



**OUR SECURE FUTURE**

Women Make the Difference

# Institutionalizing Women, Peace and Security

## The Role of Gender and Women, Peace and Security Advisors in the United States Government

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### OVERVIEW

This brief assesses the United States government's progress on advancing the Women, Peace and Security agenda through the work of Women, Peace and Security Advisors, Gender Advisors, and additional positions that have this as a component of their work. It is designed as a starting point for discussion to help policymakers: improve their understanding of these roles; strengthen their knowledge on why this agenda can help achieve more durable peace around the world; and provide recommendations on how to create a more robust infrastructure to better support these critical roles.

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### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- There has been a notable increase in WPS integration and institutionalization across U.S. agencies.
- A lack of human and financial resources continue to be a major challenge for gender advisors.
- Both civil society and gender advisors support ongoing collaboration on WPS.
- An increase in funding and a mandate for WPS gender training would further advance institutionalization.

## INTRODUCTION

**Sustainable peace and security are not achievable without the promotion of gender equity and equality and women’s equal and integrated participation in security, governance, and peacemaking. In 2000, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) formally recognized the critical role that women play in resolving and mitigating conflict by adopting Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) as critical to ensuring that women are fully integrated in every aspect of building sustainable peace.**

**In 2011, the United States created the Executive Order Instituting a National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security, which was the first mandate from the Administration to implement UNSCR 1325. In 2017, the United States went one step further in codifying WPS by passing the Women, Peace, and Security Act,<sup>1</sup> which is legislation that promotes women’s meaningful inclusion and participation in peace and security processes. The Act mandates that Women, Peace and Security (WPS) be prioritized, ensures robust implementation, and provides congressional oversight to various U.S. government (USG) agencies and departments.**

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<sup>1</sup> The United Nations founding documents, and subsequent publications relating to UNSCR 1325, use the phrase “Women, Peace and Security” without an Oxford comma. This is because “Women, Peace and Security” emphasizes the importance of women’s participation and decision-making in international peace and security. However, the U.S. National Action Plan on WPS and the U.S. Women, Peace, and Security Act of 2017 use the phrase “Women, Peace, and Security” with an Oxford comma. Both versions are used within this document depending on whether they are referring to the global agenda or the actual titles of the UNSCR or the U.S. law.

# THE EVOLUTION OF USG POLICY ON THE WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY AGENDA<sup>2</sup>

In the United States, the critical role that women play in development became clear as early as the 1960s. Yet, even with a greater understanding of how women were disproportionately disadvantaged by U.S. international development efforts — and greater willingness to push more gender-inclusive programs — implementation was often stalled and piecemeal. As a result, women continued to be systematically excluded from USG-funded economic development and trade programs. In 1973, however, Congress passed the Percy Amendment to the U.S. Foreign Assistance Act, which requires U.S. foreign aid programs to “encourage and promote the integration of women into the national economies of developing countries.” In 1979, the State Department directed all U.S. embassies and consulates that “a key objective of U.S. foreign policy is the advancement worldwide of the status and conditions of women.”<sup>3</sup>

As part of USAID’s response to the new mandate, the Agency created a policy determination that specified that strategies to include women be part of all plans, programming, and assessments. To ensure the broadest participation possible and reap the benefit of women’s contributions to society, USAID established the Women in Development (WID) office in 1974. The WID office was responsible for “reviewing agency plans and projects to assure that women are integrated, for monitoring Agency progress, and for working with other international donors and organizations.”<sup>4</sup> The WID strategy was to “ascertain what women actually want and do within a society and provide them with opportunities, skills, and resources to enhance that participation. . . . In full knowledge of the tendency to bypass or exclude women and female household heads, a woman-sensitive program would design specific strategies to involve women. The WID strategy rests on creating more rational and even-handed planning which takes into account the sex division of labor, fair returns for labor, and the equitable infusion of new opportunities and resources to all members of a given community.”<sup>5</sup>

In the years since, there have been myriad policies, programs, and laws to hold the U.S. government accountable to advancing gender equity and equality and implementing Women, Peace and Security. More recently, there has been the [Women, Peace, and Security Act of 2017](#); a [United States Strategy and National Action Plan](#); the [Women’s Entrepreneurship and Economic Empowerment Act of 2018](#) (WEEE Act); and the [National Strategy on Gender Equity and Equality](#) that have made important strides in moving this agenda forward. For example, the WEEE Act of 2018 mandates that all USAID work is subject to a gender analysis and that gender equality is integral throughout the program cycle. As USAID noted in their 2020 progress report to Congress, “a robust gender analysis, as defined in the WEEE Act, is essential to ensure USAID’s plans and programs at every level have identified, and are addressing, the most-relevant gender gaps and socio-economic issues to improve the lives of women and girls and achieve U.S. development objectives.”<sup>6</sup>

