of which are transformative while others are instrumental. She identifies a tension between feminist goals and institutional priorities, with the risk that WPS becomes a technocratic exercise rather than a feminist project. Louise Olsson and Theodora-Ismene Gizelis (2015) analyse the implementation of UNSCR 1325 and find significant variations across countries and institutions. They show that while the resolution has contributed to increased visibility of women in peacebuilding, its practical impact often remains limited due to weak political commitment, lack of funding and the absence of enforcement mechanisms.

Figure 2 | Countries have adopted a National Action Plan on WPS (as of 2024)



Carol Cohn and colleagues (2004) similarly reflect on the ambivalences of institutional engagement. While acknowledging the importance of 1325 as a policy tool, she expresses concern that gender mainstreaming often gets reduced to box-checking and fails to challenge the underlying structures of conflict and exclusion.

Similarly, a growing strand of literature critiques the WPS Agenda from a postcolonial and Global South perspective. Pratt and Richter-Devroe

(2011) argue that the WPS framework often universalises women's experiences and applies Western liberal norms in ways that may not resonate with local realities. They warn against the instrumentalisation of women for geopolitical ends and urge a more grounded, bottom-up approach to peacebuilding.

Despite being published years before the adoption of the Agenda, Mohanty's (1984) foundational critique of Western feminist discourse – especially its tendency to portray "Third World women" as passive victims – remains relevant in this context. Similarly, Lila Abu-Lughod (2013) cautions against "rescue narratives" that frame foreign intervention as necessary to liberate women in non-Western societies, thus reinforcing colonial hierarchies.

The next chapter seeks to look in greater detail at the concrete impact of the WPS Agenda, by emphasising its more thorny dimensions while trying to find avenues for improvement. To do so, an overview of official assessments and open source reports is combined with first-hand information collected through a dedicated survey.

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2.

Twenty-five Years of Progress (?)

Gaia Ravazzolo and Giulia Daga

As highlighted in the first chapter, UNSCR 1325 represents a major milestone in gender mainstreaming but remains a contested and unevenly implemented instrument. Twenty-five years after its adoption, the WPS Agenda stands at a crossroads. As Luisa Del Turco highlights in her 2020 policy paper *20 Years of Resolution 1325: A Peace and Security Perspective*, the Agenda has become a “mirror” of the broader international system – reflecting both its achievements and its contradictions (Del Turco 2020).

The formal integration of gender perspectives in peace and security institutions has represented one of the most notable achievements of the WPS Agenda. This has included the proliferation of National Action Plans (NAPs) and gender-sensitive mandates, and an increased visibility of women’s contributions to peacebuilding. While significant normative progress has been made, the Agenda’s transformative potential remains only partially realised, especially in its “participation” and “prevention” (of conflict through an increased role of women) dimensions. This chapter looks at specific areas in which gaps in the WPS Agenda’s implementation are to be found, highlighting some recommendations on how they can be filled. Then, it incorporates the anonymous voices of women active in the peace and security field, by analysing the results of a survey conducted by the MWMN Secretariat with the aim of receiving feedback on the impact of the Agenda on the professional experience of women mediators, by identifying criticalities and possible solutions (MWMN 2025).

2.1 The impact of conflicts on women

Despite the progress achieved, the current international context remains marked by numerous armed conflicts that show a worrying regression in gender rights and protections. As highlighted in the *Global Peace Index*

2024, in the past five years alone, one hundred countries have been involved – at least partially – in some form of external conflict, a sharp increase compared to 59 in 2008 (Institute for Economics and Peace 2024). The most recent data further confirm the gravity of the situation: in 2023, more than 170 armed conflicts were recorded, with approximately 612 million women and girls living within 50 km of these areas – an increase of 150 per cent compared to a decade ago. In 2024, 676 million women and girls were exposed to conflict, the highest number since the 1990s (UN Women 2025). Another alarming indicator is the sharp rise in conflict-related sexual violence, with the number of such violations documented by the United Nations increasing by 87 per cent over the past two years (UN Security Council 2025). Sexual violence is only one of the many ways women and girls suffer in war. Between 2023 and 2024, the number of women and children killed in armed conflicts quadrupled, according to OHCHR, and seven in ten women killed worldwide died in Gaza (OHCHR 2025, UN Security Council 2025).

A structural gap therefore persists between the principles formally endorsed and their practical implementation, making it imperative to rethink the UN WPS Agenda. States are called upon not only to adopt a more consistent commitment to integrating a gender perspective into the interpretation and application of international law, but also to make women's participation in decision-making processes mandatory and to allocate greater resources to the implementation of the Agenda.

The Executive Director of UN Women, speaking at last year's *Reertoire of the Practice of the Security Council*, stressed the increasingly severe impact of conflicts on women and girls, particularly in light of the dramatic escalation of violence in the Middle East. Likewise, the Special Envoy for Women, Peace and Security of the African Union Commission underscored the devastating effects of armed conflict on women and girls globally, pointing to concrete cases of abduction, sexual violence and displacement in conflict zones.

The health situation is equally alarming: in 2023, 61 per cent of preventable maternal deaths occurred in 35 crisis-affected countries, equivalent to roughly 500 deaths per day (United Nations 2024). Added to this is the impact of food insecurity: according to FAO estimates, in 2023 more than one in four women and girls worldwide experienced moderate or severe food insecurity; in conflict-affected contexts, the proportion rises dramatically to one in two (FAO 2024, UN Women 2025). In 2025, more

than 280 million people faced acute food insecurity worldwide. As of 15 August 2025, the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification reported famine in Gaza affecting over 500,000 people, with another 1.07 million at an emergency level, a situation that also affects women and girls (UN Security Council 2025).

These figures demand that we move beyond an emergency-driven logic and adopt binding and structural measures. Safeguarding the rights of women and girls in conflict settings can no longer be postponed: it must become a non-negotiable cornerstone of international peace and security policies.

Mitigating these impacts requires not only the integration of women's leadership but also the establishment of robust protection mechanisms. One of the main unsolved problems regards the necessity to move beyond emergency-driven logics and adopt binding and structural measures to safeguard the rights of women and girls in conflict settings. Stronger international and national accountability for violations of women's rights by reinforcing legal action, cooperation with international courts, targeted sanctions and effective prosecution of gender-based violence in both conflict and public life are among the non-negotiable actions that states need to take.

2.2 The protection gap

National human rights institutions and international accountability mechanisms – investigations, trials and treaty bodies – remain central to advancing the WPS Agenda. Yet, the 2024 UN Secretary-General's report on WPS shows uneven progress: of 41 conflict-affected countries and territories with available data, only 25 had national human rights institutions fully or partially compliant with the Paris Principles on independence and effectiveness (UN Security Council 2024). The 2025 report of the UN Secretary-General on Women, Peace and Security further highlights that, among 159 countries responding to the UN Women survey for the 30-year review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, 69 per cent of conflict-affected countries reported having strengthened the capacity of their security sector institutions on human rights and the prevention of sexual and gender-based violence, as well as sexual exploitation and abuse (UN Security Council 2025).

At the same time, well-funded and increasingly coordinated anti-gender and anti-feminist movements are gaining influence worldwide, as high-

lighted by the UN Working Group on Discrimination against Women and Girls (UN Human Rights Council 2024). This backlash is visible both online and offline and has translated into concrete setbacks: the repeal of laws advancing gender equality, systematic non-compliance with gender-related provisions in peace agreements, and the adoption of decrees banning the use of gender-related terminology. Women leaders and organisations advocating for equality face growing insecurity, harassment and direct attacks, while LGBTQI+ communities are targeted with rising levels of violence. Intergovernmental negotiations have also become arenas of resistance, where language on women's rights and gender equality – particularly in conflict and crisis contexts – is constantly under threat of regression.

The UN Gender Social Norms Index confirms this worrying trend, reporting no significant improvement in gender bias against women over the past decade (UNDP 2023). Against this backdrop, it is vital that member states and regional organisations with established WPS policies not only reaffirm but actively implement their commitments, especially in fragile and conflict-affected contexts. Initiatives such as the MWMN play an important role in sustaining this agenda where resistance is strongest.

State actors can strengthen legal and policy protections in several ways: repeal laws and policies that curtail women's and girls' rights, participation and bodily autonomy; adopt zero tolerance for intimidation or reprisals against women in politics, peacebuilding, humanitarian and human rights work, or cooperation with UN mechanisms (including the Security Council), with stronger legal shields for women human rights defenders, explicit digital-safety provisions, and recognition of gender-based persecution in asylum procedures. Moreover, states can increase their effort in guaranteeing services for survivors of wartime sexual violence, by ensuring timely access to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services, including emergency care for pregnancies resulting from rape, and by acknowledging the widespread, systematic use of sexual violence as a tactic of war.

Also, governments should create and fund spaces where women engage across conflict lines to counter prejudice, surface common priorities and co-design programmes tied to peace processes; as highlighted also in the *Corporate Evaluation of UN Women's Support to Women's Participation in Peace Processes*, these initiatives should be anchored in women's own agendas and designed for continuity, not one-off events (UN Women Independent Evaluation Service 2025).

Another most pressing set of interventions is needed to counter the worrying backlash in women's rights protection with a system-wide strategy that moves beyond ad hoc responses to anti-gender campaigns. This includes adopting an organisation-wide approach – grounded in country-level consultations with women's movements and allies – to tackle resistance, harmful gender norms and the rejection of women's rights in negotiation settings, as highlighted also in the *Corporate Evaluation of UN Women's Support to Women's Participation in Peace Processes* (UN Women Independent Evaluation Service 2025).

This should go hand in hand with expanded education and training on WPS across sectors, so as to build a gender-aware peace culture. In Italy, for example, although gender-related education and training have gradually expanded over the years, with specific programmes on the WPS Agenda still comparatively limited, further consolidation and integration remain crucial. Strengthening and mainstreaming gender education across disciplines – law, international relations, political science, medicine and the sciences – and embedding foundational gender literacy (sex/gender distinctions, gender perspectives, empowerment, equality) at all levels of schooling, from primary to secondary education, are key steps toward fostering sustainable structural and cultural transformation.

Finally, protection can be enhanced also by broadening and diversifying stakeholder engagement. Dialogue needs to be conducted systematically with actors who are sceptical of peace process design – or of UN Women itself. This requires stronger and more coordinated collaboration between headquarters, regional and country offices, and with other entities, to ensure context-specific dialogue that informs programme choices and course corrections.

2.3 The participation gap

The participation gap of women in formal peace processes mirrors their endemic underrepresentation in public life and decision-making. As of 12 September 2025, there are 32 women serving as heads of state or government in 29 countries worldwide. Nineteen countries are led by a woman head of state, and 22 by a woman head of government. At the current pace, gender parity in the highest offices of power will not be reached for another 130 years (UN Women 2025). According to UN Women, only 27.2

per cent of parliamentarians in single or lower houses are women, a modest improvement from 11 per cent in 1995. Gender parity remains an exception rather than the rule: only six countries – Rwanda (64 per cent), Cuba (56 per cent), Nicaragua (55 per cent), Andorra (50 per cent), Mexico (50 per cent) and the United Arab Emirates (50 per cent) – have achieved equal or greater female representation in parliament (UN Women 2025). A further 21 countries have reached or surpassed the 40 per cent threshold, yet 21 states still count less than 10 per cent of women parliamentarians, including three lower chambers with no women at all (UN Women 2025). This situation falls short of the objective of balanced political participation and power-sharing between women and men set by the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. It is also relevant to consider gender-based violence against women in politics, which continues to pose a significant barrier to meaningful participation.

To respond to a scenario that has consolidated over the years, and which, despite gradual progress over the past three decades, continues to reveal a significant female participation gap in political representation and in decision-making more broadly, the CEDAW Committee in 2024 issued General Recommendation No. 40, observing that “the long-term and structural absence of women globally from decision-making systems not only constitutes a major human rights’ violation, but also deprives the world of the potential of half its population” (CEDAW Committee 2024).

The Recommendation urges equal and inclusive representation of women across peace negotiations, post-conflict reconstruction, transitional justice, security, humanitarian aid and peacekeeping. Since the adoption of the earlier General Recommendation No. 30 in 2013, many states have progressively incorporated WPS themes into their CEDAW reporting. Building on this process, the *Guidebook on CEDAW General Recommendation No. 30* (UN Women 2015) provided practical direction to states and civil society on aligning CEDAW obligations with the WPS Agenda. It highlighted persistent gaps in data collection, sectoral mainstreaming and reporting continuity, while documenting emerging legislative and institutional reforms. The subsequent issuance of General Recommendation No. 40 (CEDAW Committee 2023, 2024) further consolidated this trajectory, setting out detailed guidance on legal, policy and programmatic measures to advance gender parity in decision-making systems.

Quotas, though contentious, remain potentially an effective tool to boost representation and normalise women’s presence in leadership.

Their impact is visible: in Sierra Leone, increased female representation in parliament in 2023 contributed to the landmark ban on child marriage in 2024 (UN Security Council 2024). Evidence also suggests that gender quotas have been instrumental in driving progress: countries with legislated candidate quotas record five percentage points more women in national parliaments and seven percentage points more in local governments compared to those without such measures (UN Women 2025).

Finally, women's role in shaping the rule of law remains constrained. Repealing gender-discriminatory laws requires intergenerational engagement, particularly involving young women in reform processes. But women remain underrepresented in international judicial institutions: since 1945, only six women – just 5 per cent of the total – have served as judges on the International Court of Justice (UN Security Council 2024).

This broader participation gap is reflected in the data on women's role in peace and security processes. According to the 2025 UN Secretary-General's Report on Women, Peace and Security, in 2024 women made up only 7 per cent of negotiators on average worldwide, while women mediators accounted for 14 per cent. Around two thirds of mediation efforts and 90 per cent of negotiations did not include women. Moreover, women's representation in peace agreements corresponded to 20 per cent in 2024, with an even lower five-year average of 11 per cent. In 2024, of the 36 peace agreements concluded, only 11 (31 per cent) contained explicit references to women, girls, gender or sexual violence, a slight increase from 26 per cent in 2023. A comparative analysis of the period 2005–2019 does, however, highlight a positive correlation: countries with NAPs on WPS appointed women to 22 per cent of mediation roles, compared with only 6.25 per cent in countries without such plans. As noted in the 2024 UN Secretary-General's report on WPS, there are promising experiences too – from women's collaboration with the Office of the Special Envoy in Syria, to informal political dialogues in Lebanon and the inclusive mediation plan launched in Libya. Nonetheless, structural shortcomings remain evident (UN Security Council 2025).

To tackle the participation gaps, governments should increase their efforts through a series of tailored initiatives that promote women's full, equal and effective participation at the local level, spanning conflict resolution, humanitarian coordination and governance, community safety, access to justice, early warning mechanisms and strategies for climate change mitigation and adaptation.

2.4 Financing WPS: Persistent challenges and emerging opportunities

In all the directions through which the WPS Agenda can and needs to be enhanced, the question of insufficient funding remains one of the most critical challenges. Despite two decades of policy development, many actors – including member states with dedicated NAPs – continue to face difficulties in tracking progress against their WPS commitments and in monitoring related budgets and expenditures. Persistent gender data gaps, alongside the broader lack of disaggregated data, further hinder the monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and other global frameworks. Nonetheless, some progress has been achieved: gender data are now available for 63 per cent of SDG indicators, compared to 26 per cent in 2015 (UN Security Council 2025). Yet, adequate and predictable financing remains a major challenge. Many NAPs continue to depend on external assistance for implementation, limiting their long-term impact. As the WPS Agenda marks its 25th anniversary, NAPs should be reimagined not as peripheral policy tools, but as strategic blueprints for conflict prevention and crisis response, requiring stronger institutionalisation across the security sector and in interconnected areas such as climate action, recovery and reconstruction (UN Security Council 2025). One major challenge lies in assessing and tracking allocations: in 2024, of the 25 conflict-affected countries with available data, only seven (28 per cent) have comprehensive systems in place to monitor and earmark budgetary resources for gender equality and women's empowerment (UN Security Council 2024). As reiterated by the UN Secretary-General, the lack of adequate and predictable funding is a central obstacle to overcoming stagnation and regression, and to delivering fully on WPS commitments. Too often, support has been limited to small-scale, short-term projects, with resources either failing to materialise or being rapidly withdrawn when government, donor or security priorities shift. The Secretary-General has also underscored that the international financial architecture has failed many by widening inequalities between and within countries and remains complicit in perpetuating gender inequality. Women's historical marginalisation within economic and financial systems continues to limit their access to resources, opportunities and decision-making power – disparities that become especially pronounced in conflict and crisis settings (UN Security Council 2024).

Recent evidence points to a growing mismatch between global commitments and available resources for gender equality and the WPS Agenda. As noted in the 2025 UN Secretary-General's report on WPS, "financing for peace, development and the realization of rights, including gender equality, is dropping, while the needs are rising". Funding for WPS and humanitarian action has consistently fallen short of the scale of the challenge, with less than five years remaining to achieve the 2030 SDGs. Between 2022 and 2023, bilateral official development assistance to contexts of high and extreme fragility averaged 50 billion US dollars per year, yet only 5.2 per cent (2.5 billion US dollars) was dedicated primarily to gender equality (UN Security Council 2025). Support for women's rights organisations in these settings declined further to 186 million US dollars (0.4 per cent) – well below the 1 per cent minimum target recommended by the United Nations. Preliminary OECD data indicate that in 2024 international aid fell by 7.1 per cent in real terms, with a third of donors reducing their gender focus. Humanitarian aid remains particularly underfunded in gender terms, with only 20 per cent of bilateral assistance targeting gender equality as a principal or significant objective (UN Security Council 2025). The consequences are stark: a UN Women global survey (March 2025) found that 90 per cent of women-led groups in crisis contexts were financially affected by recent cuts, and nearly half expected to close within six months.

As humanitarian crises intensify, funding gaps are especially severe in addressing gender-based violence (GBV). Between 2021 and 2023, UN requests for GBV prevention and response increased by 40 per cent, but in 2023, only 23.1 per cent of identified needs were met – equivalent to less than 1 per cent of humanitarian aid spending. Only a fraction reached front-line organisations. An evaluation of the 25 million US dollar global grant from the Central Emergency Response Fund to UN Women and UNFPA in 2023 showed that 40 per cent of resources were sub-granted to local women's organisations in 11 countries, confirming that investing in grassroots actors is both feasible and effective (UN Security Council 2024).

Nevertheless, within the United Nations, some progress has been made in tracking and mainstreaming gender-related expenditures. In 2024, 42 entities reported using the gender equality marker, and 24 of 113 country teams allocated at least 15 per cent of resources to gender-focused activities (UN Secretary-General 2025). Pooled funding mechanisms, such as the Peacebuilding Fund and country-based humanitarian

funds, continue to play a crucial role but are not immune to financial contraction. The Peacebuilding Fund, for example, reduced its approvals from 202 million US dollars in 2023 to 116 million in 2024, with allocations to gender equality falling from 47.3 to 43 per cent. By contrast, allocations from humanitarian pooled funds to women-led organisations increased modestly, from 7 to 11 per cent of total disbursements (101.6 million US dollars) (UN Security Council 2025).

Progress has also come through pooled funding mechanisms. The Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund (WPHF), the only global instrument dedicated to supporting local women's organisations in conflict and crisis contexts, has become a critical lifeline for women's leadership and participation in peacebuilding. In 2023, the Fund raised over 45 million US dollars, its highest annual mobilisation since its creation, and between 2016 and 2024 it supported more than 1,300 local women's organisations in 44 crisis-affected countries, including 158 that received essential institutional funding. Building on this momentum, on 8 March 2023 the Fund launched its global Invest-In-Women campaign, that by August 2025 had mobilised a cumulative 123 million US dollars, reaching over 1,600 local women's organisations across 49 crisis-affected countries (UN Women 2025, UN Security Council 2025). These achievements underscore both the persistent structural underfunding of the WPS Agenda and the potential of innovative financing mechanisms like the WPHF to bridge the enduring gap in resources for women's participation in peacebuilding and humanitarian action.

As emphasised in recent reports, all states and regional organisations must be prepared to invest political capital and sustainable financial resources to achieve transformative results in line with the WPS Agenda. Without such commitment, women peacebuilders, human rights defenders and grassroots organisations will remain underfunded, and the structural exclusion of women from peace processes will persist. More specifically, there is a need to expand financial instruments with measurable benchmarks for gender equality and women's organisations. This includes ensuring stable and predictable financing for the implementation of NAPs, including dedicated streams to support women's organisations. To reduce political vulnerability, funding mechanisms should be insulated from shifting governmental priorities. Political vulnerability and discretion can also be addressed by strengthening the legal standing of NAPs, such as converting their guidelines into laws or introducing sanctions for

non-compliance. Also, governments should ensure accessible funding for local and diverse women's organisations in conflict and crisis contexts – including those addressing sensitive issues such as sexual and reproductive rights or challenging discriminatory gender norms – by reducing bureaucratic barriers, simplifying application and reporting, increasing flexibility, and prioritising core and long-term support.

2.5 Assessing the Agenda: Women's voices from the field

With the intent to receive feedback from women active in the peace and security field on the impact of the WPS Agenda, a survey was designed and circulated between 2024 and 2025. The survey received 28 responses to the part dedicated to the WPS Agenda. Thirty-nine per cent of the respondents work in formal negotiations and peace talks (Track 1), 30 per cent define themselves as active in multi-stakeholder dialogue processes (Track 2 and 1.5), 17 per cent in community or local mediation (Track 3) and 17 per cent work in peacebuilding/reconciliation. Within these settings, respondents reported playing advisory/expert roles, training or capacity-building roles, and/or active mediation/facilitation.

A large majority of the respondents (83 per cent) reported that UNSCR 1325 has affected their work, and most of them agree that the WPS Agenda has generally enhanced the role of women in negotiation and mediation settings (fully agree 22 per cent; partially agree 70 per cent; partially disagree 9 per cent). From a geographic point of view, respondents from the MENA region seem to share a more positive view of the agenda, with 30 per cent of them fully agreeing on the enhanced role of women through the Agenda, in comparison to 18 per cent of European respondents.

The main positive effect of the Agenda, according to 35 per cent of the respondents, is greater inclusion and participation. Parity rules, such as the 30 per cent quota in formal peace processes across Africa, agreed upon by the African Union (Amani Africa 2025), have had a real impact on the number of women being invited to the negotiation tables. Despite the criticism that quota systems can generate, the increased participation of women has, according to the respondents, actually allowed delegations to consolidate inputs from a gender perspective, which was often ignored previously. In this way, tokenism could be in time transformed into strengthened advocacy power. Moreover, some respondents emphasise

that the UNSC resolution has created the normative ground for women to stand on and demand more active participation.

Sixty-one per cent of respondents indicate that the gender dimension was considered in their activities. Some argue that mainstreaming tools are central to their work. This includes embedding a gender analysis in agenda preparation and briefings, working on gender-sensitive language in outcome documents, and/or setting parity goals for panels and delegations. Others mention that a focus on safeguards against sexual and gender-based violence, or on do-no-harm protocols, is the key part of their daily work. Some others dedicate part of their work to training stakeholders in raising awareness. Notably, many respondents highlight how often the integration of a gender dimension remains an ad hoc exercise, and lacks the mechanisation necessary to embed it permanently in the processes they have been involved in.