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2 Ambassador Anwarul K. Chowdhury who served as Under-Secretary General of the United Nations (2002-07) and Permanent Representative of Bangladesh to UN (1996-2001) at the time the UNSCR 1325 resolution was adopted, has spoken about the name of the resolution. Ambassador Chowdhury commented that ‘the actual title proposed for this resolution by us is “Women and Peace and Security” with two “ands”. But one of them was dropped and a comma was added.’ He added that ‘the original intent in calling it Women and Peace and Security, however, was to frame the concept as two areas: “women” as one, and “peace and security” as the other – not as three: Women, Peace, and Security, as is now done in the context of the WPS agenda.’ The idea expressed by Ambassador Chowdhury is manifested in WPS activities which can be described as fitting into three groups: programs that focus on women’s participation, efforts aimed at peacekeeping and peace agreements, and the inclusion of gender perspectives in defense issues. This chapter falls within the first group because it focuses narrowly on the issue of women’s participation in security and defense, even though both of the other issues mentioned are also present and relevant in the region.” Fabiana Sofia Perera, Challenges and Threats to Security in Latin America, (CEEEP, 2022), <https://ceep.mil.pe/2023/05/23/women-peace-and-security-agenda-as-a-response-to-security-challenges-and-threats-in-latin-america/?lang=en>.

3 U.S. Department of State, “Action Memorandum From the Assistant Secretary of State for International Organization Affairs (McCall) to Secretary of State Muskie,” June 30, 1980, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1977-80v02/d341>.

4 Kathleen A. Staudt, “Bureaucratic Resistance to Women’s Programs: The Case for Women in Development,” paper presented at the 76th Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association, Toronto, Canada, August 1981, 6, <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED209126.pdf>.

5 Staudt, 6.

6 U.S. Agency for International Development, “Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Women’s Entrepreneurship and Economic Empowerment Act of 2018,” [https://2017-2020.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1869/USAID\\_Report\\_Congress\\_WEEE\\_Act\\_FY2019.pdf](https://2017-2020.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1869/USAID_Report_Congress_WEEE_Act_FY2019.pdf).

Although the USG has taken important steps to implement the WPS agenda since adopting the current U.S. Strategy, which was preceded by two National Action Plans in 2011 and 2016, there is much more that it could be doing. Despite these policy gains, WPS and gender equality are still not seen as critical components of the USG’s approach to foreign policy and diplomacy.

Core documents related to national security, for example, continue to only mention or completely omit WPS as a tactic for advancing peace and security. As Our Secure Future’s recent analysis of the 2022 U.S. National Security Strategy noted, “There is very little attention to gender equality as a strategic interest. . . . The Biden National Security Strategy is furthermore heavily development-focused regarding women and girls, without at least an equal emphasis on the empowerment of women in the security context regarding conflict prevention, management, resolution and recovery, as required by the WPS Act.”<sup>7</sup>

## **GENDER AND WPS ADVISORS IN THE USG**

To further operationalize these laws – and to inform and implement more effective U.S. defense, diplomacy, development, and homeland security policies and programming – the USG has hired gender advisors and WPS advisors as well as included these issues in other key personnel positions at the Departments of Defense (DoD), State (DoS), Homeland Security (DHS) and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). Gender advisors are technical experts who work to institutionalize gender equality and incorporate inclusive, intersectional perspectives, policies, and practices into their daily work. They also help implement WPS National Action Plans, as well as other policies and activities, which advance gender equality in areas affected by crisis, conflict, war, and natural disasters.

In addition, gender advisors assist with developing and implementing key policies and practices to incorporate gender and WPS objectives. They provide critical intersectional power analyses on the local context in different countries, sectors, and contexts. Their duties can include technical expertise; strategically advising, designing, implementing, and evaluating programming; and drafting and promoting policies and programs that build stronger and more equitable societies.

Embedding gender advisors throughout institutions in key offices and positions has been critical to ensuring that the USG implements laws and policies that prioritize the advancement of gender equality. When adequately supported, they have helped promote gender equality and shaped more effective policy and programming. Amid multiple challenges, they have made tremendous strides in ensuring that gender equity and equality and WPS are institutionalized, prioritized, and integrated across agencies.

That said, there is much more that needs to be done to advance these critical issues. Gender advisors need to be sufficiently supported and empowered to ensure the USG makes gender a national security priority and integrates gender throughout its policies, programming, and funding decisions. Achieving these objectives will require a concerted, coordinated effort by senior Administration officials, members of Congress, and civil society.

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<sup>7</sup> Hans Hogrefe and Cassandra Zavislak, “Women, Peace and Security and the 2022 National Security Strategy: A Strategic Blindspot in US National Security Interests,” briefing paper, Our Secure Future, January 25, 2023, <https://oursecurefuture.org/sites/default/files/2023-01/OSF-2022-NationalSecurityStrategy.pdf>.

## WPS POLICIES AND LEGISLATION



### UNSC Resolution 1325

*“Urges Member States to ensure increased representation of women at all decision-making levels”*



### Women, Peace and Security Act of 2017

*“Improve the participation of women...and include goals and evaluation plans to ensure strategy effectiveness. Such a strategy shall include a specific implementation plan from each relevant federal agency”*



### U.S Strategy and National Action Plan on WPS 2023

*“The Strategy is a fulfillment of the WPS Act of 2017 – the first ever comprehensive law of its kind, and builds on prior U.S. commitments to advance women’s involvement in peace and security processes”*

## METHODOLOGY

This paper’s analysis of different aspects of advancing WPS and gender equality within the USG is informed mostly by interviews with gender advisors, WPS advisors, and other personnel with these issues as part of their portfolio at USAID, DoD, DHS, and DoS, as well as in civil society. While DHS purview extends internationally as a critical aspect of keeping the U.S. safe, its focus is heavily domestic, and it is in the early stages of integrating WPS into its policies and programming. To that end, DHS was interviewed and the 2021 Congressional report was reviewed as part of the brief. The accomplishments, challenges, and opportunities of DHS are highlighted as a separate section of this brief focusing on domestic implementation of WPS.

Interviewees shared their experiences and perspectives on what is working well, what challenges they face, and how to strengthen institutionalization in their respective agencies. The brief is not meant to simply highlight what has already been published about the advancement of the WPS agenda, but rather provide an inside look at the role gender advisors are playing in each agency. Additional desk research was conducted that included a review of recent reports from relevant agencies to reinforce the interviewees’ key points as well as background information on the evolution of the USG in advancing these issues.

Interviewees spoke “on-background” to give them the opportunity to speak freely. The findings do not reflect the entirety of accomplishments, challenges, and opportunities, but rather highlight a pattern of insights about how WPS is being institutionalized. Quotes have been lightly edited for continuity and clarity. Interviewees’ opinions are their own and do not necessarily reflect the views of Our Secure Future, the interviewees’ employers, or, in the case of USG officials, the policies of the United States Government.

## **U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY: DOMESTIC IMPLEMENTATION OF THE WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY AGENDA**

The Department of Homeland Security is mandated by the WPS Act of 2017 to advance the Women, Peace and Security agenda. This is the first time DHS has been required to integrate WPS into its policies and programming. However, the Department of Homeland Security's attention to gender equality in its work predates the WPS Act's requirements on advancing gender equity and equality. While much of DHS's work focuses on domestic implementation, there are also strong linkages with international partners such as the women's law enforcement training by the International Law Enforcement Academy (ILEA) in Gaborone, Botswana. DHS has hired a WPS Manager and is in its early stages of advancing this agenda.

Key accomplishments include training over 12,000 women in both basic and advanced law enforcement in 2022; launching the DHS 30x23 Initiative, which aims to increase by 30% the number of women hires in DHS law enforcement by 2023; creating a Gender Policy Working Group that includes WPS and other initiatives in support of the U.S. National Strategy on Gender Equity and Equality, as well as training on the "three Gs" of gender parity, gender perspective, and gender analysis; and creating policies aimed at protecting those most vulnerable, including the ICE Directive 11032.4, Identification and Monitoring of Pregnant, Postpartum, or Nursing Individuals, which "ensures that, absent exceptional circumstances, women who are identified as pregnant, postpartum, or nursing are to be released from ICE custody."