Despite the strong emphasis on the positive impact of the Agenda on the respondents' work environment, the survey also revealed many pitfalls. Critical assessments converge on insufficient political will or instrumentalisation (32 per cent) and weak implementation/enforcement (25 per cent) with further references to fragmented or short-term funding (7 per cent) and tokenism/box-ticking (4 per cent). Insufficient political will is seen as the main reason behind the slow implementation of the Agenda: while commitments are reiterated in conferences, WPS items often are included in side-sessions of meetings, without reaching the core agenda of negotiations. This is connected to the fact that tokenism can lead only to symbolic implementations of the Agenda, with reference to women's participation only used rhetorically as a legitimising tool rather than as a reflection of a real decision-making power. Moreover, the enforcement gap is stated to be due to the lack of accountability mechanisms that sanction non-compliance of the implementation of national plans and policies that, on paper, refer to the Agenda. Lastly, funding gaps and a short-term vision promote fragmentation of activities, with a lot of pilot projects having no continuity.

According to an Agenda expert and member of the MWMN, María Villegas,¹ the Agenda has created a normative frame that legitimises wom-

¹ Villegas is a researcher at the School for a Culture of Peace (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona). Her core work combines systematic monitoring and comparative analysis. Each year she and her team produce two yearbooks: one maps all ongoing armed conflicts, and a second catalogues formal peace processes, specifying parties, the presence or absence of external mediation, agenda items and the sequence of negotiation events. A

en's participation and supplies vocabulary for advocacy; when broad alliances form – women's movements, mediators, UN agencies and sympathetic governments – women's issues enter negotiations more effectively. Yet, she stresses that recent trendlines are adverse: even the UN Secretary-General's reporting, she notes, records a decline in women's inclusion at peace tables. In line with the results of the survey, she confirms that the binding constraint is political will. Commitments are routinely voiced for reputational gain but are rarely matched by structural reforms. Under-resourcing compounds the gap: "we don't need more training" as such, she argues; resources are the missing enabler for women's sustained participation. The macro-context is also deteriorating: a global normalisation of war and militarism, rising military expenditures, and neglect of diplomacy and civil-society support create a hostile environment for feminist peace. In practice, men seldom table gender provisions; when women's organisations push, provisions appear, but absent such pressure they do not. The most promising pathway therefore remains strong domestic women's movements, adequately funded to build coalitions, set agendas and claim legitimacy before conflict parties. In short, WPS has opened doors conceptually; moving from mandate to method requires political commitment, financing and coalition-building that can withstand the present headwinds.²

Overall, respondents portray a picture in which the WPS Agenda has opened access points and supplied a normative basis for action, and yet its effect is contingent on political commitment and operational follow-through, particularly where resources and enforcement remain thin.

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distinctive contribution of this programme is a continuous attempt to document women's participation and gendered provisions inside formal talks – whether women appear on delegations or in mediation teams, and whether agenda items address women's rights. She notes the empirical challenge: some processes lack public information, and in others women delegates are present but do not advance gender provisions, prioritising their factional agendas. Alongside the yearbooks, her centre has conducted monographic studies on WPS since 2004, tracing advances and obstacles across cases.

² Author's interview with María Villegas, 19 February 2025.

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PART II
ASSESSING THE AGENDA
VIEWS FROM MWMN MEDIATORS

3.

Women Peacebuilders in Mediation Efforts: Challenges and Pathways for Inclusion

María Villegas Ariño

Mediation has become a central peacebuilding tool in recent decades. As Marko Lehti (2019: 1) points out, it has been regarded as “the most essential, effective and also cheapest tool for preventing, managing and resolving armed conflicts”. The term increasingly defines a broader reality that would include activities ranging “from high-level diplomacy to grass roots peacebuilding, reflecting a much greater interest in the idea of multi-track diplomacy” (Turner and Wählisch 2021: 1). According to data from the Escola de Cultura de Pau, in 2023 at least one third party was involved in 89 per cent of the peace processes active during that year.

3.1 The barriers against women’s mediation

Feminist research has repeatedly confirmed the patriarchal nature of peace processes, both because of the male preponderance of those who lead them, and the exclusionary practices that are reproduced during these processes (Paffenholz 2018, Fellin and Turner 2021). Women continue to be underrepresented in peace processes and, as contacts between the warring parties in an armed conflict are formalised, women who have carried out mediation tasks at the local level progressively disappear from the scene, generally giving way to international mediation teams (Turner 2018). Indeed, the high-level evaluation of the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda by the United Nations in 2015 found that women’s participation in peace processes was one of the areas of peacebuilding in which the most challenges remained (Coomaraswamy 2015). Nine years later, the Secretary General acknowledged in his latest WPS report that there is “a lack of overall progress on

women's full, equal and meaningful participation in peace processes" with data showing that on average, women were 9.6 per cent of negotiators, 13.7 per cent of mediators and 26.6 per cent of agreement signatories (UN Security Council 2024: point 22).

The observation that mediation has been one of the great gaps in the implementation of the WPS agenda has led in recent years to the emergence of initiatives and formulas to respond to this weakness. Women's civil society organisations (CSOs), women diplomats, governments and international institutions have explored ways, not without challenges and obstacles, to promote mediation standards in accordance with the requirements established in the different Security Council resolutions, such as consultation processes with women CSOs or gender technical expertise provided to mediation teams.

In peace processes, actors who have carried out mediation tasks have played both positive and negative roles with respect to the inclusion of women and gender agendas. In some cases, such as Syria, Mali or Libya, the role of third parties has contributed to hindering women's participation, acting as gatekeepers. Third parties have questioned women's legitimacy or representativity and have expressed reluctance to women's inclusion due to cultural reasons or have even ignored their right to participation.

3.2 Women's mediation on the ground: Achievements and obstacles

In other cases, the role of the mediating actors has been positive and has served to promote, facilitate and legitimise the participation of women and the negotiation of gender agendas within the framework of the dialogues. Some examples can be found in the processes in Colombia between 2012 and 2016 – with a broad participation of women in different spaces of the negotiations – the National Dialogue process in Yemen between 2013 and 2014 – a quota of 30 per cent of women was established for all delegations included in the dialogue – or the negotiations in Kenya after the electoral crisis of 2007 – each of the parties that participated in the dialogue included a woman in its delegation.

On many occasions, the activism of women's peace movements organised around the issue of participation in negotiations has been an important path for the inclusion of women and the gender perspective.

Mediation teams have been an advocacy target for women's organisations, to achieve more inclusive processes, asking mediators to pressure conflict parties regarding the inclusion of women and advocating feminist agendas and recognition of women's rights to be part of the negotiations.

In Colombia, the push of these organisations grouped in the National Summit of Women and Peace (*Cumbre Nacional de Mujeres y Paz*),¹ achieved the inclusion of several women in the negotiating teams, the establishment of the gender subcommission and an agreement in which the gender approach permeated the entire text in a transversal way, as well as different institutions in charge of implementation and verification of compliance.

In Afghanistan, the inclusion of four women in the government negotiating team in the dialogue process with the Taliban, which was unsuccessfully carried out between 2020 and 2021, was due partly to the work of women's CSOs. In the previous years, they had led different advocacy efforts to be included in talks with the Taliban (Villellas Ariño 2016: 8). In Sri Lanka, the women's movement forged alliances with women's organisations at the international level to strengthen their demands on the parties to the conflict and to be included in the peace process. After the start of the negotiations, Sri Lankan women's organisations promoted an international mission to the conflict areas to prepare a report with recommendations for the process. This report led to the decision to establish the gender sub-committee for the negotiations as a participation structure for women. Sure, the formula for participation agreed upon at the negotiating table was not proposed by women, who aspired to have 30 per cent representation of women in all the committees of the negotiations, but – as one of the members of the subcommittee pointed out – "we were given an opportunity and we've taken it" (D'Souza and Cobley 2003). However, the peace process failed to be successfully completed.

¹ The National Summit of Women and Peace was integrated by nine different women's organisations and platforms (Casa de la Mujer, Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres, Red Nacional de Mujeres, Mujeres por la paz, Colectivo de Pensamiento y Acción 'Mujeres, Paz y Seguridad', Grupo de Seguimiento de la Resolución 1325, Conferencia Nacional de Organizaciones Afrocolombianas, Iniciativa de Mujeres Colombianas por la Paz and Asociación Nacional de Mujeres Campesinas, Negras e Indígenas de Colombia) and gathered 500 women in Bogotá in 2013. See the official website: <https://www.cumbrenacionaldemujeresypaz.com.co>.

3.3 The (not always) enabling role of the international community

Support from the international community, however, cannot be taken for granted. In Syria, for example, women's organisations initially tried to influence the United Nations special envoy, Lakhdar Brahimi, to gain a space at the negotiating table to no avail. It was not until the appointment of a new special envoy, Staffan de Mistura, that they achieved a greater commitment to their inclusion in the negotiations, in a process fraught with difficulties and contradictions. In Libya, women's organisations asked the United Nations and various countries involved in the national transition process for assistance in order to be included in the high-level meeting convened in 2011 backing the Benghazi National Transitional Council, but they did not obtain the support of international actors for their demands.

Some of the challenges that persist in achieving a gender-sensitive mediation and facilitation efforts point to the structural difficulties in ensuring that the WPS agenda becomes a transformative tool in a context of predominance of liberal peace marked by neo-colonialism that constantly excludes women from the global South. The international community has favoured the participation of specific groups of women and, often, their instrumentalisation with the aim of promoting a certain international agenda of peace and security (Martín de Almagro 2018). Thus, sometimes the WPS agenda has become a tool for building liberal peace and not so much for addressing the structural causes of conflicts with little impact on gender inequalities related to armed conflict or violence. Aspects such as profound economic transformations that have to do with the inequalities resulting from the neoliberal international economic order have been left off the agenda, and consequently from the discussions in most peace processes, with enormous consequences for women both during and after armed conflicts. Frequently the most critical groups of women or those that have most directly experienced the impact of these neoliberal economic policies are not part of the repertoire of local actors with whom the international bureaucracy of the WPS agenda interacts and, above all, the facilitating actors in peace negotiations.

3.4 Challenges and opportunities ahead

Other challenges point to dilemmas intrinsic to mediation practice, insofar as the values and norms promoted by mediating actors can be perceived as

political agendas. In a context in which the WPS agenda is increasingly considered as an effective and fair tool for sustainable peacebuilding, despite the aforementioned challenges and limitations, its promotion by mediator or facilitator actors should not be perceived as an attempt at self-interested interference during a peace process, but rather as an adaptation to international standards on human rights and gender justice, provided that it is accompanied by processes in which meaningful participation is promoted to include a wide spectrum of actors representative of local diversity.

Given the non-linear nature of peace processes, with constant advances and setbacks, as well as the multiple phases in which they take place and the increasing diversity of tasks performed by third parties through them, facilitating actors such as mediators or advisors can be essential levers for women's participation in negotiations. Facilitation and mediation make it possible to convey to the negotiating actors suggestions on unexplored or alternative paths to achieve peace. Women, and other traditionally excluded groups, have developed agendas and proposals that enrich both the negotiations and the resulting peace agreements and also have the potential to overcome entrenched obstacles that frequently hinder settlements. Therefore, the proactive dimension of mediation constitutes an opportunity to promote peace processes that make inclusion and gender justice a distinctive sign.

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4.

How Women Mediators Overcome Resistance: Innovative Strategies from the Field

Ç. Esra Çuhadar

A “second-class woman [...] who aspires to be like a man”. As Miriam Coronel-Ferrer (2014: 5) recalls, this is just one example of the antagonistic behaviours received by the women who were part of the panel of the Bangsamoro peace talks, which resulted in a peace agreement in 2014 ending the decades-long war between the Philippines government and the separatist Moro Islamic Liberation Front in the majority-Muslim south. Ferrer, who was the chief negotiator for the Philippines government (GoP), remembers that she was personally called a “traitor” and insulted on social media, with threats of physical and sexual violence and including demeaning comments such as calling her a “weak negotiator”.¹

Unfortunately, this is only one instance of the difficulties women negotiators and mediators face across various conflict contexts.² Ferrer and her colleagues succeeded despite all the impediments and she became one of the few women signatories of a negotiated agreement. Like her, many other women develop strategies to deal with such barriers. Women who serve as negotiators and mediators (either at official talks or mediating local conflicts) constantly innovate ways to overcome various types of resistance to their inclusion in the talks. In previous research, I defined

¹ Interview with Miriam Coronel-Ferrer, Washington DC, June 2018.

² This article is based on in-depth interviews with 30 women negotiators and mediators around the world. Informed consent was obtained for the interviews. The project was supported by the Jennings Randolph Senior Fellowship granted to the author by the United States Institute of Peace to study resistance to inclusion in peace processes. For more information and further reading on the topic see Çuhadar (2020).

resistance to the inclusion of women as the behaviours of a particular person (or people) or group(s) that undermine women's inclusion in the peace or transition process, which can be categorised into three types of behaviour: implicit resistance, explicit resistance and coercive resistance (Çuhadar 2020: 4-5).

The non-violent strategies used by women to react to these kinds of resistance can instead be grouped into two categories: contentious and non-contentious.³ Contentious includes confrontational responses that do not refrain from escalating the verbal conflict with those who resist their participation; non-contentious include responses that address the resistance behaviour through dialogue and problem-solving approaches without escalating a conflict with the resisting actor.

4.1 Contentious strategies

Women negotiators use non-violent action to support their negotiating power vis-à-vis their opponents or competitors and to lobby for including accountability for conflict-related sexual violence as an action item in the negotiations. For example, in the negotiations over Kosovo with Serbia, Editra Tahiri, one of the Kosovar negotiators, organised the first Kosovar rally with more than 5,000 women against the occupation of Kosovo. This helped her to be nominated as a delegate for the convention to elect the presidency of the Democratic League of Kosovo (DLK) and secured her place as a member of the presidency, thus becoming the only woman in the leadership of the movement. Having a decision-making position enabled her to become the only woman negotiator at the Rambouillet Peace Conference in 1999. She also used non-violent action strategies like petitions to champion women's demands for justice concerning conflict-related sexual violence committed against Kosovar women during the conflict. Petitions and rallies were used by women in Sudan, too, to push the government actors to act in areas where they had promised to deliver on women's inclusion during the political transition talks and to hold them responsible for delaying implementation in this area.

The second non-violent contentious strategy is creating alternative channels for information gathering in the negotiations. Women negotiators from different contexts have mentioned a lack of access to critical

³ Conflict transformation strategies were first categorised as contentious and non-contentious by Kriesberg (1998).

information in the negotiation process, especially if these women participate independently as part of civil society rather than as representatives of one of the central conflict parties. To overcome this problem, women across different contexts set up alternative channels to receive information about talks. In some cases, like the talks in Northern Ireland resulting in the 1998 Good Friday Agreement, the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition (NIWC) relied on an influential woman politician who was informed about the process. In Sudan, women activists relied on social media networks to get more information. In these and other cases, women created their own information systems to ensure they were informed of what was happening in the negotiations. Thus, it is crucial for assigned mediators to hold special information sessions for women negotiators in the talks to make sure they are fully informed and have up-to-date information.

As mentioned, this strategy was sometimes combined with women using leverage through powerful "friends" or allies in the negotiation process. These powerful friends can be women in high positions or men in influential positions who are friendly to the women's demands. In addition to alliances and leveraging with influential men, women reported other alliance-building strategies during the peace process in multiple contexts to leverage their influence. These include galvanising the support of international actors or countries supporting women's inclusion, coalition-building with other societal actors, and women supporting other women through women networks. Coalition- and alliance-building has been a strategy that women's groups have employed in various settings to overcome barriers, such as in Liberia: here, women allied with religious actors when their initial efforts to get through to the president and the leader of the armed group became unsuccessful (Gbowee 2011, Ouellet 2013).

The third non-violent contentious strategy is direct verbal confrontation and assertive pushback. Such confrontation sometimes occurs as a "friendly reminder" but other times can be quite antagonistic. Verbal confrontation results in escalation when the type of resistance is more direct and intentional, as in the case of Afghan women negotiators during various talks they were involved with. In one case, in negotiations with an Islamic armed group operating in parts of Afghanistan, the resistance of the representatives of the armed group to the Afghan woman negotiator from the Afghan government who was meant to read the final statement to the

press was only overcome after her male colleagues in the delegation took a solid position in her support. Her team insisted that either she read it, or no one did; only then did the resistors back down.

4.2 Non-contentious strategies

The most frequently mentioned strategy, cited by more than two-thirds of the women interviewed, alludes to the importance of “being an expert” or “gaining expertise” as a key leverage for meaningful inclusion in a high-level official negotiation or a local mediation process. Expertise in multiple contexts helped women enter the negotiations and sustain their presence on the teams when they met with suspicion and resistance. Some women suggested that they purposefully introduce themselves, emphasising the “Ph.D.” in their title, after they realised that this prompted more respect and acceptance from others in the talks and enhanced their legitimacy. Other women initially involved in the talks in an administrative or support capacity, such as legal assistant, managed to climb up in the negotiation team and took a central position when their specialised lawyer skills were needed, and they became indispensable in drafting documents and agreements. In another context, a high-level mediator reported how the request for her involvement always started with “support” or “help” and later became a significant mediation role for her but only after her performance was seen or, in her words, “expertise is proven”. Others mentioned that they purposefully educated themselves on issues women were excluded from, such as economic and security topics. In the Northern Ireland context, women were prepared for all the issues in the peace talks, like the release of prisoners, addressing the grievances of conflict victims, economic measures, etc., in the working groups the NIWC had formed. This was instrumental in empowering them in the talks, not just on women’s issues but also building alliances on specific topics with other political parties and increasing their leverage. Similarly, in the Libyan context, preparation helped empower women to achieve parity and act more confidently around powerful men.

The second most frequently mentioned non-contentious strategy is using various dialogue and negotiation skills to overcome resistance behaviour. Almost all the women interviewed highlighted good listening skills in overcoming unsympathetic behaviours toward women or in overcoming tensions in their communication with some traditional authori-

ties, like religious figures or tribal leaders. Many women interviewed thought they had better listening skills than their male colleagues, and listening to marginalised groups or armed groups without any judgment was something these people experienced only with them. Some women gave examples of how specific mediation skills, like reframing, were used effectively to address challenging behaviours, especially objections to gender-specific text in the agreements.⁴ Women used reframing to move from an adversarial and zero-sum understanding to a non-zero-sum and consensual frame. For example, in the Bangsamoro negotiations, the Liberation Front delegates were not comfortable with the term “non-discrimination based on sex”, as the term “sex” was found offensive by the group referencing Islamic practice. They then reframed it to “gender” in the text (Coronel-Ferrer 2014: 4), which read as “non-discrimination on the basis of religion, class, gender”, which was acceptable. The Liberation Front argued that “men and women are different biologically and cannot be the same”. This objection was overcome when Ferrer reframed the concept as “parity of esteem”, meaning “equal does not mean being the same biologically but that each sex receives the dignity it deserves equally”, which had a similar meaning but a different semantic articulation and was indeed acceptable to all parties. In another reframing example, a Yemeni local mediator faced pushback when she presented herself as a mediator; she reframed her role and presented herself as “helping to fix the road problem and assisting the community”, which allowed her to be accepted as a woman.

Women also used goodwill gestures and humour as part of effective communication skills. Sometimes, women used gestures in a tit-for-tat manner, reciprocating a behaviour they found offensive. Other times, women used gestures to break ice and initiate fun that they thought would help communication. In Northern Ireland, women used jokes to deflect humiliating comments about their presence in the negotiations. For example, one of the women negotiators in the talks in Northern Ireland was told by a Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) member to go home and have babies. She responded by singing, “Stand by Your Man” (Çuhadar

⁴ Reframing in a mediation setting is changing how a situation is presented or perceived semantically by changing the language used to describe it, in order to create a new perspective on the situation and open the way for problem-solving. For more information on reframing see Spangler (2003).

2020: 25). In the Bangsamoro talks, Ferrer and her colleagues offered a box of chocolate to the Liberation Front representatives on Valentine's Day (Coronel-Ferrer 2014: 5).

The third most frequent and most innovative strategy concerns various trust-building methods women use. Women from different contexts mentioned taking additional risks that pushed safety limits, which their male colleagues refrained from taking. Going the extra mile at women's own risk helped establish trust with conflict parties and facilitated their continued presence in the peace process. The idea of an "unarmed woman taking exceptional risks to her life but determined to pursue peace" had an impact in disarming or convincing the belligerent party and building trust with them. The parties later explicitly demanded these women as mediators or negotiators.

4.3 Changing the behaviour to change the attitude

A final strategy that taps into many of the already-mentioned ideas is "if you can't change the attitude, change the behaviour first, even in a minor way". Women reported this usually creates a ripple effect for a more significant and sustained impact. For instance, when a woman enters the process, even in a minor support role or as a technical expert, even though resistance occurs initially, it often subsides in time. It even changes the attitudes of those against her presence. It is more difficult to openly oppose someone's presence to her face, so when behaviours change, people usually adjust their attitudes accordingly. For example, because there were women negotiators on the GoP team in the Bangsamoro talks, the Liberation Front also brought a woman legal expert to reciprocate that. The same dynamic happened in the negotiations over Aceh between the armed group GAM and the Indonesian government. One woman's presence, which was opposed at the beginning of the talks, first triggered the inclusion of another woman in reciprocation and then, over time, turned into acceptance of their expertise. This dynamic has happened in many different contexts. A minor behavioural change may result in a ripple effect and snowball into an attitude change.

These are only a few examples of how innovative women mediators and negotiators have become to overcome resistance to their inclusion in the negotiation processes. Although facing resistance is a distressing challenge to their presence and meaningful participation, it presents an

opportunity, too, as resistance also pushes women to carve a role for themselves and leads to the development and innovation of new and cutting-edge negotiation techniques. This results in an added value for the negotiation and mediation processes as it equips women with specific features like being more adaptable and better-skilled mediators and negotiators compared to male mediators who hardly face such resistance while doing their work.

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5.

How Technology Can Empower Women Peace Mediators

Milica Pejanović-Đurišić

The 25th anniversary of UN Resolution 1325 calls for a reflection on the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda and on strategies to enhance women's participation in all phases of peace processes (UN Security Council 2000). Despite the historic breakthrough achieved with this resolution, the involvement of women in conflict prevention and mediation remains limited. In 2023, only 26 per cent (that is, 8) of peace agreements included references to women and gender issues (Wise 2024), even as conflicts disproportionately affected the fundamental rights of women and girls. This marked a slight decline from 28 per cent in 2022 and highlights an urgent need to translate commitments into actions that empower women mediators to play pivotal roles in conflict resolution and peacebuilding.

Efforts to increase women's participation in peace processes have led to the creation of various initiatives, including women mediators' networks. However, challenges and barriers are numerous and persistent, and a multidimensional approach at the structural, cultural, institutional and operational levels is needed to overcome them (GIP Digital Watch 2024). Indeed, factors like the cultural and societal contexts and norms still limit women's roles. Furthermore, capacity-building and knowledge-sharing often face institutional resistance and/or are addressed in a fragmented manner, such as on an ad-hoc project basis, resulting in limited progress.

In such circumstances, digital technologies emerge as a notable topic, as they have the potential to help overcome many of the challenges women mediators and peacekeepers face. Traditional digital tools such as email platforms, video conferencing apps, instant messaging services, online course platforms, webinars and survey tools, have already been

widely adopted. These tools are accessible, user-friendly and effective in fostering communication, collaboration, education and organisation within peacebuilding efforts. However, while valuable, such solutions alone do not fully leverage the transformative potential of digital technologies.

5.1 Expanding horizons through innovative technologies

New and emerging technologies – such as artificial intelligence (AI), blockchain, augmented reality (AR), virtual reality (VR) and big data analytics – open new possibilities for empowering women mediators, especially as they face unique challenges due to structural inequalities, societal norms and heightened risks in conflict zones. With more innovative tools and measures, women mediators would be empowered to better navigate such an environment while dealing with complex conflicts and advocating for inclusive and sustainable peace processes.