DHS acknowledged several gaps and challenges, including translating WPS down to the 15 Operational and Support Components missions, such as the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the Transportation Security Administration, in a way that is actionable and shows why it will lead to greater operational effectiveness; increased alignment with other policies such as the U.S. National Plan on Gender-Based Violence: Strategies for Action; and the desire for continued coordination with key partners like DoS, USAID, and DoD. They are working to tackle these issues going forward in myriad ways, including hiring more WPS staff and gender advisors, increasing collaboration with civil society and academia to incorporate research and theory into practical application in programming, and working on coordinating with "WPS POCs at U.S. Northern Command (USNORTHCOM) on the integration of gender perspectives into the prevention of gender-based violence during disasters." Moving forward, a key recommendation and long-term goal for advancing WPS in DHS is to have gender advisors at all Operational and Support Components.

## GLOBAL IMPLEMENTATION OF THE WPS AGENDA

This brief focuses on the only agencies and departments required by the WPS Act of 2017 to advance this agenda, including the DoD, DHS, DoS, and the USAID. The following section provides information on those agencies focused on global implementation, DoD, DoS, and USAID. Specifically, it highlights the achievements, challenges, and opportunities facing gender advisors working to integrate WPS (and gender issues more broadly) into USG policy and programming.

The brief also provides recommendations on how to further strengthen and institutionalize this work. Each section covers these insights and includes key findings across agencies and then agency-specific findings.

*“Having dedicated gender advisors across all our components right now, at least at the headquarters level, has been huge for us. That was something that didn’t exist, and was sort of happening only on the fringes, in 2016.”*



# ACCOMPLISHMENTS

There have been many important accomplishments to institutionalize, prioritize, and integrate WPS approaches across USG agencies. These accomplishments show the innovative ways gender advisors have advanced this agenda and the maturation of policies, programming, and funding that are responsive to WPS. The work of gender advisors has been essential to transforming the way policies and programs are designed and implemented so that they are more inclusive and effective.

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## KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS ACROSS AGENCIES

Interviewees identified several important developments that apply across all three agencies:

### **1. Dedicated gender and WPS advisors.**

All three agencies have hired dedicated gender and WPS advisors to oversee the development, integration, and implementation of gender into policy. These positions are at various levels as well, which is critical in shaping policy. It is not enough to just have them at the tactical/operational level, but also the strategic level and vice versa. While we do not have the exact number, we know DoD, DoS, and USAID have been able to hire for one or more of these positions.

### **2. Increased knowledge and understanding of WPS.**

Although there has been advancement on the WPS agenda, it is not yet identified as a core national security interest, as noted above in the National Security Strategy. However, in mainstream policy arenas, it is no longer regarded simply as a “women’s issue,” but rather as an integral part of USG policy.

### **3. Development of WPS implementation plans.**

All three agencies have developed and maintained implementation plans that provide a roadmap for policymaking, including specific policy and programmatic commitments as well as provisions to ensure that agencies hold themselves accountable.

**4. Sex-disaggregation of data.** Disaggregating data by sex is essential for understanding the differing impacts of policies on women’s and men’s lives, identifying gaps that persist, and recognizing and pursuing additional opportunities to advance gender equality.

### **5. Better engagement with women in conflict situations.**

Gender advisors have been able to develop and institutionalize mechanisms that ensure that consultation with women leaders and organizations in conflict-affected countries is seen as a critical component and best practice of policy and program development.

### **6. Integration of a gender perspective in Joint Regional Strategies (JRS).**

DoS and USAID have partnered to develop joint strategies that articulate shared priorities to guide missions as they allocate resources and respond to unanticipated events. As part of this, they have worked to make the JRS more gender-sensitive, with the most recent Africa JRS serving as a leader.



## DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

### 1. Establishment of a Department-wide implementation plan.

In FY2020, DoD adopted the DoD Women, Peace, and Security Strategic Framework and Implementation Plan (SFIP), which established specific policy goals and department-specific metrics on WPS implementation, including DoD's obligations within the broader U.S. Strategy on WPS. The SFIP identified three objectives to support the USG's overall WPS strategy: women's meaningful participation in the Joint Force; promoting women's participation in international security cooperation activities; and "ensuring partner nations protect women and girls, especially during conflict and crisis."<sup>8</sup> In addition, the Joint Staff utilized the SFIP to align its gender analysis framework with those of DoS and USAID.

### 2. WPS-specific funding.

The DoD received its first dedicated funding for WPS in FY2019, which was instrumental in and directly led to the hiring of more gender advisors. In FY2021, DoD allocated \$5.5 million to develop and implement WPS policies and another \$3 million from security cooperation programming to support "programs that incorporate gender analysis and advance women's participation in [other countries'] defense institutions and national security forces."<sup>9</sup>

### 3. Development of WPS policies at some U.S. Combatant Commands.<sup>10</sup>

Notwithstanding a DoD-wide policy on WPS, combatant commands, which are geographic or functional missions that provide command and control of military forces in peace and war, took on the role to develop their headquarter-level WPS policies, which enabled their commands to tailor WPS implementation and institutionalize it further.

### 4. Appointment of dedicated WPS personnel in the military departments and Combatant Commands.

Interviewees noted the appointment of WPS advisors across multiple components, including military departments (Army, Navy, Air Force) and additional unified combatant commands.

### 5. New training programs.

Joint Staff and the combatant commands have held at least eight "Operationalizing WPS" trainings, which, according to the Pentagon's own reporting, have trained "four hundred DoD personnel to serve as Gender Focal Points (GFPs) and thirty personnel qualified to serve as Gender Advisors."<sup>11</sup>

### 6. Inclusion of WPS recommendations in the Independent Review Commission Recommendation–Implementation [Roadmap on Sexual Assault in the Military](#).

The Roadmap includes specific recommendations to strengthen collaboration among key offices and identifies "resource requirements for full-time equivalent (FTE) Gender Advisor billets" to help integrate and institutionalize WPS.<sup>12</sup>

### 7. Deployment of gender advisors to support crisis interventions and emergency arrivals.

During the 2021 U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, the DoD, for the first time, deployed gender advisors to the U.S. military bases that served as safe havens receiving Afghan evacuees. The gender advisors were a critical part of Operation Allies Welcome, demonstrating the importance of their integration into emergency responses.

8. The White House, "United States Government Women, Peace, and Security Congressional Report" (hereafter "2022 Congressional Report"), July 2022, 5, <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/US-Women-Peace-Security-Report-2022.pdf>.

9. U.S. Department of Defense, "DoD Announces Women, Peace, and Security 2022 Report" (hereafter "2022 DoD Announcement"), July 19, 2022, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3098291/dod-announces-women-peace-and-security-2022-report/>.

10. The Defense Department has 11 combatant commands including the Africa Command; Central Command; Cyber Command; European Command; Indo-Pacific Command; Northern Command; Southern Command; Space Command; Special Operations Command; Strategic Command; and Transportation Command.

11. 2022 DoD Announcement.

12. 2022 DoD Announcement.

## **An important win was also secured in the FY2023 National Defense Authorization Act.**

Section 1208 helped advance WPS for DoD because it established the first dedicated security cooperation authority to advance WPS that the department could then use with a pot of funding for working with partner nations. Excerpts from Section 1208 include:

“In General – During fiscal years 2023 through 2025, the Secretary of Defense, in coordination with the Secretary of State, may conduct or support security cooperation programs and activities involving the national military forces or national-level security forces of a foreign country, or other covered personnel, to advise, train, and educate such forces or personnel with respect to – the recruitment, employment, development, retention, promotion, and meaningful participation in decision-making of women; sexual harassment, sexual assault, domestic abuse, and other forms of violence that disproportionately impact women; the requirements of women, including providing appropriate equipment and facilities; and the implementation of activities described in this sub-section, including the integration of such activities into security-sector policy, planning, exercises, and training, as appropriate.”

“Annual Report - Not later than 90 days after the end of each of fiscal years 2023 through 2025, the Secretary of Defense shall submit to the congressional defense committees a report detailing the assistance provided under this section and specifying the recipients of such assistance.”

## **DEPARTMENT OF STATE**

### **1. Establishment of a Department-wide implementation plan.**

In FY2020, DoS adopted their Plan to Implement the U.S. Strategy on Women, Peace, and Security. The plan identified four objectives to support the USG’s overall WPS strategy: “Women’s meaningful participation in decision-making processes related to conflict and crises will increase in targeted contexts; women and girls have improved access to aid and protection from gender-based violence (GBV), abuse, and exploitation in targeted contexts; through diplomatic engagement, public diplomacy, and programs in targeted contexts, the Department models best practices in its leadership, training, analytic, and safeguarding practices; and targeted partner governments will make measurable progress towards adopting policies, plans, and capacity to improve the meaningful participation of women in processes connected to peace and security and decision-making institutions.”<sup>13</sup>

### **2. Development of a comprehensive gender analysis tool.**

The tool provides clear guidelines and instructions on how to ensure the DoS’s policies and programs address disparities, challenge systemic inequality, and advance gender equality.