For example, AI and machine learning (ML) can have a transformative impact by predicting conflict escalations and trends, enabling proactive interventions. AI-powered assistants can provide real-time negotiation support, improving decision-making and mediation outcomes. These are also powerful technologies for developing community sentiment analysis tools, using social media and local news to help mediators understand grassroots needs and priorities. With their universally applicable functionalities, AI/ML-based tools have already been used to detect hate speech and inflammatory content on social media, to flag early signs of conflict and to help mediators identify triggers for violence (Lopez and Dickover 2015). While examples of women mediators using these specific tools are still limited, by enabling access to them, women mediators would be able to amplify their contribution using fact-based evidence that would increase their credibility, enhance their preparedness and counter systematic exclusion in male-dominated spaces.

Similarly, data analytics provides real-time insights into conflict dynamics. In synergy with Quantum computing, it can be used to model highly complex conflict scenarios, testing potential outcomes of various mediation strategies. Such analytical models allow mediators to test the potential impacts of the planned interventions before implementing them. For example, the Institute for Economics and Peace with its Global Peace Index, is moving in that direction, currently using data-based

analytics to track conflict trends globally, providing early warnings for mediators and peacebuilders (Institute for Economics and Peace 2024). Specifically for women mediators, data models can account for gender-specific indicators to ensure that the insights are relevant for women. Since women mediators are often at the forefront of advocating for gender-sensitive approaches, having access to such data would allow them to highlight the broader impacts of such strategies.

Another example is blockchain technology, which ensures transparency and trust in peace processes by securely documenting agreements and tracking their implementation (Bush 2019). Decentralised platforms can be created to enable women mediators to collaborate, share resources and organise their activities in a more efficient and secure way. Blockchain-based crowdfunding might be effective for securing the financing of women-led efforts while increasing accountability and efficiency.

Virtual and augmented reality (VR/AR) offers additional precious tools, through training simulations that immerse mediators in realistic conflict scenarios, enhancing their skills in negotiations and conflict resolution.¹ Also, interactive visualisation of stakeholders, power dynamics and relationships can be created, thus providing aid for strategic planning. Similarly, the metaverse can also offer immersive virtual spaces for peace negotiations, enabling equitable participation and fostering neutrality, while overcoming geographic and security barriers, all aspects that are particularly relevant for women mediators. Networking events in the metaverse can create opportunities for them to connect globally and collaborate in a secure and supportive environment, expanding accessibility and allowing flexibility in participation.

As benefits of using the above-mentioned cutting-edge digital technologies in peacebuilding processes are evident, their implementation requires certain preconditions, such as expanded affordable access to the internet in areas of interest, adequate skills of women mediators to use digital technologies effectively and safely, better cooperation with tech companies, academia and civil sector in adapting digital tools to the needs of peacebuilding processes. In addition, it would be challenging to harness the immense potential digital technologies are offering without considering cyber risks and the fact that women mediators may face online harassment, surveillance and targeted cyberattacks.

¹ GuestXR project website: *About*, <https://guestxr.eu/about-guestxr>.

5.2 Addressing cyber risks

Dealing with cyber risks that women mediators might be facing is particularly important. Discussions on ethical principles, legal frameworks and international standards to guide responsible development and use of emerging technologies (AI particularly) are well underway in almost all international organisations and institutions (GIP Digital Watch 2023). However, differing views on the approach to their governance are evident, with some countries advocating for binding international agreements and others expressing scepticism and arguing that over-regulation could create barriers to innovation.

In such circumstances, additional efforts to find an adequate multi-layered approach to enhance digital safety and security for women mediators, and generally women, is needed. Such comprehensive approach is of uttermost importance as women are disproportionately targeted by online harassment, surveillance and cyberattacks, which can undermine their credibility, compromise sensitive negotiations, and put their safety at risk. Given their pivotal role in advocating for gender-sensitive peacebuilding, robust protection ensures they can work securely and effectively, even in volatile and digitally vulnerable conflict zones.

There again, digital technologies have important potential in creating mitigation measures for risks of this type. For example, AI-powered tools can provide threat detection, enabling digital fingerprinting and tracing sources of harassment. Also, blockchain platforms offer secure communication and document processing with the minimum risk of malicious interference. Lastly, metaverse, VR and AR could be used to simulate real-life cyberattack scenarios, helping mediators learn how to respond effectively.

In combination with efforts meant to create solutions for efficient governing, measures of this type can significantly reduce cyber risks and empower women mediators to operate more confidently and securely in their peacebuilding efforts.

5.3 The way forward

To fully harness the potential of digital technologies in empowering women mediators and peacekeepers, several additional steps should be taken. One priority is to expand access through investments in infrastructure to ensure affordable internet access and digital tools in conflict-prone areas. Collaboration among governments, international organisa-

tions, tech companies and the civil sector needs to be strengthened to design solutions tailored for peacebuilding. Such platforms and tools should address the diverse needs of women mediators, ensuring they are inclusive and accessible. In parallel, targeted training programmes should be provided to equip women mediators with the knowledge and confidence to use advanced technologies. To that end, it would be necessary to reinforce advocating for the ethical use of such tools, supporting efforts to create global standards for their responsible deployment.

While technologies alone cannot dismantle deeply entrenched societal norms, they have immense potential to empower women mediators and revolutionise peacebuilding processes. By investing in inclusive and tailor-made digital platforms and partnerships, women mediators can overcome existing barriers, use technology effectively and safely, and drive progress towards more sustainable peace agreements.

The future of peacebuilding is *digital* – and with the right strategies, it can also be *equitable*.

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6.

Intersecting Priorities: Advancing the WPS Agenda through Climate Security Initiatives

Sophia Papastavrou

The intersectionality of gender, peace and security has emerged as a critical area of inquiry within both academic scholarship and policy discourse. The Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, anchored in United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) and subsequent resolutions, emphasises the importance of including women in all aspects of conflict prevention, resolution and peacebuilding (UN Security Council 2000). Meanwhile, the escalating impacts of climate change pose significant challenges to global security, exacerbating conflict dynamics and increased forced migration. In recent years, scholars and policymakers have increasingly acknowledged the intersection of these agendas and the potential synergies between advancing the WPS agenda and addressing climate security challenges (Rüttinger et al. 2015). Recognising the interconnections between these issues is essential for developing holistic approaches to address contemporary security challenges, as initiatives aimed at mitigating the security risks associated with climate change can also serve as vehicles for advancing the WPS agenda.

6.1 Women as disproportionately affected agents of change

Integrating gender perspectives can enhance the effectiveness of climate resilience strategies, conflict prevention efforts and peacebuilding interventions. Climate change exacerbates existing vulnerabilities and can act as a threat multiplier, intensifying socio-economic inequalities, resource scarcity and competition over natural resources. These environmental stressors often intersect with pre-existing political, social and economic grievances, contributing to heightened tensions and conflict risks.

Moreover, climate-induced displacement and migration further strain resources and exacerbate social tensions, potentially leading to violent conflict. Women are disproportionately affected by the adverse impacts of climate change and armed conflict due to existing gender inequalities, harmful gender norms and socio-economic disparities. Women often bear the primary responsibility for household food security, nutrition and water provision, making them particularly vulnerable to climate-related shocks in these areas.¹ Moreover, women face increased risks of sexual and gender-based violence, including sexual exploitation and trafficking, in conflict-affected settings, exacerbating their insecurity and their health impacts.

Despite these challenges, women are agents of change and resilience in their communities, possessing valuable knowledge, skills and perspectives for addressing climate-related risks and building peace. Women are actively participating in climate change adaptation, conflict prevention and peacebuilding efforts that are essential for achieving sustainable and inclusive solutions. In Colombia, women have played critical roles in mediating peace during and after the decades-long armed conflict. The Organización Femenina Popular (OFP) is one such group where women mediate conflicts within their communities, often related to land disputes and resource allocation exacerbated by climate change. OFP was selected as a 2022 recipient of Global Affairs Canada's WPS Civil Society Leadership Award for its *Guardianas de la Vida* (Guardians of Life and Nature) programme. Operating in the Magdalena Medio region, the programme built the capacity of women through training and resources, to protect the environment and address the impacts of climate change.² In the Philippines, women are integral to community-based early warning systems for natural disasters, which are becoming more frequent and severe due to climate change. Women monitor environmental changes and disseminate warnings. Their involvement ensures timely and effective responses, reducing the potential for conflict over resources in disaster-stricken areas (Aranda and Humeau 2022).

¹ Water.org website: *A Woman's Crisis*, <https://water.org/our-impact/water-crisis/womens-crisis>.

² Canada Government website: *Women, Peace and Security Awards Program*, https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/issues_development-enjeux_developpement/gender_equality-egalite_des_genres/wps-fps-award-prix.aspx.

By recognising and amplifying women's voices, promoting gender-responsive policies and investing in women's education and leadership, the foundation for a more resilient, equitable and peaceful framework is possible.

6.2 Women mediators at the forefront of climate change and security

Women mediators are essential in addressing the intersection of climate change and conflict, leveraging their unique perspectives, skills and experiences to foster sustainable solutions. Through inclusive decision-making, women mediators prioritise diverse voices, including those of the most vulnerable women along with marginalised groups, to be heard and represented in climate change and conflict resolution processes. By incorporating a range of perspectives, they promote more holistic and effective solutions that address the needs and concerns of all stakeholders.³ The Northern Rangelands Trust (NRT) in Kenya supports women in pastoralist communities in taking leadership mediator roles in natural resource management and conflict resolution. Women belonging to their community conservancies created the Women Peace Council to advocate for and become champions of peace. These women play a crucial role in preventing planned attacks and fostering dialogue with the Morans (the name given to young men warriors), contributing to peacebuilding and community resilience (NRT 2023).

Women mediators also work towards building trust in their communities, between conflicting parties and to facilitate constructive dialogue. For example, Liberia's Women's Peace Huts, initiated by the Women's NGO Secretariat of Liberia (WONGOSOL), served as platforms for women to engage in peacebuilding and conflict resolution. Women trained in these huts mediate local disputes, including those related to resource scarcity worsened by climate change. Their work has been crucial in maintaining peace and fostering community resilience. Peace Huts have evolved into platforms that have filled critical gaps in terms of consolidating peace, facilitating reconciliation and mediation, and promoting women's empowerment at the community level (Bility 2019). By creating

³ See NRT website: *Peace Building and Wildlife Protection*, <https://www.nrt-kenya.org/peace-and-security>.

safe spaces for open communication and mutual understanding, women mediators foster cooperation in addressing the root causes of conflict and environmental degradation.

Women mediators advocate for sustainable development initiatives that address both the immediate impacts of climate change and the underlying drivers of conflict, such as resource scarcity, inequality and displacement. Recognising the differential impacts of environmental degradation and violence on women and men, it is imperative that policies and interventions consider gender-specific vulnerabilities and empower women in their communities. Subsequently, support can be provided to local initiatives that strengthen adaptive capacities, enhance natural resource management and promote sustainable livelihoods to ensure communities can withstand environmental shocks and mitigate the risk of conflict.

The potential synergies between advancing the WPS agenda and addressing climate security challenges can be found in some key projects initiated by World Vision International.⁴ Women in Bangladesh are often at the forefront of managing natural resources and are key to promoting peace in their communities. World Vision conducts awareness programmes to educate communities about the importance of ecosystem restoration and environmental conservation to ensure sustainable peace. Women provide leadership due to their central role in managing household resources and their influence within the community. First, women are actively involved in planting and maintaining mangroves, gaining employment and skills in the process. World Vision's initiative then leverages this by empowering women to take on leadership roles in peacebuilding efforts. The initiative promotes the inclusion of women in local decision-making bodies and processes related to environmental management and conflict resolution (World Vision International 2021).

Similarly, in Sierra Leone, World Vision has strengthened the institutional capacity of women-focused civil society organisations through coordinated efforts to sustain peace and enhance the safety and security of women and girls in Sierra Leone before, during and after elections. Women

⁴ World Vision International is a global humanitarian organisation dedicated to improving the lives of children, families and communities around the world, particularly those living in poverty and facing various forms of hardship. Founded in 1950, World Vision operates in nearly 100 countries, providing assistance through a comprehensive approach that includes emergency relief, development programmes and advocacy initiatives.

who participate in peace processes tend to represent broader and more diverse constituencies, ensuring that a range of views and interests are represented and peace processes are fully democratised (World Vision Sierra Leone 2023). Integrating gender perspectives into natural resource management and peacebuilding efforts has contributed to conflict prevention and sustainable peace (UNEP et al. 2013). Women's participation in peace negotiations and post-conflict reconstruction processes has led to the inclusion of gender-sensitive provisions in peace agreements and the establishment of mechanisms to address women's rights and needs.

6.3 Integrating gender perspectives into climate security initiatives

To effectively address the intersecting challenges of climate change, conflict and gender inequality, it is therefore crucial to integrate gender perspectives into climate security initiatives. This requires mainstreaming gender considerations across all stages of policy development, implementation and evaluation. Policy makers and government officials need this approach to create inclusive policies that address the unique vulnerabilities of different gender groups affected by climate change. NGOs and international development agencies can use intersectional strategies to ensure their programmes are equitable and effectively support marginalised communities. Academics and researchers studying climate impacts can integrate intersectional analysis to produce comprehensive data that highlights the varied experiences of men, women and non-binary individuals. Community leaders and grassroots activists can benefit from understanding intersectionality to better advocate for those whose voices are often unheard in climate discussions. Finally, private sector companies, particularly those in industries related to agriculture, energy and infrastructure, should incorporate these perspectives to enhance corporate social responsibility and contribute to sustainable, equitable development.

At all levels, gender-responsive climate policies should firstly prioritise the needs and priorities of women and marginalised groups, ensuring their active participation in decision-making processes. Secondly, gender-sensitive climate adaptation and resilience strategies should recognise and build upon women's roles as stewards of natural resources and caretakers of their families and communities. This involves providing women with access to resources, technologies and capacity-building opportunities to

enhance their adaptive capacity and resilience to climate-related risks. Thirdly, efforts to address climate-induced displacement and migration should adopt gender-sensitive approaches that recognise the specific vulnerabilities and protection needs of women and girls. This includes ensuring access to safe and dignified shelter, healthcare, education and livelihood opportunities for displaced women and girls. Moreover, gender mainstreaming in climate security initiatives requires fostering inclusive and gender-responsive institutions and governance structures. This involves promoting women's representation and leadership in decision-making bodies, including climate adaptation planning committees, disaster management agencies and peacebuilding processes.

Despite growing recognition of the intersection between gender, climate and security, significant challenges remain in mainstreaming gender perspectives into climate security initiatives. These include inadequate funding and resources for gender-responsive programming, limited capacity and expertise in gender analysis and mainstreaming, and entrenched gender norms and power dynamics within institutions and societies.

The important role of women mediators cannot be overstated. Their unique perspectives, collaborative approaches and dedication to inclusivity make them invaluable agents of peace and catalysts for positive change in conflict resolution processes worldwide. The intersection of women, peace and security with climate security initiatives offers a transformative opportunity to address interconnected challenges and advance sustainable peace, resilience and gender equality. For example, inclusivity in policy and decision-making ensures that women, particularly those from marginalised and vulnerable groups, are actively included in climate security policy and decision-making processes at all levels.

It is imperative that in the development and implementation of gender-transformative climate adaptation and mitigation, strategies address the specific needs and contributions of women. The integration of WPS principles into climate security frameworks requires further commitment to fully address conflict prevention and peacebuilding efforts: for instance, ensuring that women mediators are leading in conflict resolution and peacebuilding initiatives related to climate-induced resource conflicts; additionally, supporting community-based conflict resolution mechanisms that empower women as mediators and leaders and fostering partnerships between climate security initiatives and WPS programmes to leverage resources and expertise.

By integrating gender perspectives into climate policies and practices, we can enhance conflict prevention, peacebuilding efforts and sustainable development. The support of research initiatives that explore the specific impacts of climate change on women and their roles in peace and security is vital to inform policymaking and programme design, and to lead evidence-based interventions. Through collaboration and investment in women's leadership and empowerment, we can address the interconnected challenges of conflict and climate change, advance gender equality, and promote lasting peace and security in the face of the climate crisis.

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PART III

THE ROLE OF THE MWMN

IN FOSTERING PEACE AND SECURITY

ACROSS THE MEDITERRANEAN

7.

The Mediterranean Women Mediators Network: Evolution, Impact and Way Ahead

Loredana Teodorescu

Over the past decades, a number of regional women mediator networks¹ have been launched in different regions across the globe to contribute to implementing the WPS Agenda, with a specific focus on promoting the meaningful participation of women in peace and security.

The Mediterranean Women Mediators Network (MWMN) was part of this momentum. Inspired by the Nordic Women Mediators Network, it was launched in 2017 by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, in collaboration with Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) and Women in International Security (WIIS), which have managed its Secretariat since its inception. It was one of Italy's flagship initiatives during its term as a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, and during its G7 Presidency, with the aim of enhancing its contribution to the effort of "building peace for tomorrow".

The initiative brings together Italy's commitment in three key areas: the promotion of peace and stability in the Mediterranean; the promotion of the peaceful resolution of disputes and mediation; and the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda. It also represents the only initiative launched under the auspices of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to maintain continuity on these issues, being included as a specific action in the National Action Plan for the implementation of the WPS Agenda (in the recently adopted V Plan, under action 1.5) (CIDU 2025). Indeed, a key component of Italy's commitment, renewed over the

¹ On women mediator networks see for example Fellin and Turner (2021), Teodorescu and Cervi (2025) and Möller-Loswick et al. (2019).

years, is to strengthen the role of women as drivers of peace across the whole conflict cycle.

To date, the network includes around one hundred women mediators from 24 countries across the four shores of the Mediterranean (North Africa, the Middle East, the Western Balkans, EU countries in the region, Turkey), with diverse profiles and areas of expertise, from official diplomats and representatives from international organisations to representatives from civil society and grass-roots-level organisations and academia, engaged at different levels. Its main objective is to strengthen the participation and influence of women mediators and peacebuilders in peace, security and political processes, in both formal and informal settings.

The launch of the network represented a concrete step to translate the WPS Agenda from policy into practice, and at the same time already a clear recognition of the role women play, giving bigger legitimacy to their work in different sectors. Stability in the Mediterranean is essential for security in the whole region, with the successful implementation of the WPS agenda serving as a crucial foundation. Given its complex socio-cultural context, women mediators can bring strategic knowledge to their contribution to conflict resolution and sustainable peace. The network itself acts as a catalyst for ongoing or potential mediation efforts and post-conflict stabilisation processes, integrating a gender perspective, facilitating the creation of synergies and connecting different levels of mediation and a wide range of actors, both institutional and from civil society.

Among its prominent initiatives, the network creates spaces for dialogue in crisis contexts such as Syria and Libya; provides analysis of complex issues leveraging the contextual and thematic expertise of the mediators – such as de-radicalisation in Lebanon, the issue of Syrian refugees in neighbouring countries, and sanctions; promotes advocacy and knowledge-sharing activities aimed at strengthening the role of women as agents of peace and stability and their inclusion in various processes, such as in Cyprus and Libya, or leveraging their role supporting post-conflict reconstruction, as in the Balkans. The network is also involved in experience-sharing and mentoring activities. Examples are initiatives involving a group of young peacebuilders from Afghanistan and the Balkans, and Ukrainian women.

Delving into the activities of the network and providing concrete examples, this section capitalises on the experience of the network to reflect on its evolution, impact and ways to reach its full potential.

7.1 *The evolution of the network*

The evolution of the MWMN over the years has enabled the network to address two main challenges affecting the WPS Agenda: low women's participation in formal decision-making and the lack of recognition of their roles. The MWMN promotes greater representation of women in mediation, negotiations and decision-making, while also ensuring their meaningful involvement in shaping policies and understanding of local and national issues. This approach acknowledges that mediation happens not only in formal settings, but also through informal and preparatory processes that influence formal talks.

The MWMN was created to fulfil the need to increase the number of women involved in peacemaking efforts and to facilitate the appointment of women mediators at the local and international level, thereby reducing the networking capacity gap in the Mediterranean area.

As the MWMN took its initial steps, a disconnect soon became apparent. While the space for women to participate in high-level peace processes is still very low, the number of women who contribute meaningfully to creating the basis for lasting peace and stability and/or who are often at the forefront of local conflict and violence prevention, is, on the contrary, quite substantial. The contribution of many women peacebuilders and mediators outside of formal structures might be unseen or unvalued, but it is essential, extending beyond negotiations and helping to overcome relations based on hard power, manifesting a holistic definition of mediation that enables a multi-level approach to both mediation and leadership (Fellin 2021).

These considerations led the MWMN to expand its mission and scope, advocating for the meaningful inclusion of more women in all phases of the peace process. Indeed, networks are not just about numbers. They are also about creating a space that allows women to share technical expertise and knowledge while giving recognition to their work at different levels. Networks create relationships and bonds that reinforce cross-cultural and transgenerational solidarity and sisterhood among women. A core activity of the MMWN quickly encompassed also recognising, valuing, supporting and leveraging what women are already doing often at a community or local level, or in informal spaces, increasing the visibility of all women's voices in mediation, while ensuring that they can still inform processes and discussions from which they are excluded.

This evolution within the MWMN enabled greater representation of the different realities in which mediators normally perform. Women often facilitate dialogues across divided societies, engage civil society, lead reconciliation activities, mobilise communities and strengthen their resilience, and address the root causes of conflicts. Especially in an increasingly polarised world, the skills, expertise and work of mediators and peace-builders become even more precious. MWMN member Lea Baroudi is a significant example. Working at a community level in Lebanon, she helps her country reconcile with its past and rebuild its future, using culture, joint projects and holistic programmes as inclusive tools, addressing sectarian conflicts and the reintegration of former fighters, and preventing the radicalisation of younger generations. Another example comes from MWMN members from the two sides of the Cyprus island who keep alive the dialogue across divided communities despite a frozen conflict and a stalled peace process, promoting joint initiatives based on dialogue and mutual understanding.

Further, the MWMN progressively moved towards a localised approach. Over the last years, some local Antennas were formally launched, in Turkey, Cyprus and Kosovo: these are local realities of the network where the members engage with a wider group of women involved in peacebuilding and mediation at the local level and conduct initiatives. Other initiatives were co-designed and developed in countries like Libya, Syria and Lebanon, thus operationalising the Network by providing concrete opportunities, channels and entry points for its members.

This approach is contributing to a new understanding of local mediation as a full part of the mediation process, instrumental, even if often underestimated. It is also contributing to shaping a different narrative, moving increasingly from a model of leadership from the front towards an approach where actors work together for a shared purpose, and each has a role to play and needs to be recognised for that.

The progressive evolution of the MWMN reinforces the role of the network as a vital connector: between local actors and global processes; between actors, both institutional and coming from civil society; and between spaces, both formal and informal. This linkage between local organisations and national and international stakeholders facilitates a multi-track approach to peacebuilding and mediation² while amplifying

² On multi-track negotiation see, e.g., Federer et al. (2019) and Turner (2019).

women's voices and ensuring that women excluded from the formal processes can still inform decision-making.

Finally, the ability to influence, rather than merely participate, has increasingly become a specific demand from women. They no longer want a seat at a table created by others; they wish to help shape the processes and for themselves and bring their own perspectives and priorities. To achieve this, the network has evolved to act as an external focal point for decision-making processes. It supports conveners of strategic dialogues on peace, security and stability and on specific crises, by identifying expert women mediators to enrich the discussions, facilitating access or creating opportunities for its members. It also provides a space for discussing sensitive topics and sharing views across the region, when the space is shrinking and there is a need for a safe environment to do so.

7.2 Areas of intervention

The MWMN operates through clusters of activities designed to promote an increased participation and influence of women in peace, security and political processes, at all levels, in line with one of the pillars of UN Security Council Resolution 1325/2000. Its work spans across *capacity building, advocacy and outreach, the creation of synergies and experiences sharing, and the promotion of local initiatives*. The following section summarises the specific activities conducted by the network in these fields, except for local initiatives, which will be dealt with in depth in Chapter 8.

7.2.1 Capacity building: Strengthening skills and leadership

In the field of capacity building, the MWMN offers a structured set of short courses, training and masterclasses focused on mediation leadership, negotiation technique and gender-responsive practice – delivered both in person and online. To date, seven formal trainings have been delivered, together with numerous thematic briefings and meetings aiming at facilitating experience and knowledge sharing. For instance, in 2019 the network ran a training and experience-sharing module on Inclusive and Gendered Mediation, organised with the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, IAI and WIIS Italy. The module combined skills sessions with peer learning to connect practice across the region and to embed gender analysis in process design.

During the pandemic the MWMN pivoted online and, between 21 May and 11 June 2020, offered the masterclass “Leading Effectively in High Pressure Environments”. The course aimed to help mediators lead authentically under crisis conditions, with emphasis on pacing, prioritisation and decision-making when stakes are high. Its objective was to equip participants to carry responsibility under pressure while maintaining team cohesion and trust. That summer the network launched a dedicated online series on leadership in mediation, partnering with the Geneva Centre for Security Policy and Durham University. The course “Leadership in Mediation: Visibility, Influence and Impact” introduced a leadership framework centred on direction, alignment and commitment, and guided mediators to define what “success” looks like for the network and for their own practice. The MWMN’s capacity building also targets negotiation craft. On 31 October 2024, the Cyprus Antenna and the PEACERETURN project hosted “Negotiations Skill-Building: Finding Your Voice”, led by Professor Neophytos Loizides (then at Warwick University) and Professor Betül Çelik (Sabancı University/Turkey Antenna of MWMN). More than 65 participants – including United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus personnel, diplomats, civil-society actors and other stakeholders – worked through exercises designed to strengthen voice, agency and persuasion in divided settings. The programme framed inclusion as a community rather than a “women’s issue”, situating gender as integral to the credibility and outcomes of peace processes.

Finally, especially since the pandemic, regular online meetings have helped consolidate the network as a privileged space for sharing. Mediators often report on their specific activities and their country’s development and create strong personal relationships which allow the development of joint initiatives, valuing the diversity of the network also in terms of skills. This space for sharing assumed a global dimension when the MWMN, hosting the first Secretariat of the Mediterranean Women Mediators Network, promoted a dedicated session for sharing experiences during the Annual Event of the Global Alliance, allowing women coming from different regions to come together and, divided into online breakout rooms, discuss their lessons learnt and strategise about the future.

Indeed, while training programmes are important to strengthen skills, they are no substitute for first-hand practical experience. For this reason, the MWMN combines its capacity-building activities with efforts to create

more opportunities for its members to put their considerable training and skills into effect.

Across these activities, four design choices stand out. First, co-teaching with academic and policy partners ensures conceptual depth alongside hands-on drill and can facilitate further synergies and cooperation. Second, the MWMN consistently blends plenary meetings with small-group practice and reflective tools, creating a pipeline from abstract principles to technique. Third, the network nurtures and welcomes diverse groups – both geographically (Mediterranean sub-regions represented) and institutionally (independent mediators, UN staff, diplomats, CSOs) – to stimulate cross-fertilised methods, consolidate channels of dialogue and exchange, and facilitate access to opportunities. Fourth, the experience and knowledge held by the mediators themselves is one essential pillar of capacity building, which strengthens both thematic and contextual knowledge and skills.

7.2.2 Advocacy and outreach: Shaping the discourse on Women in Peace and Security and amplifying women's voices

Advocacy and outreach are vital tools used by the MWMN to influence the global discourse on women, peace and security. The network actively leverages multilateral platforms to advocate for women's participation in peace processes and amplify the contributions of women mediators.

First of all, the network uses high-level multilateral platforms to advocate for women's participation. Some international fora have become avenues to promote and amplify the MWMN's and its mediators' messages and to showcase their work. Some examples include the UN WPS Week and the side initiatives promoted on the margins of the UN Security Council Open Debate on WPS;³ the EU Community of Practice on Peace

³ For instance, during UN WPS Week in 2025, the MWMN together with the other networks of the Global Alliance and UN Women promoted the event “Reflecting on 25 Years of UNSCR 1325: Lessons, Challenges and a Forward Strategy” at UN Women headquarters in New York. In 2024 the network co-organised two events: the first focused on “Women-led Mediation Amidst Intersecting Climate and Humanitarian Crises: The Role of Women Mediator Networks”, and promoted in coordination with OSCE, UN Women, the Pacific Women Mediators Network, FemWise, and the Permanent Missions of Italy and Tonga; and the second was a high-level panel titled “Enhancing Women's Participation in Conflict Prevention and Resolution”, organised with the other regional networks of women mediators gathered under a Global Alliance.

Mediation (MWMN 2023), the annual event of the European External Action Service (EEAS);⁴ the Geneva Peace Week;⁵ the MED Dialogues,⁶ a high-level initiative on the Mediterranean region promoted annually by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation together with the Italian Institute for International Political Studies in Rome. These fora have become an opportunity to meet mediators, representatives of other networks and key stakeholders, and to promote joint initiatives amplifying the network's messages and experience. Other regional fora which feature a regular participation and contribution of the MWMN and its members include, for instance, the Africa Conference on Security, the Aswan Forum, the Munich Security Conference, the Geneva Peace Week, the Doha Forum and the Antalya Forum. In addition to that, the network also organises and promotes numerous events, online or at the premises of the Istituto Affari Internazionali.

Second, in terms of advocacy and outreach, the network engages in international calls and campaigns to shape international agendas and also conducts specific targeted advocacy activities. Early in the Covid-19 emergency, for instance, it publicly welcomed UN Secretary-General António Guterres's call of 23 March 2020 for a global ceasefire, aligning the network with a broad effort to de-escalate violence and protect civilians during the pandemic. It also sent a letter to Stephanie Williams, at that time Acting Special Representative of the Secretary-General and

⁴ For instance, in 2022 the MWMN promoted a panel discussion entitled "Taking Forward Women's Meaningful Inclusion in Peace Making" with members sharing their experience in Turkey, Cyprus, Lebanon and Syria. From 2023 onwards, the MWMN has annually co-promoted a panel discussion together with the other networks of the Global Alliance to amplify the conveyed messages.

⁵ During the Geneva Peace Week in 2023 and 2024, the MWMN partnered with the OSCE and focused on the new generations of young peace builders and mediators.

⁶ Within the MED Dialogues, for several years the MWMN co-organised the Women's Forum. Through this format, the network has contributed to the works of the conference with the participation of numerous mediators and experts. In 2022, the Women's Forum was suppressed as a separate platform with the intent to fully integrate and mainstream women's voices into the different panel discussions within the main programme. This led for instance to an outstanding panel discussion in 2022 around the role of diplomacy and mediation titled "The Art of Peace in Age of War", with the aim to rethink traditional approaches to the field and suggest a new "positive agenda", to address shared challenges (MED Dialogues 2022).

Head of Mission of the United Nations Support Mission in Libya,⁷ in order to share with her the network's concerns about the situation of the Libyan women due to the consequences of the protracted conflict. When the conflict exploded in Gaza, it again joined other networks of regional women mediators to ask for a ceasefire and the full implementation of the WPS Agenda.

In 2025, the network contributed to the Global Alliance campaign sharing mediators' videos with key messages on the occasion of the anniversary of the WPS Agenda, highlighting the meaning of the Agenda in different contexts and what is needed to fully implement it, empowering and leveraging women's role. At the national level, particularly significant is the campaign launched with a major Italian newspaper, *Avvenire*, called "WomenforPeace" (Avvenire 2024), featuring stories of a number of mediators together with other women who are contributing to global peace through their daily work, especially at the local level.

In other contexts, advocacy is mainly done behind closed doors, and less through public calls. An interesting discussion held between members of the network, indeed, highlighted the need to prioritise concrete actions that can make the difference and have a tangible impact rather than public calls which in an increasingly polarised world pose the risk of trapping discussion in politicised debate rather than keeping the focus on the main messages the MWMN wants to deliver.

Third, the MWMN's advocacy includes curating evidence and policy arguments on the issues it raises. Its Advocacy and Outreach page foregrounds inclusion in Libya and signposts authoritative sources – UN humanitarian planning for Libya (OCHA 2018), WILPF's policy brief on Libya (WILPF and TWBI 2018) and Palwasha L. Kakar's USIP article (Kakar 2019). This curation anchors the network's positions in publicly accessible documentation that underlines why women must be present in negotiations. The network itself is contributing through a series of op-eds for the *IAI Commentaries* series and shorter blogs⁸ written by its mediators, by analysing conflicts in parts of the Mediterranean and clarifying women mediators' roles in peacebuilding and mediation – an additional, text-based advocacy vector aligned with the network's convenings and communication tools.

⁷ See the section "Advocacy and Outreach Campaigns" on the MWMN website.

⁸ See the MWMN Blog: <https://womenmediators.net/the-mwmn-blog>.

Fourth, the network has invested in its communication tools. In addition to its presence on the main social media and platforms, it runs a periodic newsletter to broaden reach and continuity. The newsletter is disseminated among members, sister regional networks and the wider public; it aggregates MWMN activities and distils “current debates and activities in the international fora on mediation and gender”, confirming the newsletter’s role in advancing WPS knowledge across the region.

These activities are contributing to inform and shape reflections, increasing the understanding of specific contexts and the role of women, disseminating ideas and proposals, and creating the basis for future synergies. They are also strengthening the visibility of mediators, by exposing them and in some cases by putting them in direct contact with key actors.

7.2.3 Synergies: Joint initiatives and experience sharing beyond the network

The MWMN’s synergy work links peer practice, policy uptake and inter-regional alliance-building, with the aim to translate lived mediation experience into shared methods and institutional commitments.

For example, MWMN brokers practice-to-policy exchanges through public convenings.⁹ The network also inserts its expertise into regional dialogues beyond the Mediterranean and contributes to cross-learning among networks, especially for the benefit of new ones to be created.

For instance, in 2020, at Indonesia’s foreign ministry web seminar on “The Role of Women Negotiators and Mediators in Maintenance of Regional Peace and Security”, MWMN’s then-Head Irene Fellin presented the network’s model and lessons on enhancing meaningful participation; the meeting opened with a keynote by H.E. Retno L.P. Marsudi, Indonesia’s Foreign Minister, and drew on other regional women mediator networks for cross-learning. After that, Italy supported Marsudi’s initiative to

⁹ For instance, on 5 October 2020, the network co-hosted the virtual conference “Amplifying Voices for Peace: Women Peacebuilders and Mediators at the Peace Table – The New Norm”, led by the Permanent Representation of Germany to the EU with ICAN, the Global Alliance of Regional Women Mediator Networks, EEAS and eight European foreign ministries. The meeting connected women peacebuilders with governments and multilateral mediation units, pressed for states to join Commitment 2025 on women’s inclusion, and mapped concrete ways to normalise women’s presence at the table.

launch a network of women mediators in the Southeast Asian region and organise a Regional Conference on Women, Peace and Democracy.

More specifically, WIIS Italy, as implementing partner of the MWMN, organised meetings to share experiences and create networking opportunities with other regional networks, held interviews for the Steering Committee of the new network, co-organised the “Capacity Building Workshop on Peace Negotiation and Mediation” on the sidelines of the Regional Forum on Women Peace Negotiators and Mediators in June 2021, and trained 60 young women from 11 Southeast Asian countries on the adoption of a gender-sensitive approach to conflict mediation. Several meetings were also promoted to share the experience of the MWMN with the Arab Women Mediators Network, for instance during a workshop held in Cairo in 2023, and with the Mexican and Argentinian ministries of foreign affairs. Through these activities, the MWMN facilitated the expansion of the Global Alliance to three new networks, starting from the South-East Asian network and more recently in 2025 the Pacific and the Ibero-American one.

A specific exchange initiative in 2024-2025 was dedicated to the role of women mediators addressing intersecting challenges, including those triggered by climate change, and those deriving from the humanitarian-development-peace nexus while implementing the WPS Agenda. The exchange, coordinated by UN Women with Italian financial support (MFA DGMO) brought together members from the MWMN and the Pacific Network of Women Mediators to share reflections and concrete examples from different contexts.

Moreover, MWMN members routinely share experiences in global fora to widen the circle of practice.¹⁰

The MWMN does not just attend coalitions, it leverages for their creation and enlargement. As a founding member, it launched the Global Alliance of

¹⁰ For instance, Hafida Benchehida (MMWN member from Algeria) contributed to the 12th Human Rights Defenders Forum at the Carter Center, themed “Building Solidarity toward Equality for All”, joining activists and community leaders from 28 countries – a platform to exchange practical strategies across movements. In 2025, MWMN Head Loredana Teodorescu represented the network at the 69th session of the Commission on the Status of Women in New York, at the side-event “Taking Stock of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action through the Implementation of the WPS and YPS Agendas”. The meeting was promoted, *inter alia*, by Italy’s Permanent Mission to the UN and the African Union, underscoring inter-regional coalition-building.

Regional Women Mediator Networks in New York on 26 September 2019 to push decision-makers to accelerate UNSCR 1325 implementation. Moreover, it coordinated the Global Alliance's first formal Secretariat from 2020 to 2022, thus supporting the establishment of working methods, such as the creation of a Global Contact Group, where all networks are represented, which meets regularly to strategise and coordinate activities. It also launched the Alliance's first joint initiatives, such as the annual event, and the first experience-sharing initiatives. Also, it welcomed its first new members, and established regular channels of dialogue with stakeholders, starting from representatives from UN Women and UN DPPA, which have joint meetings every three months.

The active membership and commitment of the MWMN has contributed to making the Global Alliance a privileged space to share experience, discuss priorities and strategies, undertake joint initiatives and amplify a collective voice. A particularly important meeting to strengthen and consolidate synergies with the EU was held in March 2025 in Brussels. The Global Alliance convened to discuss its strategy and activities in the anniversary year of the Resolution 1325 on WPS and to engage in critical discussions on responding to contemporary challenges in peace and security.

Finally, synergies and collaborations are also developed to tackle specific issues, such as deradicalisation. For instance, in July 2025, the MWMN designed together with NATO Strategic Direction-South Hub a workshop on "The Role of Women in (De)Radicalization in Africa and the Middle East" which was held in Naples. The event brought together experts and institutional representatives from Europe, Africa and the Middle East to explore gender-informed strategies to prevent violent extremism. Discussions emphasised the importance of local leadership, inclusive community engagement and interregional cooperation, highlighting women's vital roles in peacebuilding and deradicalisation efforts. The workshop was conceived as a first step to initiate a community of practice and exchange on a topic particularly relevant in the current context, and its outcomes were summarised in a public report for further dissemination.

Similarly, cooperation with actors like OSCE and UN Women happens on a regular basis, as reflected in joint panel discussions and reflections, mentoring and exchange activities. Especially on the occasion of the 25th anniversary, with the aim of taking stock of the past years' lessons learnt and contributing to the next to come, the MWMN has engaged in joint reflections with other actors. This is the case for instance with an OSCE-

MWMN joint publication addressing the role of women's networks contributing to the WPS Agenda. The MWMN has also recently joined the WPS Working Group in the Arab states, promoted by the WPS Regional Hub at the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs at the American University of Beirut, in partnership with the UN Women Regional Office for the Arab States and many other regional and global partners, such as GIZ (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit), the Swedish Dialogue Institute for the Middle East and North Africa, the Arab Reform Initiative, the Middle East Council on Global Affairs, and Inclusive Peace.

While numerous initiatives, especially the exchanges, are benefiting from the regional dimension of the network, others are developed in closer cooperation with members of the MWMN and/or their organisations to meet the specific needs on the ground and reflect the specificity of each context. Specific examples are related to Syria, Libya, Lebanon and the local antennas developed in Kosovo, Turkey and Cyprus, which will be further described in Chapter 8.

7.3 Impact and added value of the MWMN

After almost a decade of work, the added value of regional networks such as the MWMN as strategic tools contributing to and fostering the implementation of the WPS Agenda has clearly emerged. Some specific issues related to this were also highlighted in a survey¹¹ launched between 2024 and 2025 by the MWMN Secretariat with the aim of getting a sense of the impact of the network on its members' everyday work activity, and identifying avenues for future development.

First of all, the MWMN acts as a network and a community of practice. It provides a space for women to connect and share their experience, linking knowledge and capacity while enhancing their skills. The networks also fosters trust and solidarity, facilitates joint projects, and brings parties across conflict lines together to engage in dialogue, thereby increasing their mutual understanding. For example, the MWMN has provided a safe ground for Syrian women to reflect on sensitive issues which could not be easily tackled elsewhere, and to engage in meaningful exchanges with other

¹¹ Twenty-four network members provided answers (either through the French or English version of the survey). The survey was then integrated and deepened with a series of semi-structured interviews.

mediators from the region. These dialogues, conducted in a secure environment, enabled participants to collectively reflect on strategies to advance women's empowerment and address gender-specific challenges in conflict settings (see Chapter 8). These kinds of initiative foster cohesive and supportive communities of practice, offering platforms for solidarity and visibility around women's experiences in conflict, allowing a deeper and nuanced understanding of the local context through the lenses of the women involved. Moreover, they create linkages with numerous key stakeholders, thereby broadening the initiative's influence, ensuring a follow-up to discussion outcomes and reinforcing legitimacy.

Moreover, the idea of a network as a safe space and powerful connector has inspired similar initiatives at the local and national levels: this is the case, for instance, with the Network of Moroccan Mediators, which was co-initiated by a founding member of the MWMN, Farida Jaidi, and benefited from her experience within the MWMN itself; and with the Network of Palestinian Businesswomen and Professionals, founded by Dalal Iriqat, a MWMN member, to empower a group of women leaders in different fields who could play a role in shaping the future of Palestine.

A second added value of the MWMN is the provision of a solid source of information and expertise. The network produces informed and insightful conflict-sensitive analysis, with the potential to become a hub of peace and security expertise, with the convening power to foster collaborations.

Examples include the rich experience gathered within the network in fostering dialogue between communities in Syria and Lebanon, in tackling post-conflict reconciliation in the Balkans, or in devising channels and entry points to propose gender-sensitive norms, such as in Cyprus. These examples can function as best practices to be used in ongoing peacebuilding processes, such as the reintegration of former fighters in the current sensitive transitional phase in Syria, or in ongoing conflicts, such as in Ukraine. With this spirit of experience sharing in mind, the network has already promoted for instance exchanges among Ukrainian women and mediators from the Balkans.

This resonates with the results of the survey conducted with MWMN members (MWMN 2025), highlighting that the network's activities allow for knowledge production and method transfer. Respondents use the network to turn situated practice into sharable knowledge and to import techniques back into process design. Several describe "writing papers/blog posts" as part of their network workload, alongside "thematic

briefings” that circulate tools between tracks and levels. Where offered, training opportunities are folded into this loop, reinforcing a repertoire that travels from workshops to dialogues. Webinars convening practitioners from across the Mediterranean and beyond give also access to ground-level knowledge that rarely circulates in academic or official channels.

Moreover, the MWMN fosters collaboration infrastructure and local anchoring. The network functions as a scaffold for cross-member cooperation and for anchoring work with locally embedded actors. Typical activity bundles include for instance “Support to Local Networks; Engagement in Initiatives”. These combinations – meeting, co-designing ad-hoc projects and disseminating outputs – allow members to move from episodic contacts to sustained collaboration chains.

A third added value is that the MWMN acts as a vital connector and powerful bridge between different levels of mediation, spaces and actors, providing and enhancing access to stakeholders and to the political level, and fostering synergies between different actors. Part of its efforts are dedicated to keeping alive a continuous dialogue between the different actors involved through regular meetings and exchanges: members describe the network as a platform that secures invitations and stage-time across initiatives and conferences, translating individual efforts into visibility.

The establishment of the network as a cohesive and strategically coordinated platform has thus enabled women to engage more effectively with key stakeholders, influence decision-making processes and mobilise joint efforts when needed. This is the case for the participation of a delegation of Libyan women in the Palermo Conference, facilitated through a mobilisation of efforts and targeted advocacy, including the connections built within the MWMN. This participation not only allowed the delegation to contribute to the discussions on UN policy in Libya, but represented a critical entry point to further dialogues, keeping women connected to a peace process from which they had largely been excluded (see Chapter 8).

The MWMN also plays a vital role in connecting diverse spaces of engagement and bridging different mediation tracks – namely, between formal Track I processes (official, high-level negotiations) and Tracks II (civil society and local actors) and III (grassroots, people-to-people initiatives).¹² By doing so, it provides a pathway toward inclusion in formal

¹² The three peace tracks in peace mediation are based on Lederach’s three-level, pyramid-based model (Lederach 1997).

peace processes, where women's participation remains limited; it helps navigate the lack of access; and it supports multi-track approaches to women's participation.

For example, the Cyprus peace process illustrates the ongoing disconnect. Despite more than five decades of protracted conflict, no woman has participated in high-level negotiations on an equal footing with male counterparts. This persistent exclusion exists despite numerous commitments made by states following the adoption of Resolution 1325/2000 and subsequent WPS resolutions. To date, Cypriot women have been confined to technical committees and Track II initiatives, with no meaningful representation in official negotiations – an omission that continues to hinder the peace process (see for example Hadjipavlou 2023).

Creating a link with official dialogues and establishing robust linkages between Track I and other mediation spaces remains essential. To this end, more recently, for instance, members of the Cyprus Antenna were among the few civil society organisation representatives to have meetings with UN high level officials as the UN is trying to revitalise the process. Future efforts to promote the meaningful inclusion of women in high-level negotiations in Cyprus could be catalysed by key stakeholders, drawing upon the experience and support of regional platforms such as the MWMN.

A forth added value of the network consists in creating professional affiliation, policy influence, visibility and recognition of its members in different ways. For independent professionals especially, the network supplies an institutional “home” that legitimises public engagement and policy work. One respondent writes: “As a consultant, the network enabled me to have a permanent affiliation... [It] helped me to grow as a professional in policy influencing”. Respondents frame this affiliation as protection against politicisation while opening doors to agenda-setting venues. For some MWMN members who took part in the survey, the network serves as a platform to enable members to “explain themselves” and surface practice-based insights to peers. This visibility translates into advocacy leverage: speaking “as members of the network” strengthens claims before national governments and international organisations and helps articulate needs “in a coordinated and coherent way”.

The MWMN is vocal in presenting its members as agents of change, by amplifying their voices and impact, by highlighting their valuable potential in conflict contexts as they bring trust-building, flexibility, collaboration and inclusivity to the processes, and by promoting and recognising

their contributions at both formal and informal levels, while also keeping high attention high on the WPS Agenda and holding the international community accountable. By doing so, the network challenges the persistent perception that competent women are absent from the field or present solely in the form of victims. This approach directly addresses structural biases and the underrepresentation of women in high-level mediation and peacebuilding roles, offering concrete examples that counter the narrative of exclusion.

Among the different initiatives, the podcast series “HerStory” has been a powerful means to disseminate the work of network members and reflect on the lessons to be learnt based on their experience, and has inspired other similar initiatives developed by MWMN antennas, such as in Kosovo. Moreover, belonging to a network of women mediators is already a recognition of the value of members’ contributions to peace. Indeed, the MWMN membership is based on specific criteria, and has been made upon selection only. Affiliation to the network therefore not only enhances the legitimacy of its members within the field, but can also sometimes strengthen their professional positioning, facilitating access to opportunities and decision-making spaces. Some networks’ initiatives are also aiming at maintaining focus on the WPS Agenda and the need to implement it, especially in these challenging times; and holding actors such as member states and organisations accountable for the commitments they made 25 years ago.