### **3. Utilizing the WPS Learning Exchange.**

The WPS learning exchange, established in partnership with the U.S. Institute of Peace, was launched and is designed to facilitate quarterly civil society consultations to build relationships, share lessons learned, exchange data, and brainstorm solutions.

### **4. Increase in training.**

The DoS more than doubled the number of Foreign Service Institute (FSI) courses that include WPS principles, which in turn meant a near-doubling of the number of personnel trained.

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13. Department of State, “Plan to Implement the U.S. Strategy on Women, Peace, and Security,” 2020, [https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/20-01943-SGWI\\_v11\\_forWeb\\_Bookmarks508.pdf](https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/20-01943-SGWI_v11_forWeb_Bookmarks508.pdf).

## **5. Incorporation of WPS in Strategic Frameworks.**

Bureaus and missions have updated and integrated WPS principles in myriad frameworks, including “a combined 44 Integrated Countries Strategies (ICS), Functional Bureau Strategies (FBS), Joint Regional Strategies (JRS), and thematic and regional frameworks.”<sup>14</sup>

## **6. Integration of WPS into implementation of the Global Fragility Act (GFA).**

DoS has pushed for the incorporation of WPS concepts into implementation of the GFA, including “discussions on country selection, strategic frameworks, and resourcing” to promote the participation and representation of women in GFA programming.<sup>15</sup>

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# **U.S. AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

## **1. Establishment of a Department-wide implementation plan.**

In 2019, USAID adopted their Women, Peace, and Security Implementation Plan to Implement the U.S. Strategy on Women, Peace, and Security. USAID identified the following key priorities and approaches for its implementation efforts: “Dedicated funding and reporting mechanisms; broad consultations; synergies with key policies, strategies, and initiatives; elevating WPS in USAID transformation; and building new and effective partnerships.”<sup>16</sup>

## **2. Integration into regional and functional bureaus.**

Hiring dedicated technical gender advisors in the regional and functional bureaus has been critical in helping to institutionalize WPS in relevant policies and programming. As part of this, USAID also provided regionally specific WPS trainings to both D.C. and Mission officers.

## **7. Launch of a formal consultative mechanism in a crisis setting.**

This pilot program was designed to establish standard operating procedures for conducting consultations both at the onset and throughout a diplomatic engagement and programming. This initiative launched after the withdrawal in Afghanistan and relied heavily on gender advisors to design and implement the consultations.

## **3. Integration of WPS in conflict and fragility strategies.**

USAID has integrated WPS principles into core strategies such as the U.S. Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability and the Global Fragility Act<sup>17</sup> and U.S. Strategy to Anticipate, Prevent, and Respond to Atrocities.

## **4. Increased Mission support for WPS.**

Although full implementation and buy-in is dependent on Mission leadership, USAID is building a cadre of champions at both the leadership and staff levels in its Missions, providing not only program implementation that meaningfully integrates gender, but also gathering critical data to show how WPS transforms communities and societies.

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14. 2022 Congressional Report, 13.

15. 2022 Congressional Report, 13.

16. USAID, “Women, Peace, and Security Implementation Plan,” 2020, <https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/2023-02/2020-USAID-Women-Peace-and-Security-Implementation-Plan.pdf>

17. 2022 Congressional Report, 19–20.

## CIVIL SOCIETY PERSPECTIVE ON USG

### SUCCESSSES

Notable increase in WPS integration and institutionalization, regular consultations with civil society, and agency implementation plans and strategies to advance gender equality and WPS.

### CHALLENGES

Lack of resources (human and financial), too many competing responsibilities for gender advisors (stretched thin), and not enough leadership commitment.

### OPPORTUNITIES

Continue formalizing consultations with civil society and ensure that it is inclusive of different perspectives.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Increasing funding, mandating WPS and gender training, and focusing the portfolios and responsibilities of gender advisors on WPS and related issues.

## CHALLENGES

Although the USG has made progress on advancing gender equality and promoting WPS, several barriers continue to prevent institutionalization, both across agencies and within specific programs and policies. From the lack of political will to personality-driven leadership priorities, and from insufficient funding to the overstretching of gender advisors, gender equality goals and objectives continue to be sidelined in many ways.