A fifth added value is the capacity of the MWMN to act as a tool of soft diplomacy. In times of war, diplomacy is needed to keep dialogues alive, to create bridges, to overcome fractures in the society, to build trust and to offer alternatives for crisis resolution. Diplomacy has become more complex: it is no longer the sole preserve of the state, with more non-state actors engaged as well. Civil society, women’s networks and international organisations provide multilateral tools and platforms for crisis resolution. The type of diplomacy offered by the networks is flexible, agile and able to adapt to the different contexts. It is also suited to addressing many drivers of conflicts which are transnational in their origin. In this context, members of the MWMN bring their experience, knowledge and thematic expertise to inform locally responsive solutions.

The role of networks in addressing intersecting crises, including those triggered by climate change, and their abilities to work across the Triple Nexus have been part of a specific exchange promoted between the MWMN

and the more recently established Pacific Women Mediators Network, promoted by UN Women and supported by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Local women peacebuilders are engaged in a diverse spectrum of activities, including responding to challenges of climate change, development, disaster risk reduction and conflict prevention. They address threats comprehensively and inclusively. Given that women are disproportionately affected by crisis, conflicts and disasters, they often also contribute significantly to local, community-based solutions to prevent or address them.

Therefore, leveraging the work done by women mediators and peace-builders, the networks often facilitate collaboration between sectors and help for instance to bridge gaps between humanitarian aid and long-term development.

Lastly, an additional strength of the network lies in its capacity to connect women across generations, creating spaces for mutual support, learning and collective action. An intergenerational approach, grounded in mutual exchange and collaboration, is critical to designing sustainable peace processes that are informed by past experiences while oriented toward innovation, future resilience and inclusivity.

Despite this, young women often face a compounded form of marginalisation due to the intersection of age and gender. Their potential as transformative agents is frequently overshadowed by a prevailing narrative that frames them primarily through the lens of vulnerability. Women's networks play a key role in challenging this narrative by promoting targeted initiatives and fostering inclusive spaces for intergenerational dialogue. Such efforts not only strengthen young women's agency and leadership in peace and security processes, but also amplify the long-term impact of their contributions at local, national and international levels.

In the past few years, the MWMN has enlarged and welcomed new members, through two open calls, with the aim to enrich but also diversify its membership, with a particular attention to the inclusion of younger voices who can highly benefit from the dynamic space of experienced women, while bringing new skills and fields of expertise. MWMN members like Hajar Sharief are themselves huge advocates of the intergenerational co-leadership approach, promoting a deeper reflection within the network as “working together across generations can strengthen women mediators' and peacebuilder's collective influence”.¹³

¹³ Interview with MWMN mediator, October 2025.

Mentorship programmes that connect experienced mediators with younger counterparts also represent a powerful mechanism for fostering intergenerational exchange. These initiatives enable senior professionals to serve as mentors and role models – guiding, inspiring and supporting emerging mediators. In doing so, they contribute to building confidence, strengthening solidarity across generations and nurturing the dialogue necessary to foster innovation and resilience in peacebuilding practices. A notable example is the mentoring programme promoted by WIIS Italy, which pairs young Afghan women in diaspora with members of the MWMN. Its broader objective is to equip participants with the tools and confidence needed to play an active role in shaping the future of their countries, while also reinforcing a network of solidarity among women. Many of these young women have become advocates and voices for communities that have been silenced or marginalised. Through engagement with established networks and access to expert guidance, their impact is significantly amplified.

While its full potential is still not fully leveraged, all these features place the MWMN and women mediators' networks in a unique position to foster and strengthen the implementation of the WPS Agenda, moving from policy into practice, despite all the challenges.

7.4 How to tap the network's potential

Networks such as the MWMN have made important progress over the years and are now more recognised and known as key interlocutors providing concrete tools to contributing to the WPS Agenda. The centrality of women mediators and their networks has also been highlighted in a number of key international documents and events, including UN Secretary-General's annual reports on women, peace and security,¹⁴ the "New Agenda for Peace" (DPPA 2023) and the European External Action Service "Peace Mediation Guidelines" (EEAS 2024).

However, the recent reports on WPS implementation highlight that the participation in formal processes is an objective still far from being achieved, and bridging the different levels of mediations, spaces and actors

¹⁴ Examples: S/2016/822, para. 14; S/2017/861, para. 17; S/2018/900 para. 39-41; S/2019/800, para. 79; S/2020/946, para. 34; S/2022/740, para. 28; S/2023/725, para. 17. All available in UN Peacemaker website: *Secretary-General's Reports*, <https://peacemaker.un.org/en/node/2063>.

requires a continuous effort. The experience of the last decade shows that women's networks such as the MWMN are in a unique position to act and strengthen the implementation of the WPS Agenda, but for the Agenda to achieve its goals a collective action is needed. Clear action points for effective and multi-stakeholder engagement with women mediators and their networks remain also underdeveloped, despite being needed to allow them to achieve their full potential. In other words, networks like the MWMN are playing an important role, but the wider system needs changing. Recognising that the structural barriers of gender inequality are the main obstacle to progress on the WPS Agenda, the network can work on different levels, from advocacy to showcasing the impact of women and creating some positive conditions for change, but it can only do so much. A structural change is needed to create a critical mass in terms of numbers of women in high-level positions, which can trigger further changes; and to concretely address obstacles fostering a cultural change. Mediation and the WPS Agenda exist in complex times. While the number of ongoing conflicts is the highest since World War II (see for example Institute for Economics and Peace 2025), many processes are stuck, and multilateralism is under pressure. The WPS Agenda is often sidelined, if not rejected, reflecting the global pushback on women's rights; prevention is rarely valued, while the focus increasingly shifts towards militarisation, hard security and defence, managing ongoing conflicts and reaching short-term deals. The complexity of the geopolitical situation, together with the changing landscape in the field of mediation, of course affect the work and the results of the MWMN, posing additional challenges.

Moreover, there are some specific issues which, if correctly addressed, could allow the MWMN and other similar networks to fully reach their potential.

First of all, the basis of inclusive peace processes is access. However, opportunities to include women and their perspectives are still limited, and spaces need to be created. While capacity building and continuous learning are essential, there are women who are already well trained and experienced and whose participation could be a real added value to any discussion or process. Including them would mean, by definition, bringing diversity and having a more inclusive process, but also benefiting from their insights and views.

Taking this into consideration, the MWMN invested a lot in training activities in the first years, while focusing more, in recent years, on creating

entry points for those trained women to access different spaces and acquire practical experience, and on strengthening specialised knowledge. The 1325/2000 25th anniversary stands as an opportunity to review progress and look ahead but also has served to create momentum for specific initiatives like the UN Secretary-General's Common Pledge for Women's Full, Equal and Meaningful Participation in Peace Processes, launched on 24 October 2024 (UN Peacemaker 2025). The Common Pledge commits global mediation actors to concrete actions to increase women's inclusion in peace processes, e.g., by appointing women as lead mediators, ensuring women are part of mediation teams, advocating for women's participation with conflict parties, consulting with women leaders and organisations, and embedding gender expertise in mediation teams. Implementing the Pledge should also generate closer cooperation between global actors who signed the pledge and initiatives like networks which can be instrumental to identify mediators. Indeed, as observed by MWMN members in the survey, governments and – crucially – conflict parties should consult the network more systematically and appoint women from the network in formal roles within ongoing processes.

Integrating women mediators' networks into formal peace and security frameworks, and supporting efforts to elevate women's expertise and influence in institutional decision-making, requires donors, national stakeholders and multi-lateral organisations endorsing their participation in formal processes and reform initiatives. This means also continuing to champion systemic change to address discriminatory policies and unequal resource distribution; while recognising networks as vital interlocutors and partners, thus providing them institutional support. By leveraging international frameworks and advocating for equitable representation in decision-making roles, women mediators' networks can indeed reshape institutional norms and create pathways for meaningful participation, helping embedding gender perspectives into peacebuilding and security efforts.

What has proved to be really valued is also the power for the network to convene people and create a safe space for exchange and mutual learning. This might not have a direct impact on processes, thus lacking measurable indicators, but has allowed MWMN members to learn from each other, create strong relationships which are the basis for future cooperation and joint initiative, and stand in solidarity for each other when times are harder. The space provided by the networks has also been useful for

sensitive discussions which cannot happen elsewhere, preparing the ground for future participation or highlighting the complexity of issues through women's lenses. This requires a continuous effort in keeping the network together, providing opportunities to meet and discuss, from time to time also with the support of dedicated funds.

Financial support is indeed an important aspect to allow the network to consolidate itself and retain its functionality, but also to support concrete initiatives developed together with mediators themselves, which are often the outcomes of the exchanges and discussions that occur within the network. Experience shows that the Secretariat plays a vital role in keeping the network together, supporting its activities and acting as an external focal point. Moreover, while empowering members, encouraging them to take the lead and develop their own initiatives and to participate in dialogues and processes, the network needs also to further support them in this. However, technical support for women is often lacking despite their expertise, and the current trend of increased militarisation and security-focused approach risks overshadowing WPS commitments and shifting the allocation of funds. While regular support for the MWMN has so far been ensured by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with the network and its activities growing, there is an increasing need to secure commitment to funding, expand funds and diversify donors. This has proven to be difficult in the challenging context, impacting first of all the mediators themselves, and often given the institutional inability to better link the WPS Agenda to other agendas and policies, and related funds, such as the Sustainable Development Goals and the Triple Nexus.

Moreover, when initiatives are funded, the logic of short annual funds still prevails. By contrast, long-term, multi-annual and flexible funding mechanisms can provide sustained, predictable resources to women's networks to enable strategic planning and capacity strengthening. Moving away from short-term cycles would allow networks to effectively scale efforts, retain human resources and engage youth groups, increasing the professionalism of people involved, whose current commitments are often on a voluntary basis or at the expense of other employment opportunities. Longer-term support to women's network initiatives should not wait for the end of conflicts, as women are paving the way to peace as they respond to crises in their countries. This requires also recognising the value of initiatives which need continuity and might not deliver concrete and tangible results in the short term, forcing donors to move away from

their traditional approach. Measuring the impact can also sometimes become a challenge: data and indicators can tell just one part of the story but need to be accompanied by a collection of stories and lived experience. Sustainable resources would be also important to invest in strengthening expertise in areas critical to the WPS Agenda, allowing women's networks to contribute more effectively to decision-making processes and institutional reforms.

Another equally important aspect, and often a precondition, is institutional support. For networks, being recognised as strategic interlocutors, and engaged as reliable partners and allies, is essential and a prerequisite for the needed cooperation. Progress in this regard has been made, but this is not always the case and often relies on personal initiatives rather than formalised approaches.

A positive precedent was set for instance by Switzerland in 2024: before chairing the Open Debate on WPS at the UN Security Council, Swiss institutional representatives kept an open channel of dialogue with women's networks and their members. This included a workshop in Geneva aiming at identifying the most pertinent challenges of peacebuilding and mediation practice today, focusing on learnings from women's experiences in mediation and in peace processes, and a retreat of women mediators from nine regional networks as well as the Swiss mediator network, to develop recommendations to increase women's meaningful participation in peace processes within the current global context.

These consultations informed the annual Open Debate on Women, Peace and Security of the UN Security Council. On that occasion, Switzerland seized the opportunity to highlight the critical role of women's increased participation in peacebuilding and mediation, stating in the joint press statement ahead of the debate that the "support of multi-track mediation approaches must thus also include the recognition and institutionalization of women mediator networks" (Amherd 2024). It also provided space for a representative of the Global Alliance to brief the Security Council, and for a closed-door meeting between mediators and representatives from non-permanent members at the Security Council to happen.

This positive experience was mainly linked to the proactivity of a country which is particularly committed to mediation and the WPS Agenda. However, the repetition of such fruitful cooperation is not automatic and will depend on each country and institutional representative's sensitivity and interest, in the absence of a more institutionalised role for networks.

Ongoing efforts to strengthen strategic partnerships pertain also to the EU and particularly the EEAS, which facilitated a series of meetings with stakeholders and EU members states with representatives from the Global Alliance in Brussels in 2025 and uses the outcomes of fora in which networks are contributing, such as the Community of Practice on Peace Mediation and Civil Society Civil Society Dialogue Network, to inform its policies and actions.

A final consideration concerns the importance of synergies, cross-cutting cooperation across policies and actors, and effective coordination. Fragmentation and siloed operations, in fact, limit the impact of women's networks.

The MWMN was already launched as a way to increase synergies and links between institutions and civil society. So far, the network's success has relied largely on the commitment of individual Italian diplomats and parliamentarians who, through their openness and proactive engagement, have recognised its added value and impact. Their efforts have promoted and supported the network at various levels, helped consolidate relationships and, more broadly, ensured financial support for the WPS Agenda in Italy.

However, connections must extend beyond these actors to include other key regional and international stakeholders. This has been a specific focus of the MWMN, which has developed cooperation and joint initiatives with the EU, OSCE, UN Women and NATO, and has played a key role in launching and expanding the Global Alliance of Regional Women Mediators Networks.

Consolidating this broader network and creating strategic partnerships requires time, continuous effort and the building of trust. Moreover, expanding partnerships, bridging the gap between researchers and practitioners, and engaging creatively with diverse partners – including security forces – have increasingly emerged as essential elements. Promoting synergies among different actors and agendas, overcoming silos and recognising the interconnected nature of policies are all crucial steps.

This needs to happen on several levels.

First, at the policy level: for instance, peace and stabilisation processes should be accompanied by initiatives that foster the social and economic development of the countries involved. This requires a deeper understanding of the interconnections between WPS and other challenges and policy areas, as well as greater coordination and complementarity. It also

means overcoming competition, mistrust or overly narrow approaches in order to promote initiatives that build partnerships across sectors, generations and communities. The WPS Agenda itself could also be broadened to encompass emerging areas such as cybersecurity, hybrid threats and climate change.

At the institutional level, coordination and synergies are equally vital. Within the UN, for example, the work of the MWMN relates both to UN Women and to the UN DPPA and its mediation efforts. At the national level, within the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, while the main interlocutor for the network is the Directorate General for Political Affairs and Security – specifically the department in charge of UN affairs – there are strong links with regional offices (notably the MENA Department) and thematic offices (such as those dealing with security). Encouraging coordinated donor strategies and coalition-building could strengthen the influence of women's networks like the MWMN and ensure their voices are integrated into formal peace and security processes. Conversely, when departments and policies operate in isolation, there is a risk of confining WPS and the role of networks to a narrow niche, limiting their potential and impact.

At the same time, networks such as the MWMN must continue to build inclusive coalitions, broadening their outreach to grassroots and informal groups, non-affiliated women and youth, through deliberate and coordinated strategies. Addressing these priorities within a framework of collective action, where states and international organisations play a crucial role, and with genuine political commitment, will enable the MWMN to take further steps towards consolidating its role and enhancing its long-term impact.

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8.

The MWMN's Impact on National and Local Peace Processes

Giulia Daga, Gaia Ravazzolo and Loredana Teodorescu

MWMN activities in support of national and/or local peacebuilding processes have been numerous and diversified based on the specific local contexts, the background and work of the mediators involved, and broader political developments that have impacted each area differently in recent years. This chapter aims to show in detail the specificities of the network's actions in the context of peacebuilding processes in the contexts of Kosovo, Libya, Syria, Cyprus, Turkey, Lebanon and Palestine. The network's contribution to peace processes has varied deeply based on the instruments involved and the level of institutionalisation of the activities. In Cyprus (2019), Turkey (2019) and Kosovo (2020), the network established local "antennas", groups of network members that coordinate their activities closely and engage with other non-member women active in peacebuilding activities. Through the antennas, the network is able to amplify its reach and expand the formal and informal net of relations that subsequently inform the Secretariat's priorities and potential opening to new members and new initiatives. In other contexts, such as Syria and Libya, the network has played more informal – though highly impactful – roles in advancing the participation of women in ongoing peace processes, creating synergies between network members' activities, and expanding the outreach of local activities through the MWMN's platforms. Elsewhere, such as in Lebanon and Palestine, the network plays an indirect role by expanding the reach of its members' initiatives. In this chapter, the data gathered from the network's archives is integrated with informal conversations with Secretariat members, also considering semi-structured interviews with MWMN members active in each of the case studies.

8.1 Turkey

Since October 2024, Turkey has entered a turbulent yet pivotal phase marked by the unexpected revival of peace talks with Abdullah Öcalan, the imprisoned leader of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). The symbolic turning point came on 1 October 2024, when an unforeseen handshake in the Turkish Grand National Assembly captured national attention. Devlet Bahçeli, Chairman of the ultranationalist Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) and long-standing opponent of Kurdish dialogue, extended his hand to DEM Party Co-Chair Tuncer Bakırhan and to other members of parliament representing the Kurdish democratic movement. Bahçeli's statement on that occasion – "While we want peace in the world, we need to ensure peace in our own country" – became the catalyst for a new, albeit uncertain, era of dialogue and possibility.

The initiative, formally spearheaded by Bahçeli, has been met with cautious hope but also with widespread scepticism. His symbolic gesture, followed by Öcalan's call to the PKK to lay down arms, suggested the reopening of a peace process. Yet the secrecy surrounding Öcalan's involvement and the lack of transparency from the government deepened doubts, particularly among Kurds and civil society actors who vividly recall the collapse of the 2013-2015 negotiations and the violent aftermath that followed. President Erdoğan's renewed interest in dialogue also appears closely tied to electoral calculations, as his ruling coalition faces uncertainty ahead of the next presidential elections. Unlike a decade ago, this engagement unfolds in an even more repressive climate, with the AKP-MHP bloc tightening authoritarian policies not only against Kurdish movements but also against broader opposition forces, including the secular Republican People's Party (CHP).

Still, Turkey's political dynamics are shifting. The CHP has openly expressed support for dialogue despite its sharp criticism of government authoritarianism, while the DEM Party continues to balance negotiation with active resistance. Kurdish civil society organisations, meanwhile, insist that reconciliation cannot wait for a formal settlement. They advance grassroots initiatives rooted in justice, memory and pluralism, rejecting both impunity and assimilationist policies. These actors promote what they describe as "agonistic reconciliation" – an approach that accepts political disagreement, recognises difference and seeks coexistence without erasing Kurdish identity. Regional developments, including the halt of the

war in Syria, have also created new opportunities for dialogue with Syrian Kurds, adding an additional dimension to the process.

The establishment of the MWMN Turkey Antenna in June 2019 marked a significant milestone in localising women's participation in peacebuilding and mediation processes in Turkey.¹ Originating from a 2019 meeting among women mediators and activists, the Antenna was created to foster a nationwide community of practitioners committed to gender-sensitive approaches to conflict resolution. Under the broader international umbrella of the MWMN, the Turkish Antenna brings together academics, civil society leaders, mediators and politicians, uniting diverse expertise to strengthen women's agency in all stages of peace and negotiation. Through research, such as the "Women's Cooperatives" research conducted in 2022, the Antenna has sought to operationalise these goals – building local capacities for mediation and connecting women across regions to promote social dialogue and inclusive peace (Süleymanoğlu et al. 2023).

Yet, in Turkey, peace cannot be reduced to the mere absence of war; rather, it must be understood as positive peace – a transformative process that addresses structural inequalities, historical injustices and social divisions (Daşlı 2025). In contexts marked by protracted conflicts, such as the Kurdish question, reconciliation and peacebuilding cannot wait for a formal political settlement. Civil society initiatives like the MWMN Turkey Antenna embody this vision by advancing reconciliation from below, emphasising justice, inclusion and pluralism as essential foundations for a sustainable and democratic peace (Daşlı 2025). Being part of the MWMN thus provides not only international visibility but also a shared framework for reimagining peace as an active, participatory and gender-responsive process rooted in local realities.²

Within this complex environment, the Turkey Antenna of the MWMN has emerged as one of the few organisations positioned to act swiftly in support of social peace. Drawing on longstanding peacebuilding expertise, the Antenna has sought to place women peacebuilders at the forefront of this transformative moment. Its members emphasise the importance of ensuring women's voices in shaping the democratic future of the country. In particular, the Antenna has focused on three interconnected areas of action, supported by the MWMN, as underlined by Ayşe

¹ See MWMN Turkey Antenna website: <https://kadınarabulucular.net/en>.

² Ibid.

Betül Çelik in her interview: (a) research on women's cooperatives and grassroots initiatives as entry points to broader peace dialogues; (b) capacity-building through gender-sensitive mediation and negotiation trainings in conflict-prone areas; and (c) direct engagement in mediation efforts, both at parliamentary and local levels (Interview 2). Yet, they also acknowledge that without a genuine commitment to justice, truth-seeking and political recognition, official peace talks risk repeating the failures of the past. The current moment is thus both fragile and full of potential: a test of whether Turkey can move beyond the instrumental use of peace as a political tool and advance towards an inclusive settlement based on reconciliation, justice and pluralism.

Since the opening of this new phase in October 2024, the Turkey Antenna of MWMN has undertaken an increasingly active role. It has launched an intensive round of meetings with political and institutional actors, with the dual aim of ensuring women's meaningful participation in the peace process and contributing its mediation expertise to ongoing discussions. A distinctive element of the Antenna's approach is the deliberate effort to build trust among women mediators with diverse ethnic, sectarian and ideological backgrounds. This internal cohesion, fostered since the foundation of the Antenna in 2019, has allowed the group to speak with a unified voice in front of political actors and to avoid fragmentation along partisan lines. The mediators have engaged in consultations with parliamentary leaders, highlighting the need for women's participation at all levels of negotiation and bringing into the process the skills and comparative knowledge developed through the network.

A symbolic milestone was reached with the declared decommissioning of the PKK, which led to the establishment of a parliamentary commission tasked with developing policies on disarmament, demobilisation and re-integration. Members of the Antenna held discussions with several representatives of this commission, reaffirming their readiness to contribute to the design and implementation of social peace initiatives at the local level. In March 2025, the Antenna met with Numan Kurtulmuş, President of the Turkish Grand National Assembly and head of the parliamentary commission. In May, outreach continued with visits to Özgür Özel, leader of the CHP, and to Tuncer Bakırhan and Tülay Hatimoğulları, co-chairs of the DEM Party. During the same mission to Ankara, the delegation also engaged with members of the parliamentary commission and with Efkan Ala, a long-serving parliamentarian.

In parallel, the Antenna broadened its operational footprint by engaging in parliamentary sessions that included academics and conflict-resolution specialists. At the 10th session of the National Solidarity, Brotherhood and Democracy Committee, contributions were made by Professor Havva Kök Arslan, Sevtap Yokuş Veznedaroğlu (part of Turkey Antenna, although not a member of the MWMN), Ayşe Betül Çelik, Talha Köse, Deniz Ülke Kaynak, Associate Professor Çerağ Esra Çuhadar and Vahap Coşkun. The participation of Çelik and Çuhadar was particularly significant, as both are members of the Turkey Antenna of MWMN. Their interventions underscored the role of the network in bridging civil society, women's mediation expertise and formal political mechanisms, while reinforcing the goal of embedding gender-sensitive perspectives and international experience into parliamentary deliberations on disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration.

On 20 August 2025, with the support of the Democratic Progress Institute, the Antenna convened a high-level seminar entitled "Mechanisms that Create Opportunities in Peace Processes". The event gathered civil society representatives, academics and practitioners, and featured contributions by Çuhadar and Çelik, who analysed comparative peace mechanisms – such as inclusive commissions, consultation and observer bodies, referenda and confidence-building measures – and critically assessed their applicability to Turkey's evolving peace process. The seminar also reflected a broader learning dynamic within the MWMN, whereby Turkish mediators could draw inspiration from experiences in other contexts (e.g., the Philippines or Indonesia) and adapt successful framing strategies to reduce resistance to concepts such as power-sharing. This seminar, along with the invitations extended to three Antenna members to present directly before the parliamentary commission, reflects the growing recognition of the network's expertise at both institutional and political levels.

Overall, the Turkey Antenna of MWMN has consolidated its position as a credible interlocutor in Turkey's peace process. By engaging with parliamentary actors, facilitating the involvement of its members in high-profile hearings and organising strategic seminars, it has ensured that gender perspectives are integrated into institutional debates. At the same time, the Antenna has advanced key recommendations: the urgent adoption of a National Action Plan on UNSC Resolution 1325, stronger interaction between Syrian refugee organisations and Turkish NGOs to foster social cohesion, and a systematic effort to make 1325 known at the local

level, where awareness remains minimal. By adapting lessons learned from international peacebuilding to Turkey's context, fostering dialogue across party lines and societal groups, and strategically positioning itself as a reference actor, the Antenna demonstrates the added value of the MWMN in transforming fragile opportunities for peace into sustainable and inclusive processes.

8.2 Cyprus

A further dimension of the MWMN is represented by the experience of its Cyprus Antenna, which was launched after a preparatory process initiated in July 2018. On that occasion, a meeting hosted by the Cyprus Women's Lobby, with the support of the MWMN, Women Mediators across the Commonwealth, WILPF and UNFICYP, brought together 26 women peacebuilders from across the island. The participants engaged in in-depth discussions on the persistent underrepresentation of women in the Cypriot peace process and identified potential island-wide strategies to promote inclusivity and participation.³ The Cypriot context is that of a "frozen conflict": no active fighting but the constant presence of checkpoints, barbed wire, militarisation and a public narrative still dominated by patriarchal paradigms. The island remains physically divided, and this division has very tangible effects on people's everyday lives. Crossing between the two sides requires passing through a limited number of checkpoints, often involving long queues, bureaucratic procedures and restrictions that affect access to work, education, healthcare and social relationships. These daily obstacles reinforce both physical and psychological separation between communities (Reuters 2024). In this setting, women's leadership and sustained intercommunal engagement are crucial levers for peace. Women have the potential to foster trust, promote inclusive dialogue and bridge the social and cultural divides that persist on the island.

At the institutional level, the UN Security Council has repeatedly reaffirmed that the full, equal and meaningful participation of women is essential for building sustainable peace. For example, Resolution 2561/2021 refers explicitly to this in the Cypriot context, extending the mandate of the UN peacekeeping force in Cyprus while stressing the need for

³ See MWMN website: *Cyprus Antenna*, <https://womenmediators.net/?p=31693>

women's involvement (UN Security Council 2021a). Likewise, Resolution 2587/2021 expresses regret for "the ongoing lack of meaningful participation of women's organisations and youth in the Settlement process", and urges the parties to develop an action plan to increase women's participation (UN Security Council 2021b). These measures align with the broader framework of UNSCR 1325 on WPS.

Despite these international commitments, this gender quota has not translated into meaningful participation: in more than five decades of conflict and negotiation, no woman has held full negotiating status in the central peace talks (Hadjipavlou 2023). As a result, while the UN resolutions have established an important normative framework for women's inclusion in the peace process, in practice they have so far failed to produce concrete outcomes or progress commensurate with expectations, leaving Cyprus's gender and peace agenda largely unfulfilled.

Following these discussions, and after several months of preparation, the Cyprus Antenna of MWMN was officially launched on 17-18 May 2019 in Nicosia. The two-day event opened with a public session dedicated to examining the global challenges of ensuring women's meaningful participation in mediation and peacebuilding, followed by an interactive mediation workshop focused on inclusive and gender-sensitive approaches tailored to local women peacebuilders. The launch of MWMN-Cyprus thus marked the beginning of an island-wide intercommunal initiative designed to strengthen the role of women both as drivers of peace in Cyprus and as active agents in the consolidation of a democratic society. Since then, the Antenna has alternated advocacy with practical training: introductory courses on negotiation and mediation that attracted participation from UN personnel, diplomats, policymakers, civil society actors and youth from all the communities of Cyprus. Just last year, one such event was organised, bringing together as many as 75 participants – a successful attendance by the standards of the Cypriot Antenna, as underlined by Magda Zenon in her interview (Interview 5).

The Antenna's founding members – five women with long-standing expertise in peacebuilding and gender activism – were drawn from across the island. Three of them had participated in the official launch of the Mediterranean Women Mediators' Network in Rome in October 2017, and subsequently mobilised the broader Cypriot community of peace-builders around the idea of a genuinely inclusive, island-wide initiative. Their efforts culminated in the inclusion of two members from the

Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, ensuring that the Cyprus Antenna reflected the intercommunal character of the peace process. In September 2019, the Antenna also participated in the launch of the Global Alliance of Regional Women Mediator Networks in New York, thereby linking its local experience with broader international initiatives. Cypriot members underline that the network's strength lies in its transnational "sisterhood": a system of mutual support that facilitates access to UN and EU spaces and provides legitimacy in highly politicised environments.

Over the years, the Cyprus Antenna has been recognised by the United Nations as a credible local interlocutor, serving as a point of access for stakeholders and facilitating dialogue between civil society and institutional actors. In this role, it has maintained consistent engagement with UN officials active in Cyprus and contributed to framing women's participation as a structural element of the peace process. In 2025, women peacebuilders presented to UN Under-Secretary-General Rosemary DiCarlo concrete proposals: the establishment of an island-wide working group of women peacebuilders with a formal mandate to feed into the talks; and the creation of agile thematic groups able to provide negotiators with rapid, targeted recommendations for constitutional or policy drafting.

Among its most recent activities, on 17 July 2025 the Antenna hosted a public screening of 'Pray the Devil Back to Hell' (2008), the acclaimed documentary recounting the story of Liberian women whose collective mobilisation brought an end to civil war. The screening was followed by an interactive discussion led by MWMN member Maria Hadjipavlou and Associate Professor Umut Bozkurt (Department of Political Science & International Relations). The event created a vibrant setting for dialogue across communities and stimulated reflection on the role of women in peace processes, the importance of cross-communal engagement and the ways in which international experiences can inspire local strategies in Cyprus. This "public pedagogy" complements other storytelling practices developed by the mediators: podcasts, short videos and community dialogues in formerly mixed villages that collect and amplify women's voices, countering elite-controlled media narratives and humanising the costs of division.

Through these and other initiatives, the Cyprus Antenna has consolidated itself as a key platform for intercommunal women's peace activism on the island. Since May 2019, indeed the Cyprus Antenna of the MWMN has brought together women from both Greek- and Turkish-Cypriot communities to engage in dialogue and carry out joint initiatives aimed at

pushing forward the peace process while integrating a gender perspective. By combining local engagement with international linkages, and by fostering both public awareness and institutional recognition, the Antenna contributes to sustaining the momentum for an inclusive and gender-sensitive approach to the Cypriot peace process, while also offering a model of intercommunal cooperation for other divided societies. Key recommendations emerging from this practice include: (a) creating a permanent consultative group of women mediators with formal recognition in the peace process; (b) maintaining a roster of thematic expert cells able to deliver concise and time-bound proposals on constitutional and policy issues; (c) expanding mediation and negotiation training to both young women and young men to build a new peace constituency; and (d) securing stable funding for narrative-change initiatives such as podcasts, screenings and micro-documentaries. The interviewee also highlights practical constraints – funding volatility, volunteer burnout and fragmented leadership cultures – which the network can help address through mentoring, pooled resources and joint advocacy.

Following the recent expansion of the MWMN to include mediators from Greece, new potential spaces for dialogue are emerging across the region. This development opens the possibility for exchanges and joint activities involving members of the Greek, Turkish and Cypriot antennas of the network – a step that could further strengthen inter-regional collaboration and mutual understanding among women peacebuilders. Although this initiative is still in progress, it represents a promising direction toward fostering cross-border dialogue and integrating a gender perspective into peace and mediation efforts throughout the Eastern Mediterranean.

8.3 Kosovo

From the outset of post-war state building in Kosovo, international actors active in the peacebuilding process endorsed Resolution 1325/2000) to advance women's participation in peace and security. The inclusion of women in the institutional and social reconstruction has however developed slowly. In 1999, one year before the adoption of Resolution 1325, the UN Security Council established the UN Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) with the mandate to follow the peacebuilding process towards the establishment and reinforcement of democratic institutions. Yet, both the

mission and formal international negotiations did little to include women at the table, so that the actual presence of women in the post-war negotiations remained marginal. During the period of UNSCR 1244 (1999-2008) and beyond, the UNMIK-led state-building process was overwhelmingly male-driven, with women virtually absent from key decision-making structures and peace talks. As noted by Jeta Krasniqi (2023: 4) “in the talks on the Interim Agreement for Peace and Self-Government in Kosovo, the Rambouillet Accords (1999), there were no women signatories, no women mediators, no women witnesses, and women made up only 3 per cent of negotiating teams”.⁴

To cope with this marginalisation both within the Kosovar decision-making structures and in international missions, women activists joined to boost the Kosovo Women’s Network, which had been informally created in 1996 to advocate for Kosovar women’s voices from the local to the international levels. The Kosovo Women’s Network (KWN) has been instrumental in lobbying for legal reform, public awareness campaigns, and where possible direct inclusion.⁵ Organised protests erupted in both Kosovo and Serbia in 2006, for International Women’s Day, to demand a more concrete increase in women’s participation in the Serbia-Kosovo negotiations. On that occasion, feminist activists recall hanging a banner reading “Resolution 1325 gives us the right to be in the negotiation team”,

⁴ Jeta Krasniqi, a member of the MWMN, is a consultant serving as an Expert Advisor to the Kosovo Government on the EU-facilitated negotiation process between Kosovo and Serbia. She is also the deputy chair of the Governmental Commission for the verification and recognition of conflict-related sexual violence victims during the war. Krasniqi has also been part of the “Follow Us” initiative, launched by the OSCE Missions in Kosovo and Serbia in Budva as one of the earliest efforts to build dialogue between women from both societies. Bringing together prominent women leaders including members of parliament, representatives of institutions and civil society, and academics, the initiative sought to use the gender equality and peace agenda as a bridge between divided communities. It preceded the official EU-facilitated dialogue, offering a rare space for cooperation grounded not in politics but in shared values of understanding, empathy and solidarity. Despite the political challenges that later interrupted regular meetings, its legacy endures through one of its most powerful outcomes – the establishment of the OSCE Dialogue Academy for Young Women, now marking its tenth anniversary. Over the years, Krasniqi has continued to cooperate closely with the Dialogue Academy, serving as a mentor and trainer, supporting new generations of women from Kosovo and Serbia who are learning to lead with empathy and courage.

⁵ See KWN website: *About Us*, <https://womensnetwork.org/?p=240>.

yet women were only offered limited roles in minor working groups or token representation; major decisions were taken by male policymakers with little gender awareness (Behrami 2023).

In the following years, a few formal steps were taken to implement the guidelines of Resolution 1325, such as the adoption of the Kosovo Programme for Gender Equality (KPGE), and the Working Plan 2013-2015, which was launched in January 2014 with the aim of putting into practice both the Resolution and the KPGE by enhancing women's representation in decision-making, integrating gender perspectives into security institutions and ensuring justice and reparations for survivors of wartime sexual violence. Despite legal frameworks and institutional commitments, such as the 30 per cent quotas for women in parliament and municipal councils, practical inclusion remained limited by both formal and informal barriers.

Reports on the implementation of the Working Plan show that even if by 2019 women had indeed reached a quota of 33 per cent of deputies in the national parliament, political parties' women leaders have remained few, and media visibility of women politicians has remained limited. Similar inequalities are observed in the private sector, the judicial system and the security sector, where discrimination, lack of promotion opportunities, resignations due to unsafe work environments, and tokenism remain common (Scilla 2020). More generally, Kosovo continues to have low female labour force participation, high levels of unpaid care work, and economic exclusion: as of 2017, only about 12 to 18 per cent of women were employed, women owned less than 20 per cent of property and had limited access to credit – impeding their capacity to participate fully in WPS activities or public life.⁶

The year 2020, marking 20 years of the implementation of Resolution 1325, constituted a broader moment of reflection on the role and impact of the WPS Agenda, further influenced by the inequalities and criticalities exposed by the Covid-19 pandemic. This context allowed for greater awareness and international engagement over the status of women's inclusion in Kosovo's institutional representation of women and fight against gender-based violence.

In this context, on 18 November 2020, the MWMN, with the help of the Italian Embassy, launched a Kosovo Antenna, composed of the Kosovar

⁶ See UN Women Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia website: *Kosovo*, <https://eca.unwomen.org/en/node/9063>.

network members Edita Tahiri, Jeta Krasniqi and Linda Gusia, who had joined a year earlier. The Antenna was launched with a conference held in Prishtina and chaired by the Italian Ambassador to Kosovo, Nicola Orlando, alongside Italian Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Marina Sereni and Acting President of Kosovo Vjosa Osmani. The conference resulted in a series of recommendations for the institutions of Kosovo to be enhanced in the ongoing negotiation process in the country.⁷

The launch of the MWMN Kosovo Antenna in 2020 marked an important milestone in supporting the Kosovo national WPS Agenda. The events brought together women leaders, policymakers and international representatives to discuss Kosovo's progress on UNSCR 1325, and created platforms for national dialogue on women's participation in security, peacebuilding and mediation. The launch positioned Kosovo as an active contributor to the regional network and strengthened institutional and civic engagement around gender equality, reconciliation and democratic governance (MWMN 2020).

One of the first projects implemented with the support of the MWMN focused on women in the security sector, a field where gender stereotypes are deeply rooted. The initiative resulted in a comprehensive report mapping women's participation, identifying key obstacles and proposing concrete recommendations for reform. Its findings were presented at a national conference that gathered key institutional representatives and members from civil society. The event generated an informed dialogue on integrating gender perspectives in security policy and emphasised the importance of retention, career advancement and work-life balance for women in the sector. Beyond its policy contribution, the initiative strengthened inter-institutional cooperation and gave visibility to women professionals as agents of change within Kosovo's security framework.

The findings and conclusions of the report were later translated into a short documentary and a podcast series, expanding the impact of the initiative through storytelling and public engagement. The documentary portrayed women's experiences in joining and advancing within the security sector, confronting gender stereotypes while inspiring future generations. The initiatives in promoting the WPS Agenda continued through a podcast series titled "Spotlight" (KWN 2024). The series has created a

⁷ See MWMN website: *Kosovo Antenna*, <https://womenmediators.net/?p=31696>.

bridge between past struggles and present achievements, by highlighting continuity in women's roles across peace and security processes. The podcast aimed at providing a legacy for newer generations of the role of women in peace processes, by presenting the individual experiences of women active in the 1980s and 1990s. Together, these media initiatives broadened public understanding of women's roles in shaping Kosovo's democratic and security institutions and promoted a culture of solidarity across generations. Their outreach extended beyond awareness-raising, amplifying visibility and fostering dialogue on reconciliation, inclusion and shared responsibility for peace. The initiatives reaffirmed women's agency in building sustainable peace and democratic resilience.

As Jeta Krasniqi observes, these projects were relatively small, yet they managed to achieve strong visibility, and to leave tangible legacies beyond policy documents and meetings. In cooperation with local NGOs, the Kosovo MWMN Antenna actively promoted its activities through press releases, media appearances and public discussions. The podcast, in particular, reached a wide audience, through the involvement of the current President Vjosa Osmani-Sadriu and the former one Atifete Jahjaga, generating significant public interest and encouraging NGOs to replicate similar initiatives (Interview 4).

One of the central aims of the Antenna's work has been to acknowledge and honour the role of women in Kosovo's peace and security landscape, women who not only broke barriers within their own communities but also challenged the misjudgements of the international community. Their contribution extended beyond advocacy to active bridge-building between communities divided by conflict and across national boundaries, laying the foundations for reconciliation and solidarity. During the 1990s, women played pivotal roles in sustaining civic life and raising international awareness of human-rights abuses and the humanitarian crisis, often through simple yet courageous acts such as bringing bread from Pristina to Drenica (Haxhiaj 2023). Women activists and informal networks in Kosovo worked to preserve education, healthcare and community life under repression, while building solidarity with regional feminist movements such as Women in Black. This cooperation later evolved into structured cross-border initiatives, including the Women's Peace Coalition, which embodied women's moral leadership and commitment to reconciliation across the former Yugoslavia. Through these efforts, women in Kosovo forged their own paths as advocates of peace and justice, long

before international interventions. The Antenna's work continues this legacy, aiming to restore visibility, dignity and agency to women whose stories form the foundation of Kosovo's enduring pursuit of peace and equality. To this end, the experience of Edita Tahir, recognised as the only woman peace negotiator in the Balkans participating in the international peace processes, as well as a MWMN member, has also served as an inspiring example for other women in the wider region and has been shared during numerous meetings.

Among its latest activities, the MWMN has also launched a cooperation with the OSCE Dialogue Academy for Young Women, now marking its tenth anniversary. Throughout the years, the Academy has become a living example of how women's dialogue can transcend political divides and transform inherited mistrust into cooperation and respect, shaping a generation oriented toward reconciliation, peace and intergenerational solidarity. Believing that new generations have a crucial role to play in the region, by also shaping a new narrative overcoming historical and political divide, the MWMN engaged in the 2024 and 2025 edition of the Academy, connecting the experience of seasoned leaders with the energy and vision of young women. By doing so, the initiative has shown that sustainable peace in the region depends on empowering women to become bridges across communities, across generations and across borders. Finally, beyond the specific work of the Kosovo Antenna, the MWMN has created for its Kosovar members a space that means more than professional engagement; it felt like a family of strong, committed women united by trust, solidarity and a shared sense of purpose. It created a space where courage, empathy and mutual support transcended institutional roles, generations and national borders. Through the network, the Antenna members connected Kosovo's experience to a wider regional and global movement of women mediators who understand that peace cannot be sustained without inclusion, dialogue and genuine human understanding. In Jeta Krasniqi's case specifically, being part of this community reaffirmed her belief that women's agency and collective power extend beyond mandates – they are acts of care, conviction and responsibility toward others. The MWMN reminded Krasniqi that women's voices, often the first to call for peace and the last to be heard, remain essential to reconciliation, bridge-building and the transformation of our societies (Interview 4).

8.4 Libya

From the early post-Qaddafi era, Libyan women have mobilised to demand representation under UNSCR 1325, advocating for direct involvement in peacebuilding and constitutional transitions as a reflection of their prominent role in the 2011 uprising (NGO Working Group on WPS 2020). Differently from the context of Kosovo, where some women had been included in the formal peace talks, in the Libyan peace process women lacked representation in formal negotiations. At the grassroots level, however, women have found space to play a more active role since the beginning of the conflict.

In the almost 15 years since the 2011 uprisings, the role of women in key local peacemaking positions has steadily increased. Women's Affairs Officers across municipalities drive gender-sensitive policy advocacy and bridge communities with local authorities. The increased role has followed an incremental approach: women have received digital and technical training to expand their mediating skills and become more effective in the work that they had already been conducting informally (Elboaishi 2025).

Civil society networks such as Voice of Libyan Women (VLW), the Libyan Women Platform for Peace (LWPP) and Together We Build It have played instrumental roles in this process. VLW, founded by Alaa Murabit in 2011, launched the faith-based Noor Campaign, mobilising over 600 community leaders across 35 cities to promote women's rights via Islamic discourse. The LWPP, co-founded by Zahra' Langhi, has driven advocacy around electoral reform, inclusive dialogue on disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration, and coordination with UN Women.

In 2014, Together We Build It (TWBI) initiated the "1325 Network in Libya", a civil-society platform with the aim of training activists on the WPS Agenda, monitoring the implementation of UNSCR 1325 and lobbying government bodies – including the constitution-drafting assembly – to adopt a National Action Plan, ensure women's mediation roles in negotiations and reform the security sector. Among its activities, the network launched the campaign "1325 Your Number in Peace Building", which aimed at translating the UN language into the local context and raising public awareness about the WPS Agenda. The campaign was translated into the publication on national TV and social media of a video on the resolution, and the distribution of five thousand copies of a leaflet summarising the role of the resolution in the Libyan context (TWBI 2014).

Rida Al Tubuly and Hajar Sharief, the co-founders of TWBI, have been core promoters of the 1325 Network, organised national training and briefed the UN Security Council on youth and women's inclusion in peace processes. In 2019, Sharief was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in recognition of these efforts. Both Al Tubuly, a co-founder member of the MWMN, and Sharief have become active members of the Mediterranean Women Mediators Network, which provided the platform to advance their objectives and to interact with other women networks from other regions.

Rida Al Tubuly, a pharmacologist-turned-activist and university professor, is the director of TWBI, co-authored the first civil society 1325 monitoring report launched in New York in 2014, created a national women professionals database and has testified at the UN Security Council and UN Human Rights Council advocating for women's rights within the WPS Agenda. She has served as an expert on gender-based violence for a committee established by the North-South Centre of the Council of Europe.

Al Tubuly highlights that 2011 was the key year that led many women including herself to become interested in WPS. The hopes and expectations of a post-Gaddafi Libya were high. Together We Build It was aimed not only at gathering women from diverse settings but also enhancing intergenerational exchanges, with the objective of enhancing the role of women and young women in the country. One area of intervention was to support women running for office, by organising major campaigns, carrying out advocacy and promoting the visibility of women candidates.

In November 2015, 38 Libyan women from diverse regional, political and diaspora backgrounds convened in Geneva to draft a "Minimum Women's Peace Agenda", jointly hosted with UN Women and the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL). The agenda demanded constitutional gender equality, legal reform to combat violence, 30 per cent representation quotas in governance, transitional justice and attention to displaced women's needs. It emphasised women's transformation from conflict victims into peacemakers (UN Women 2015a).

At the formal national level of negotiations, however, women's participation in official peace talks still met strong barriers, and no women participated in the military track talks that resulted in the ceasefire agreement. Zahra' Langhi, co-founder of LWPP, observes that often the formal UN-led frameworks fail to reflect the profound role as mediators that

women have been practicing in the Libyan context. Most traditional women mediators have never heard of the United Nations, and yet their role has been pivotal both in mobilising civil society at the time of the anti-Qaddafi uprising, and in facilitating dialogue between tribes and families in settings such as the Saharan milieus of the Fezzan region (Kakar 2019).

To overcome this lack of representation, in 2018, TWBI and the Mediterranean Women Mediators Network supported UN Women and other women's associations to successfully lobby for the inclusion of four women – initially not involved – in the formal group of three out of four Libyan delegations in the “Palermo Conference for and with Libya” discussing the future of the country. The advocacy was preceded by a campaign led by TWBI in Libya for the official inclusion of women in the Libyan delegation, which was called “You Are Missing the Full Picture”. The campaign involved high-level meetings between TWBI and Libyan authorities, including the prime minister, as well as engagements with the international community, including representatives of member states and the EU in Geneva and Tunis. TWBI's initiatives led to Libyan women in parliament, political parties and civil society collectively signing a statement calling for women's participation in the delegation. Although no formal invitation was extended to MWMN, TWBI, UN Women and the Nordic Women's Mediators Network, these organisations successfully secured their presence at the venue to support the Libyan women delegates and enhance their visibility, with the MWMN's backing.

The Palermo conference managed to receive a broad representation of Libyan actors, including from the Presidential Council/Government of National Accord, the House of Representatives, the High Council of State and the Libyan National Army. This was a milestone for the active involvement of UNSMIL in supporting women's participation in the peace process in Libya. The conference's final communiqué, agreed upon by the Libyan participants, a large number of states and international organisations, “urged Libyan representatives to support the principle of full inclusivity, including women participation, for the National Conference, without vetoes” (Libya et al. 2018).

In the case of the Palermo conference, the MWMN's access to and influence in decision-making fora allowed for the mobilisation of efforts that secured access to a high-level venue and enabled the participation of four Libyan women after years of exclusion; that visibility created leverage over the international community and UNSMIL, which subsequently

incorporated women in later stages. The episode shows how the network translated local mobilisation into diplomatic presence – working with the Nordic Women Mediators and UN Women – and drew on the transnational campaign “You Are Missing the Full Picture” (Interview 1).

The network has continued its advocacy work that started with the Palermo conference, so as to keep the topic of the participation of women high in the international agenda. In April 2020, the MWMN coordinated the drafting of a letter to Stephanie Williams, then Acting Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of Mission of UNSMIL, to emphasise the worsening conditions of women due to the continuation of the conflict (Fellin 2021). In October 2020, the network, the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation and UNSMIL organised a closed-door meeting with the aim of advocating for “the inclusion of women in Sub-Committees, gender mainstreaming agreements, creating Advisory Committees with national ownership and setting up a committee of women to monitor the peace tracks”. Stephanie Williams joined the meeting.⁸

Formal peace talks, such as the Palermo meeting and the Track II Libya National Conference peace process, have since 2018 increasingly recognised the role of women. The UNSMIL-facilitated Libyan Political Dialogue Forum (LPDF) starting in November 2020, saw a women’s participation of 23 per cent, a stark improvement compared to previous discussions where women were only six per cent of the total participants. At the same time, more women have also taken part in municipal elections as both voters and candidates (Council on Foreign Relations 2025a).

Within the LPDF, 17 of 75 delegates were women who jointly issued a statement demanding at least 30 per cent leadership positions for women, inclusion guarantees based on competence, and regional, ethnic and age diversity. These demands were reflected in the process roadmap, but broader critiques persisted: participant selection was seen as exclusionary, some delegates were accused of corruption and women remained often sidelined in decision-making (NGO Working Group on WPS 2020). Many barriers are linked to the lack of a political long-term solution in Libya, but also due to enduring structural problems. The political milieu remains militarised, dominated by violent actors who are considered the legitimate stake-

⁸ See MWMN website: *Local initiatives: Libya*, <https://womenmediators.net/?p=30524>.

holders in power sharing. For example, no women are reported to be part of the 5+5 Libyan Joint Military Commission and the 6+6 Libyan Joint Committee for Preparing Electoral Law, resulting in unequal legislative proposals such as the six out of 90 seats quota formulated for a future national Senate (Council on Foreign Relations 2025a).

Moreover, even when women gain entry to peace tables, institutional and patriarchal constraints severely limit their capacity to influence outcomes. Intimidation and violence against women leaders are widespread – activists have faced threats, kidnappings and assassination attempts, and many fear for their safety or flee public life altogether (UN Women 2015b). The Libyan case is emblematic in showing the intersectionality between women's grievances and other forms of discrimination and violence against weaker groups, such as migrants.

Although the country's conditions have become particularly complex after the failed implementation of the roadmap for free and fair elections, and increasing attacks by local actors against women operating in Libya, the MWMN has continued its critical work in supporting Libyan women's initiatives. As recognised by Al Tubuly, the added value of the network has been supporting initiatives that have difficulty in finding international donors (even more difficult given the shifts in priorities and reductions in funding from several countries). The main objective remains that of gathering women located in Libya, consulting with them on their proposals and difficulties, and then bringing the issues to a higher political level. Beyond access, the network provided learning and peer infrastructure that informed the respondent's methodology. Training and exposure within the MWMN complemented TWBI's ongoing efforts and was visible in the design and facilitation of the Track 1.5 meeting in Utøya in 2022. Organised by Libyan members of the network through TWBI, the aim of the meeting was to foster dialogue among representatives of Libyan political factions with women and youth from civil society. In a meeting that convened young parliamentarians, government spokespeople, former militia members and civil society activists, Al Tubuly led the mediation, applying gender-responsive practice acquired through the network. The meeting resulted in the parties involved expressing their willingness to continue the discussions with the facilitation of TWBI. This led to the drafting of a paper that stressed the need for inclusive, fair and democratic elections; highlighted the principle of foreign non-interference in the Libyan conflict; and called for a nationwide reconciliation process leading to the design of a new social contract in

Libya. The event was a success in the TWBI's action, as it managed to convene divergent actors in a moment of high polarisation among Libyan factions and active armed conflict. Some of the meetings in Utøya were joined by international representatives such as Stephanie Williams and the UN Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth.

For its efforts in the Utøya meeting, TWBI was named "Voice of Dialogue" by the Nobel Peace Center in the summer of 2022 (Nobel Peace Center 2022). A few months later, Stephanie Williams formally recognised Together We Build It for its important role in promoting Libyan women's integration in the peace process, and advocated for an increased support to Libyan women-led organisations following the TWBI model.

The TWBI approach, in coordination with the MWMN, seeks to establish a Libyan women-led and -facilitated peace track in a Track 1.5 format involving both national actors' representatives as well as women and youth. The track should facilitate dialogue and lead to gender-responsive outcomes including increased women's representation in formal delegation, and fostering a more inclusive and sustainable peace process. Indeed, the core assumption behind a feminist peace approach is that women tend to push an agenda in negotiation tables that goes beyond the power-sharing arrangements and includes a human security-based approach which is essential in fostering the conditions for reconciliation and peace.

Since 2025, the network has been co-developing with TWBI a preparatory Track 1.5 "base-building" project with consultations in Libya and meetings in Rome, as a first step in the implementation of a women-led peace track. Although anticipated funding from several donors was paused, the partnership endures, indicating that the MWMN now serves as a scaffold for strategic planning, resource mobilisation and convening power. The network co-organised a first meeting in Rome in September 2025, composed both of sessions among Libyan women participants from different target groups including the House of Representatives, the High State Council, the Advisory Committee of UNSMIL established in 2025, the Libyan High National Elections Commission and civil society organisations; and of sessions involving Libyan representatives in dialogue with key stakeholders, including diplomats, parliamentarians and the community of experts. For an inclusive approach to the consultations, the agenda of the meetings was developed by the participants, and so was the outcome document.

In addition to this Track 1.5 initiative, the network continues to be dedicated to offering training and support to Libyan women mediators involved in the feminist peace track, so as to enhance their mediation, negotiation and conflict resolution skills. At the same time, the network allows for exchanges of best practices among the Libyan women involved in the consultations and other women, especially from the African continent. This is to be followed by further consultations among Libyan women, while advocating for the inclusion of a more gender-sensitive approach to Libyan peace process negotiations at all levels of decision-making.

In conclusion, the network's impact in the work of the Libyan women mediators is threefold, according to Al Tubuly: it lowers barriers to entry in elite diplomatic spaces; it enhances professional capacity through training and peer exchange; and it consolidates cross-level alliances that sustain women's participation despite volatility in national institutions and donor politics. Al Tubuly links these mechanisms to outcomes – presence at Palermo, successful youth dialogue mediation and an active programme pipeline – underscoring the MWMN's role as a catalyst converting advocacy into institutional change, with durable effects on process design.

8.5 Syria

From the start of the conflict, Syrian women have been largely excluded from formal negotiations. Although UN-led Geneva talks began in 2012, there were no women at the table. Launched in 2016, the Syrian Women Advisory Board (WAB) – a UN-supported, 15-member body – has partially addressed this absence by working as advisor to the UN Special Envoy on how to integrate women's perspectives into UN-mediated negotiations. The objective of the WAB, which was granted access to the Geneva peace talks as an observer party, is to ensure solutions in line with UNSC Resolution 2254, for an inclusive and non-sectarian governance in the country (Al Maleh 2018). Although it was the first such board in UN history, its influence has not translated into direct negotiating power; Syrian women leaders have pushed for full inclusion at the formal level due to a lack of political recognition of the Board by the conflicting parties (Cervi 2023).

In 2019, the UN also pressured for the creation of a Syrian Constitutional Committee composed of members of the government, the opposition and civil society. Women comprised nearly 30 per cent of members

of the Committee, marking the highest such representation in any Middle East peace process to that date (Council on Foreign Relations 2025b).

Through these and other autonomous initiatives, such as the Syrian Women Making Peace Forum, women-led international and local dialogues have ensured that issues like gender-based violence, access to justice, aid delivery and detainee release remain on the political agenda – matters too often overlooked in male-dominated negotiations (Ergene et al. 2025).

Moreover, at the local and grassroots level, women have emerged as critical peacebuilders, or the “invisible glue holding communities together” (Mhaissen et al. 2025). Women activists and civil society groups have mediated local ceasefires (e.g., in Damascus suburbs), facilitated access to humanitarian aid, supported detainee release, negotiated between returnees and host communities, and documented human rights violations. These “insider-mediators” have leveraged trust within communities to negotiate sensitive matters like service provision or local ceasefires in fragmented war zones (UN Women 2022).

In addition to the several women-led actions to increase their voices in formal and informal negotiations, the conflict has – paradoxically – also created spaces for female military and self-defence participation in specific contexts. Kurdish-led groups such as the YPJ (Women’s Protection Units) and the Bethnahrain Women’s Protection Forces adopted all-female fighting brigades in the northeast, blending anti-ISIS combat with strong feminist and minority identity commitments. These formations exemplify how wartime mobilisation has shifted women into combat roles and positions of authority in local systems of governance and security – a stark contrast with the exclusion of women from formal diplomacy.

Through these and other examples, Syrian women have thus been internationally recognised as active participants in the civil war compared to other conflict or post-conflict zones. Within this multifaceted context for women’s agency, the Mediterranean Women Mediators’ Network has played an active role in supporting advocacy activities for Syrian women’s mediators to the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and to the general public through the organisation of conferences and webinars. In parallel, the network has fostered informal dialogue among Syrian women, and between Syrian and other members of the network to exchange experiences and best practices and reflect on strategies for empowering women. Discussions on sanctions, education, return of refugees, and de-radicalisation

(among others) have allowed the network's members, coming from several conflict or post-conflict zones, to look at the Syrian example as a way to provide mutual support, exchange perspectives on the different challenges encountered and show solidarity.

In politically charged arenas like Syria, the MWMN provides a neutral space that defuses polarisation, enabling independent mediators to operate. These mediators used the space created by the MWMN to bring into dialogue initiatives and sectoral technical expertise in different fields. For example, the expertise of Anna Cervi on international and national regulatory frameworks in Syria (Cervi et al. 2024) (i.e., sanctions) enabled discussing tensions between key sectoral needs of the Syrian population, including water, energy, food (Cervi 2024) and education (Cervi and Moret 2025) and European policies on restrictive measures, forced migration and gender (Ciampi et al. 2025). Thanks to the MWMN, Anna and other mediators were able to expand their reach to stakeholders otherwise inaccessible to them. For example, the discussions on Syria saw the participation of a wide range of actors, including the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, the European Union, Syrian authorities, the Syrian diaspora, the international private sector and several NGOs (Interview 3).

The network also underwrites coordination roles and encourages mediators to play an active role in their own context. For example, since Cervi became a member of the MWMN she was able to co-found the Italian Initiative for International Mediation (3IM)⁹ and to coordinate efforts that brought to light RIMI (LUISS et al. 2025), an important platform available to Italian diplomacy for promoting through dialogue and mediation to resolve and prevent conflicts and promote peacebuilding.

As part of its effort in fostering dialogue on the Syrian conflict, in 2021 the network launched the initiative "The Role of Women in the Elaboration of Durable Solutions to the Syrian Crisis" in collaboration with the NGO Search for Common Ground and with the support of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation. As part of the initiative, the MWMN organised a series of four webinars that brought together 25 Syrian women activists, subject matter experts and members of the network. The webinars aimed to foster dialogue among Syrian women and with other mediators and experts, to better understand their priorities and

⁹ See 3IM website: <https://www.3im.it>.

contribute to sustainable solutions to the Syrian conflict, particularly within the framework of the official peace process. They also sought to identify areas for future action and gather recommendations to inform advocacy and new initiatives within and beyond Syria.

During the webinars, participants discussed topics they had identified as the most pressing: the role of women in the peace process, the challenges faced by Syrian women in diaspora communities and upon return, and the legal and cultural obstacles that limit their participation in society and politics. These conversations led to a series of recommendations addressed to the international community, the Syrian government and international NGOs, highlighting the need to support Syrian women's active involvement in peacebuilding and decision-making processes.¹⁰

The recommendations, published in 2022, included the need for international donors to empower the economic and leadership capacities of Syrian women, so as to increase their leverage and recognition in local and national fora. The MWMN also called for the creation of a network of Syrian women, able to include the voices of the very different components of society that women are part of, especially those that are usually excluded, and which could not be represented in the limited number of members of the Women Advisory Board (MWMN 2022).

In September 2023, the network organised a meeting at MWMN premises in Rome that involved the WAB and network members from different countries (Egypt, Lebanon, Turkey and Italy). The meeting allowed for further exchanges of practices between women active in conflict and/or post-conflict zones, gathered in a safe and inclusive environment to reflect on strategies for women's empowerment and to address the specific challenges they face, and was followed by a high-level meeting at the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation and an informal hearing at the Italian Parliament (MWMN 2023). By creating a trusted community, such initiatives enable women to express solidarity, offer mutual support and raise awareness of the distinct hardships they experience in conflict settings. Four key factors particularly contributed to the success of this initiative: the diversity of perspectives, as it effectively captured the complexity of the Syrian context by incorporating a range of women's viewpoints, showing that practical solutions can

¹⁰ See MWMN website: *Local initiatives: Syria*, <https://womenmediators.net/?p=30524>.

emerge even amid differing experiences and opinions; strategic connections, as it linked the UN-led Syria peace process and other conflict-resolution efforts promoted by MWMN members with think tanks, academia and diplomatic circles, thereby broadening its influence and visibility; institutional leverage, as it built on existing frameworks such as the WAB and MWMN, facilitating the implementation of the action points developed during the discussions; and international support, as backing from UN and member states, including Italy, further strengthened the legitimacy and credibility of the issues addressed (Teodorescu and Cervi 2025).

Another focus of the MWMN's advocacy for Syrian women regards the issue of refugees, internally displaced persons, and the possibilities of their return with effective protection and justice, including women and children. The question of refugees' return opens a series of challenges, including the issue of human and civil rights protection, but also the rise of private law controversies regarding the rights of ownership and inheritance, which create a number of obstacles especially for women. In October 2024, the network organised an ad hoc online roundtable on the issue of refugees' return to Syria, which involved women mediators, IGO and NGO practitioners, public institution officials and field experts. The high profile of the participants, which included the Italian Special Envoy for Syria Stefano Ravagnan, the UNHCR Country Representative for Syria Gonzalo Vargas Llosa, the Directors of the NGOs Sawa for Development and Aid, Rouba Mhaissen and Arab Renaissance for Democracy and Development, Samar Muhareb, allowed for an in-depth cross-sectoral discussion (MWMN 2024).

Between 2024 and 2025, after several years of activity focused on Syrian women, the network formally expanded its engagement within Syria. In this phase, approximately ten additional women were invited to join. They were selected on the basis of their competencies and experience in mediation, without presuming to represent all parties or constituencies.

Together with these new members, the network convened a series of closed-door follow-up meetings designed to create a safe space for exchange. These meetings enabled participants to identify specific priorities and urgent needs and to co-develop initiatives. Particular attention was devoted, first, to thematic areas such as sanctions, refugees and education, and second, to locally rooted mediation efforts aimed at strengthening dialogue among communities and placing reconciliation at the

centre of the agenda. Importantly, the mediators can draw on the experience accumulated by other members of the network. Notably, the work of Lea Baroudi in northern Lebanon – on reconciliation, dialogue between divided communities and the reintegration of former combatants – offers relevant precedents. Likewise, lessons from women in the Balkans and from cross-cutting women’s movements that emerged in that context (to which Edita Tahiri bears direct witness), as well as the efforts of Cypriot women – who advanced several proposals, not always adopted, to incorporate women’s participation and gender perspectives into the constitution – provide valuable comparative insights.

The transitional phase that started with the fall of the Assad regime in Syria has opened both challenges and opportunities for women. It is still early to assess the outcomes of the transition in terms of women’s inclusion in decision-making roles in the country. The MWMN has continued its work in underlining the necessity of ensuring an inclusive transition in Syria – one that leverages and benefits from the skills many women developed and strengthened during the years of conflict, within a particularly vibrant and dynamic civil society.

First, the MWMN has been involved in an initiative funded by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation and led by the non-profit voluntary organisation Coordinamento delle organizzazioni per il servizio volontario (COSV) and WIIS Italy. This initiative aimed to enhance the capacity of Syrian women as civil society representatives to actively engage in dialogue processes for peace. It targeted different areas in Syria where COSV was already actively working, supporting over 330 individuals through training in mediation, facilitation and dialogue, and sought to empower five women facilitators who would lead community dialogues and initiatives. The initiative also promoted the use of cultural heritage as a dynamic resource for peacebuilding, conducting community workshops and supporting at least three local peace initiatives. The initiative is still ongoing. In its concluding phase, it aims to establish a coordinated, long-term support framework for dialogue efforts in Syria by forming a joint working group with Italian and Syrian stakeholders and producing a policy paper.

Second, the network is insisting on giving voice to Syrian women. In this spirit, the network also published a blog curated by Syrian mediators to amplify their voices on the meaning and requirements of an inclusive transition. In February 2025, three blog posts were published by

members of the network, Rouba Mhaissen, Eva Ziedan and Rim Aljabi (Search for Common Ground) (Mhaissen et al. 2025). While the ideas expressed are diverse, the message is unequivocal: Syrian society cannot be reconstituted, and the country cannot be renewed, without the substantive contribution of women.

Third, it is supporting fundraising efforts to further expand women-led initiatives in the country and consolidate bridges between Syrian women and counterparts in Italy, in the Mediterranean area and in the Gulf countries.

8.6 Lebanon

In Lebanon, the MWMN does not operate through an official local antenna, but by supporting specific initiatives and showcasing the ongoing work of the Lebanese members of the network.

Between 2021 and 2022, the MMWN promoted a collaboration with Saint Joseph University of Beirut and the Centre Professionnel de Médiation (CPM), founded and directed by the professional mediator, trainer and network member Johanna Hawari-Bourjeily. The project, led with Hawari-Bourjeily, trained around 60 community actors from the regions of Tripoli and Beirut – including members of the MARCH association – in active listening, empathy and post-conflict reconciliation through mediation techniques. In addition, nine scholarships were awarded for an advanced mediation training course offered by the CPM in Tripoli. Since then, the network's activities have continued on a regular basis, with the involvement of UN Women and other local partners. This collaboration has led to the creation of an extensive network of women who have benefited from mediation training, strengthened their skills and in some cases established local mediation units within NGOs or municipalities – bringing tangible impact to their communities.

Among the MWMN members, Lea Baroudi offers a concrete example of how mediation and dialogue at the community level can translate into effective and long-term reconciliation in post-conflict areas, in line with the objectives and activities of the network.

Baroudi is a Lebanese mediator and scholar whose work offers a compelling model of pluralistic peacebuilding in a context marked by deep sectarian cleavages, institutional fragility and protracted crisis. As founder and president of MARCH Lebanon (established in 2012), she has

designed and implemented community-based initiatives that address sectarian conflict, radicalisation, censorship and gender-based violence through an integrated approach that combines mediation, psychosocial support, artistic practice and socio-economic inclusion. Her method – grounded in emotional intelligence, trust-building and inclusion – foregrounds the relational and affective dimensions of conflict transformation, particularly within identity-divided communities. Baroudi also co-leads research and policy proposals on political violence, statelessness and youth engagement, bridging academic rigor with practice in fragile settings. Her work was soon recognised internationally: she was appointed Member of the British Empire in 2019 for civic rights work and was a finalist for the 2023 Global Pluralism Award. In 2024, she contributed to the PeaceCon plenary “Pluralism and Trust”, where she underscored how empathy, dialogue and deliberate listening can rebuild social cohesion; as she notes, being perceived as “less threatening” as a woman peacebuilder can open doors and enable bridge-building across volatile divides (MARCH 2024).

The Lebanese context against which Baroudi’s work unfolds is crucial to understanding both its necessity and its innovation. The country has endured one of the world’s most severe national depressions, rooted in decades of financial mismanagement, systemic corruption and political instability that escalated from 2019 onward. In March 2020, Lebanon defaulted on its sovereign debt for the first time in its history. The Lebanese lira has since lost over 98 per cent of its value against the US dollar, fueling runaway inflation and rendering essentials such as food, fuel and medicines prohibitively expensive for many households. More than 80 per cent of the population has fallen below the poverty line. The August 2020 Beirut port explosion compounded economic and social devastation, while public services – healthcare, education and social protection – have teetered toward collapse. Unemployment, especially among youth, remains high, with marked school exclusion, rising child labour and a sustained “brain drain” as professionals emigrate. Political institutions have been largely paralysed, despite mass protests in October 2019 that rejected sectarian clientelism and demanded accountable governance. In this environment, the erosion of trust in institutions intersects with communal insecurities, producing a combustible mix that entrenches polarisation and invites exploitative mobilisation by armed and extremist actors (Daga 2025).

Baroudi's peacebuilding philosophy directly addresses these interlocking crises by treating conflict not solely as a matter of interests or institutional design but as a fundamentally emotional and relational process. She argues that fear and mistrust – rooted in an unresolved national narrative and a chronic sense of identity-based insecurity – underpin and intensify political and sectarian divisions. Accordingly, effective mediation must offer “alternative emotions”: inclusion, dignified recognition, belonging and the experience of being heard without judgment. This emphasis reframes the WPS Agenda: formal frameworks and numerical representation are necessary but insufficient unless matched by the emotional and relational intelligence required to rebuild trust at the community level. Baroudi's practice demonstrates how women peacebuilders can bridge divides, shift narratives and foster durable cohesion through methods that centre empathy, listening and non-threatening engagement (Corsini 2024, Geronico 2024).

The signature testing ground for these principles has been Tripoli, a city emblematic of Lebanon's sectarian fissures. Beginning in 2014, Baroudi and MARCH initiated a theatre-based mediation process involving former combatants and at-risk youth from the rival neighbourhoods of Beb el Tabbeneh (predominantly Sunni) and Jabal Mohsen (predominantly Alawite). Sixteen ex-fighters – eight from each side – participated in a multidisciplinary programme that combined psychosocial support, technical and theatrical training, emotional regulation and personal development. The project culminated in the performance “Love and War on the Rooftop”, a play inspired by participants' lived experiences that transformed violence into shared memory and, critically, made the “other” visible as a human subject. The theatrical medium functioned as a collectively authored narrative space in which previously silenced or stigmatised experiences could be expressed, heard and re-signified. What began as a single artistic intervention rapidly evolved into a holistic approach addressing multiple drivers of conflict (MARCH 2015).

From there, MARCH established a cultural café along Tripoli's former demarcation line, creating a safe, inclusive environment for men and women to gather, learn and collaborate. The café became a hub for an integrated peacebuilding programme that combined dialogue with socio-economic pathways. Recognising that reconciliation unattached to livelihood prospects is fragile, MARCH embedded vocational training in design, construction and tourism, and launched three social enterprises in these

sectors. These ventures support youth, former fighters and the broader community to remain economically active while sustaining the social gains generated by reconciliation processes. Today, more than 150 people are engaged in these initiatives, which also include public storytelling and the sharing of reconciliation journeys. The design is intentionally cyclical: the same individuals who move through healing and training become ambassadors of coexistence, reinforcing new social norms through practice (MARCH 2023).

Baroudi's perspective on gender is noteworthy precisely because it resists instrumentalisation while affirming distinctive contributions. She contends that women's participation is not merely a matter of equity but a substantive addition to the repertoire of mediation skills needed in fragmented societies. Women mediators may be perceived as more neutral and less threatening; they can more readily elicit vulnerability and authenticity – qualities that are prerequisites to repairing broken social bonds. In engagements with armed men, Baroudi's own experience suggests that gendered expectations, when navigated with care, can facilitate relational openings that might be more elusive for male mediators. Rather than a claim of innate difference, this is a pragmatic recognition of how social perceptions can be leveraged to build trust and enable dialogue (Geronico 2024).

The MWMN plays a pivotal role in amplifying Baroudi's work, connecting it with stakeholders and strategic spaces of discussions, and ensuring that it can be used as a successful example in other contexts. As an affiliated mediator within the MWMN, she exemplifies the network's purpose: to move beyond advocacy for representation and demonstrate, through evidence and practice, the indispensable value of women's leadership in peace processes. The MWMN provides a platform for peer learning, visibility and policy engagement that situates local practice within a regional and international ecosystem. This support is not merely symbolic. By connecting mediators across the Mediterranean, the network fosters methodological exchange, consolidates lessons learnt on community-level trust-building and equips practitioners to translate bottom-up insights into policy proposals. In this way, the MWMN bridges micro-level innovations – such as Tripoli's theatre-based reconciliation – with meso- and macro-level frameworks that can replicate or adapt these approaches in other fragile and polarised contexts. Moreover, through and with the network, she has shared her experience and approach in several high-level

public and closed-door fora, such as the conference Coopera in 2022 and various editions of the Med Dialogues, both sponsored by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The network has also transformed part of Baroudi's work into policy recommendations for NATO, allowing for a translation from a grassroots and local initiative into policy language. Indeed, in 2025, representatives from the network's Secretariat brought and shared Baroudi's work on de-radicalisation with NATO Strategic Direction-South Hub in Naples, leading to the drafting of a report on the role of women in countering and preventing radicalisation, building mostly on the Lebanese, but also Syrian and Libyan, experience and expertise of the network (NSD-S HUB and MWMN 2025).

The relationship between Baroudi's practice and policy is also evident in her combined scholarly and programmatic work on political violence, statelessness and youth engagement. PeaceCon 2024 provided a stage for articulating these linkages before a global policy audience. In the "Pluralism and Trust" plenary, Baroudi's reflections highlighted that empathy is not an affective luxury but a strategic necessity when the central deficit is social trust. Trust, in turn, is not restored by fiat; it is rebuilt through repeated, structured encounters that allow for narrative change and the normalisation of cooperative behaviour (MARCH 2024).

Importantly, this approach addresses common critiques of the WPS field regarding the gap between normative commitments and practice. Baroudi's work insists that the "how" of inclusion matters as much as the "who". It is not enough to seat women at a negotiation table; mediators must cultivate capacities – listening, narrative competence, trauma-informed practice – that are often undervalued in formal diplomacy. By centring such capacities, the practice challenges technocratic tendencies to reduce peacebuilding to institutional design and security sector reform alone. Instead, it argues for a layered strategy in which institutional reforms are scaffolded by community-level transformations of affect and identity.

The mediation work of another Lebanese member of the network, Karma Ekmeji, takes place at a more institutional and national dialogue level. Ekmeji is a Mediation Advisor at UN Women and a Senior Policy Fellow at the American University in Beirut (AUB). She was the International Affairs and Relations Advisor to former Prime Minister Saad Hariri (AIWA International 2024). Ekmeji's work in the promotion of the WPS Agenda has led to the co-founding, with UN Women and the AUB, of the Women,

Peace and Security Working Group for the Arab States, a forum specifically intended to advance the protection of women in conflict and post-conflict zones, and their participation in peace processes. The Working Group was launched in 2024, and involved women active at all levels of mediation and negotiation activities, often joined by consultants and external participants, such as the Women, Peace and Humanitarian Fund, the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. One of the Working Group's main objectives, since its foundation, has been the drafting of a white paper to be eventually presented to the Security Council (Inclusive Peace 2024). The Working Group's meetings and objectives move hand in hand in the MWMN, with many members overlapping across the two groups. In 2025 the MWMN officially joined the partners of the consortium supporting the Working Group, with one of the next meetings expected to take place in Rome. Ekmeji's synergies with the network have been visible also in the cooperation towards the launch and growth of the Global Alliance since 2019, which included the MWMN, and during the close exchanges between MWMN members and UN Syrian Women Advisory Board members on the Syrian crisis, the impact in the whole region and the role of women.

The parallel works of Lea Baroudi, Karma Ekmeji and Johanna Hawari-Bourjeily are but three examples of the multiple nuances and areas of implementation of the WPS Agenda, and where the MWMN contributes with both its formal and informal tools.

8.7 Palestine and Israel

While not formally present in Israel and Palestine through local antennas, the network has concretely worked in favour of a stronger female presence in mediation and dialogue initiatives in support of the peace process. The network is also the only regional network of women mediators having both Palestinian and Israeli members from very different backgrounds: the very fact of having these women together, sharing the same space within the network with other women from the region, has proven to be a unique feature of the MWMN, affirming its added value as convening and connecting space. The group is composed of both Israeli and Palestinian ambassadors, analysts, elected local representatives and CSOs members active in grassroots initiatives and advocacy. The diversity

allows for integrating the most nuanced perspectives on looking for ways for advancing the peace process with an increased participation of women.

By bringing this diversity, and its regional scope, the MWMN is therefore well positioned to address the complicated context in the Middle East. The events of 7 October 2023, Israel's counteroffensive in Gaza, and the two-year protracted difficulties in reaching a ceasefire, in addition to the historical roots of the conflict, have made it increasingly likely that the conflict will persist, although in other forms, and potentially spread across the wider Middle East. Despite the growing international consensus that led, in the Summer and Autumn of 2025, to many multilateral efforts towards peace and to more countries recognising Palestine as a state, the road to a sustainable and durable solution remains very difficult and could easily reignite regional tensions between state and non-state actors alike. In such a volatile environment, the MWMN stands out as an essential resource for conflict prevention and mitigation efforts.

A series of closed-door bilateral and collective exchanges were organised in the last few years among network mediators from various contexts (including Lebanon, Syria, Turkey, Israel and Palestine) to discuss ways to contain the conflict, promote de-confliction, share mutual perceptions and explore the role each mediator can play within her national context, community and networks to mitigate the impact of the crisis.

Among the network's specific initiatives after the escalation of violence in Gaza since October 2023, the MWMN has functioned as an informal and safe place to strengthen awareness and mutual understanding of the evolving situation both in Palestine and in Israel through the shared experience of the network's members. Moreover, the network has increased its efforts to function as a safe go-between to facilitate the exchange of reflections not only among members but also with external actors, so as to keep the door of peaceful dialogue open even during peaks of regional and global confrontation. In parallel, the network has worked informally with all its Israeli and Palestinian members to expand the possibilities of women's agency in their own sphere of action and enhance their exposure and connections. In some cases, the network facilitated access to strategic fora and discussions, including the Med Dialogues' special edition on the Middle East in 2023, to ensure that its members can inform them by incorporating a gender perspective and their first-hand experience and deep expertise. Also thanks to the effort of the MWMN and

its connecting role, several mediators were included in strategic dialogues and Track 1.5 or 2 mediation processes on the issue – such as the dedicated initiative launched by the Munich Security Conference under the impetus of the former OSCE Secretary-General Helga Schmid. MWMN mediators were also supported in joining the European-Palestinian-Israeli trilateral dialogue initiative, particularly in meetings held in Paris and Rome at IAI, allowing them to actively contribute to people-to-people initiatives which are essential for maintaining dialogue channels and connecting key actors. As part of these activities, a Palestinian and an Israeli network member were also invited, in two different episodes to be released in 2025, to share their perspectives and experiences on the conflict in the MWMN podcast series “#HerStories”, hosted by Magda Zenon.

Moreover, the MWMN somehow inspired and supported with its own experience the launch of the Network of Palestinian Business and Professional Women (BPW Palestine), by the MWMN member Dalal Iriqat; and afterwards the Diplo-Women Circle where international and Palestinian women gather to discuss women’s role in diplomacy and how to take reconciliation forward, launched in May 2024, and attended, among other representatives, by the Head of the MWMN. It also inspired the initiatives developed by Ambassador Amal Jadou, MWMN member, in cooperation with local municipalities to advance women’s participation at political level.

These kinds of initiatives are considered instrumental to bring women together, allow them to share and strategise together and leverage the role of each of them within their respective communities. On all occasions of formal and informal discussion, all actors have lamented the lack of inclusion of women and feminist perspectives at all levels of negotiation. The need for substantial women’s participation and perspectives as essential for any possible solution to the conflict is especially stressed in the work and publications of Dalal Iriqat. Iriqat is a Palestinian Assistant Professor at Arab American University in Palestine and a researcher on women’s leadership in peacebuilding, resilience and reconstruction – particularly in Gaza and the occupied Palestinian territory. She has been a member of the MWMN since its establishment, and through the network has been able to expand the reach of her scholarship and advocacy for a greater role for women in the Palestinian context.

In her most recent commentary for the IAI, published in July 2025, Iriqat highlights how global peace frameworks systematically marginalise Palestinian women, often treating them as passive victims rather than as

agents of reconstruction and civic leadership. She argues that the WPS Agenda is inconsistently applied to Gaza, where women bear disproportionate burdens from conflict and are frequently excluded from decisions about post-war recovery and peace processes. Iriqat (2025) further describes Palestinian women in Gaza as frontline responders and pillars of resilience – leading humanitarian support, trauma-healing, community rebuilding and grassroots advocacy – even while international frameworks neglect their agency. She calls for the consistent and meaningful inclusion of women in negotiation tables and reconstruction planning, insisting that any durable peace in Gaza must be shaped by the women who survived and rebuilt its communities. Her critique underscores the failure of global peacebuilding norms to prioritise local female leadership and warns that structural exclusion replicates colonial legacies and limits Palestinian women's political recognition. Her voice contributes to a growing feminist debate on the politics of inclusion, pursuing not token presence but full decision-making capacity.

According to Iriqat (2025), the MWMN exemplifies this shift by operating at the crossroads of diplomacy, mediation and social activism. Far beyond symbolic representation, the network systematically strengthens women's political agency, ensuring they act as decisive influencers in peace and decision-making processes. Through its action, the MWMN connects emerging and experienced women mediators, expands access to high-level diplomatic fora and promotes transnational solidarity. By linking grassroots engagement with institutional processes, it bridges formal and informal mediation spaces. In contexts such as Palestine, where women's roles in sustaining communities are often overlooked in official negotiations, the network provides a model for institutionalising feminist leadership in reconstruction and governance and demonstrates, through its experience, that gender-responsive peacebuilding is not aspirational but achievable – provided there is genuine political will. Indeed, even today, in the complex landscape of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, women do not sit at the decision-making tables. Yet they are there – in the territories, in communities, in local organisations that work every day for co-existence, dialogue and a possible peace. Amplifying these voices is a way to remember that peace is not built only in rooms of power, but also – and above all – on the ground, by those who never stop believing in it. And networks like the MWMN can play an important role in revealing the hidden yet essential role of women (Iriqat 2025).

Authors' interviews

1. Interview with Rida Al Tubuly, 17 February 2025
2. Interview with Ayse Betül Çelik, 16 June 2025
3. Interview with Anna Cervi, 14 February 2025
4. Interview with Jeta Krasniqi, 5 February 2025
5. Interview with Magda Zenon, 3 June 2025

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PART IV

CONCLUSIONS

9.

Conclusions

Loredana Teodorescu, Giulia Daga and Gaia Ravazzolo

As underlined in the previous chapters, women play a pivotal role in peace-building and conflict prevention, management and resolution; and strengthening their meaningful participation at all levels of decision-making is a necessary condition for sustainable peace. Ensuring their active involvement is no longer a matter of principle alone, but of strategic necessity. The role of women in peace processes is now widely acknowledged as indispensable. Resolution 1325 played a pivotal role in recognising the role of women as agents of change and has fostered the development of an international framework and national policies, the establishment of new practices and tools, including the launch of women mediator networks across the globe and new high-level figures working on the WPS Agenda within the institutions, and an increased awareness on the topic. However, recent data reveals that progress, although visible, remains uneven and often fragmented. Twenty-five years after the adoption of Resolution 1325, it is therefore imperative to understand how to address persistent challenges which are preventing the WPS Agenda from fully fulfilling its promises.

To address these gaps, the international community must identify and eliminate all obstacles to the full implementation of Resolution 1325, adopt concrete positive actions, set measurable targets to increase women's participation and ensure their systematic monitoring and a strong accountability system. Indeed, despite the pitfalls and the challenges, the WPS Agenda is still an important tool which can be leveraged to hold accountable member states and the broader international community.

In 2023, the United Nations set an initial benchmark of one-third female representation in mediation and peace processes, with the long-term objective of achieving parity. In 2024 the UN Secretary General also launched a Common Pledge for Women's Full, Equal and Meaningful

Participation in Peace Processes,¹ committing global mediation actors to concrete actions to increase women's inclusion in peace processes. Peace-keeping operations, in turn, remain a strategic instrument where full and meaningful inclusion of women is considered indispensable.

Beyond the UN framework, a growing number of actors – including regional and subregional organisations, member states, private entities, civil society, women-led organisations and networks of women mediators – have taken an active role in promoting and further strengthening the WPS Agenda. Still, many women-led peace organisations and networks face persistent resource constraints, which jeopardise their capacity to fully contribute to peacebuilding and mediation. Indeed, while the expansion of networks of women mediators both at regional and national levels and the adoption of minimum benchmarks are encouraging steps, they remain insufficient without a more coordinated, binding and sustainably funded strategy. Only under these conditions can women's participation move beyond normative commitment and become a structural practice, capable of shaping both the effectiveness and the durability of peace processes.

The recommendations emerging from this analysis highlight the need for structural, political and operational shifts to ensure women's meaningful participation in peace processes. First, clear benchmarks for inclusion must be set at different levels, in line with the UN's commitment to reach at least one-third female presence in mediation and peace processes as an initial threshold, looking towards equal participation as the long-term goal. Achieving this requires the introduction of specific targets, incentive mechanisms and the systematic integration of gender considerations into the mandates, staffing, budgets and reporting of UN and regional peace operations.

As confirmed by most women practitioners contacted during the research for this volume, quotas are often only a formality, and yet they enhance participation. Most importantly, they are the first step for the development of skills or practical experience that can secure future and further substantial participation, or can provide entry points. However, as Rouba Mhaissen, a MWMN member, put it: "recognition must replace tokenism" (Mhaissen 2025). Throughout the examples shown in this volume, it is evident that continuous training and innovative approaches to peacebuilding

¹ UN Peacemaker website: *A Common Pledge for Women's Participation*, <https://peacemaker.un.org/en/node/10116>.

and mediation are key to concretely enforce the participation pillar of the WPS Agenda, but they must go hand in hand with normative recognition and all the adequate safeguards against discrimination.

As shown in all the cases presented, women have long been active in grassroots reconciliation efforts across historical and geographic settings. In today's complex environment, women mediators stand at the forefront – often unseen and undervalued. Across regions affected by both violent and systemic conflict, women are taking the lead in addressing its root causes, resolving disputes, fostering dialogue and rebuilding trust across communities. This must be seen as concrete proof that the increased participation of women in formal peace processes is not just the application of a hyper-formalised principle of equality, but that women mediators and peacebuilders have a long and rooted history, and that they bring to the table experienced, innovative and most importantly, successful, practices. This change of mentality and communication is pivotal because it helps overcome sceptical resistance to positive measures addressing the persistent obstacles. Indeed, while it should no longer be the case, there is still a need to present more successful cases to show the contribution of women mediators and the added value of their participation.

While more gender data is needed to inform policies and programming, it is not enough to fully picture the situation on the ground and should be accompanied by more qualitative analysis, collection and dissemination of lived experiences and story telling.

The Mediterranean Women Mediators Network, through its engagement at different levels, does exactly this: it expands the reach of women whose activities are already concretely contributing to peace, security, resilience or reconciliation. The recognition and expansion of locally driven women's initiatives makes the network successful – in direct contrast to more formal international engagements. Many respondents have indeed observed how the international approach, especially in the first phases of peacebuilding processes, may fail to recognise pre-existing concrete actions of women in the field.

This blindness risks presenting the narrative of internationally driven efforts to formally increase the institutional presence of women, through the introduction of quotas or similar incentives, thereby reducing the pre-existing agency of local women. This difficulty is often intertwined with the already pressing local challenges of fighting against established patriarchal norms in society.

This goes hand in hand with other thorny points in the full application of the Agenda. First, women's participation should be recognised as a distinctly political issue shaped by power dynamics, conflict and interests. At the same time, the WPS Agenda itself should be considered as a crosscutting political agenda aiming at achieving peace and security for all. This calls for more synergies across actors and agendas. Equally important is the promotion of context-specific and inclusive mechanisms, by establishing and supporting platforms that channel women's voices into peace processes and ensure the representation of diverse perspectives. Such mechanisms must be accompanied by sustained civil society support that creates time and space for women to define their own agendas, while linking grassroots peacebuilders with broader networks and formal negotiations. Localising the Agenda to adapt it to the different context is also needed to this end as one size does not fill all. Finally, strengthening evidence and advocacy remains critical: robust evidence on the added value of women's participation should be generated and widely disseminated to influence key peace actors, while the UN's advocacy and convening power, together with that of other actors such as the EU and OSCE, should be leveraged to advance women's inclusion through context-specific targets, technical and financial support, and a clear demonstration of how gender inclusion contributes to more effective and sustainable peace outcomes.

A shift in narrative is also required. This means communicating more effectively the existence of female role models, bringing to light positive examples of initiatives led by women, and making visible their contributions. Just as this book has endeavoured to do, by presenting concrete cases and activities carried out by members of the MWMN, the dissemination of such narratives can contribute to changing perceptions and to strengthening women's agency in peace and security.

This vision resonates with the framing of women as "agents of change" embodied in UN Security Council Resolution 1325. Although feminist scholarship has long reflected on these questions, the valorisation of women's active participation in mediation and peacebuilding should not be regarded solely as a feminist issue: it is a matter that concerns society as a whole. Despite the rhetoric of equality, it is essential to recognise – as explored in the preceding chapters – that women continue to face discrimination across multiple levels and sectors of society, particularly in relation to power. Even after 25 years of the Women, Peace and Security

Agenda, the evidence shows that certain spheres of power – notably in politics and in high-level decision-making structures – remain largely inaccessible to women. The roots of such exclusion can be traced in the historical evolution of social structures that have too often confined women to the role of mothers and caretakers of the family, when in fact women are far more (and other) than this.

As shown by the case of the Mediterranean Women Mediators Network, networks of women mediators have emerged to address some of the persistent challenges to the full implementation of the Agenda, translating formal commitments and policies into concrete practices and highlighting the vital importance and impact of women-led peace initiatives. They not only have a concrete impact strengthening the contribution of women mediators and peacebuilders to peace and security; they also keep attention focused on the WPS Agenda and hold actors such as member states and organisations accountable for the commitments they made 25 years ago.

In a time of shrinking space for civil society and backlash for women's rights and participation, women mediator networks continuously inform debates and policy discussions to showcase the importance and need to promote inclusive processes and women's meaningful participation. The Global Alliance, gathering more regional women mediators networks and co-founded by the MWMN, was launched in 2019 precisely to amplify these messages, representing "a collective of voices demanding policy and decision-makers to implement the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 and related Resolutions and create meaningful spaces for women to influence global peace and security".²

Moreover, networks became hubs of expertise, convening and connecting actors, gathering women capable of bridging divides and fostering trust where traditional, mostly male-dominated processes fall short. Mediation efforts driven by women have grown in relevance in addressing the root causes of conflict, building social cohesion and responding quickly to crises. At a time when the world is afflicted by a dramatic increase of conflicts, the work of women's networks continues to mitigate their impact by playing vital roles in conflict prevention and de-escalation of tensions as well as supporting peacebuilding efforts and finding sustainable peaceful solutions that build bridges between communities.

² Website of the Global Alliance of Regional Women Mediators Networks: *About*, <https://www.globalwomenmediators.org/?p=270>.

For this reason, while putting in place all the necessary measures to accelerate the full implementation of the WPS Agenda, it is important to utilise and recognise women mediator networks as key assets for inclusive and sustainable peace and security and strategic interlocutors. This calls for member states and international organisations to formally recognise women mediator networks as key strategic interlocutors and partners and institutionalise their role in peace processes, considering at the same time networks as an asset helping them to turn their existing commitments to the Agenda and gender equality into concrete actions.

The question of funding remains central to this institutionalisation: only long-term, direct and flexible funds can allow such networks to plan their activities strategically and be coordinated by a Secretariat while promptly responding to the emerging challenges, thus producing substantial results and expanding the ambition of their objectives. However, the institutionalisation must not happen at the expense of their capacity to work as informal and straightforward platforms of exchange. For the network to keep its effectiveness, its informal setting remains pivotal, as it creates the space for conversations even among actors that do not formally speak to each other, thus facilitating dialogue in ways that would be rarely possible in a more structured and institutional organisation. To conclude, while women mediator networks can add much value, the political willingness to truly commit to the Agenda remains absolutely critical, not only through rhetorical declarations and symbolic actions, but by allowing its transformative power to unleash. Achieving peace and safety for all requires transformative strategies – where women's leadership is not an afterthought, but lies at the heart of peacebuilding and mediation. As conflicts are on the rise, and so are violence and polarisation, now is the time to invest in the people and processes that make peace endure – beginning with those who have quietly held it together all along in their efforts to transform the conditions that allow violence and conflicts to grow. Already 25 years ago, the Agenda showed us the way.

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Twenty-five years after the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1325, the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda remains a cornerstone of global peace efforts – yet many of its promises are still to be fulfilled. This volume, promoted within the framework of the Mediterranean Women Mediators Network (MWMN) – an initiative launched by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation in collaboration with the Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) and Women in International Security Italy (WIIS Italy) almost a decade ago – offers an updated reflection on the Agenda's evolution and on the concrete impact of the MWMN, bringing together theory, policy analysis and first-hand experiences from women mediators across the Mediterranean region. Combining a feminist security studies perspective with qualitative research – ranging from surveys and interviews to field insights – the book traces how the network's local initiatives, mediation efforts and cross-regional collaboration have shaped the implementation of Resolution 1325 in a rapidly evolving geopolitical context. The volume highlights tangible achievements, persistent gaps and innovative strategies to strengthen women's role in peace processes. It concludes with concrete policy recommendations aimed at enhancing the effectiveness of the WPS Agenda. A must-read for scholars, policymakers and practitioners, this book bridges research and practice, offering both a critical appraisal and a forward-looking vision for women's mediation and peacebuilding across the Mediterranean and beyond.

Loredana Teodorescu is the Head of the Mediterranean Women Mediators Network, President of Women in International Security Italy (WIIS Italy) and Senior Fellow at IAI. Additionally, she leads European and International Affairs at the Luigi Sturzo Institute, and she advises and cooperates with many think tanks and organisations, including UN Women and OSCE. Previously, she served as Coordinator of the Secretariat of the Global Alliance of Regional Women Mediator Networks.

Giulia Daga is a postdoc research fellow at the School of International Studies of the University of Trento and an adjunct lecturer in International Relations and Middle East Politics at John Cabot University. She is a former research fellow in the 'Mediterranean, Middle East and Africa' programme at IAI.



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