A lack of gender advisors or inadequate support to current gender advisors can lead to the development of policies and programming that are gender blind. As the United Nations has noted, gender-blind policy and programming fail “to recognize that the roles and responsibilities of men/boys and women/girls are assigned to them in specific social, cultural, economic, and political contexts and backgrounds. Projects, programs, policies and attitudes which are gender blind do not take into account these different roles and diverse needs.”<sup>18</sup> This can lead to negative consequences, including perpetuating and exacerbating preexisting power imbalances and inequality as well as potentially putting women and girls at greater risk of being victims of violence and discrimination. Tackling these challenges must be a priority to not only support gender advisors and advance gender equality, but also protect the beneficiaries of USG assistance.

***“WPS is an afterthought. It’s not prioritized at the beginning. When there is a crisis, the immediate reaction is talk to the players involved to advocate to the government.”***

18. United Nations/UN Women Training Centre, “Gender Equality Glossary,” <https://trainingcentre.unwomen.org/mod/glossary/view.php?id=36&mode=letter&hook=G&sortkey=&sortorder=&fullsearch=0&page=-1>.

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## KEY CHALLENGES ACROSS AGENCIES

The following challenges apply across all three agencies, including:

### 1. Lack of leadership and political will.

Without leadership supporting and prioritizing this agenda, progress can be difficult. Interviewees noted that although there have been WPS champions in each agency, there is a lack of consistent leadership and political will for advancing the overall mission. This is particularly true at the middle-management level, where personnel do not necessarily see WPS as an important enough issue or are not held accountable for advancing these issues.

### 2. Translating the “So what?”

A challenge is translating why WPS is important and getting past gender biases. Better articulation of why this work matters, what it will achieve, and how it is best implemented in ways that officials can readily conceive and act upon will help.

### 3. Lack of consistent and core funding.

Not having consistent and core resources, continuing to get unfunded mandates, trying to make the case for funding constantly, and in some cases not having WPS-specific funding prevent agencies from prioritizing and planning.

### 4. Gender advisors’ multiple responsibilities and lack of authority.

Gender advisors are often assigned a variety of other responsibilities (such as atrocity prevention and disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration), making it very difficult for them to focus their attention and time on advancing gender equality and WPS. They also lack authority to make certain decisions or are often not included when important decisions are made.

## DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

### 1. Gender advisors as contractors.

Many of DoD’s gender advisors are contractors, meaning that they have limited ability to actively participate in critical decision-making and do not have the authority to make (only implement) policy. Additionally, contractors are not allowed to be a part of funding conversations. When most of these advisors are contract support, and they cannot request sustained budgetary support, there is risk for a decrease of funding and the possibility of less job security. This also weakens their ability to advocate for inclusion of gender in policy development. That said, there have been incremental improvements in this area since the Independent Review Commission’s report noted the need to address the issue.

### 2. Absence of a DoD Instruction (DoDI) on WPS.

DoDIs are the Pentagon’s foundational guidance documents, defining and clarifying roles and responsibilities. Given the reality that DoD is a command culture, adoption of a DoDI would serve as both a critical signal to and a clear mandate for all DoD components to implement WPS-focused policies and programs. This can clarify, for example, the gender advisor role, and will help institutionalize and operationalize the WPS work. As noted in the opportunities section below, they are in the process of finalizing a DoDI for WPS.

## DEPARTMENT OF STATE

### 1. Inability to integrate gender considerations into any response to an emerging crisis.

The DoS often struggles to respond to rapidly developing crises in real time. Whenever it is confronted with an immediate crisis and there is a need to identify a problem, determine solutions, allocate funding, and roll out programming, it often fails to ensure that gender advisors have a voice in decision-making and/or a role in implementation.

### 2. Need for greater integration with other policies.

The WPS policy space has grown and there is a need to be more concrete and specific about how WPS relates to other issues and policies, such as conflict-related gender-based and sexual violence, implementation of the Global Fragility Act, and atrocity prevention.

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## U.S. AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

### 1. Lack of a rapid-response funding mechanism.

When an emerging crisis happens, there is not a WPS-specific rapid-response funding mechanism that can be quickly mobilized to ensure gender and WPS are at the forefront of and fully integrated into any response. USAID has several rapid-response mechanisms, such as the Human Rights Support Mechanism Rapid Response Mechanism, that are good models to replicate.

### 3. Limited access in certain decision-making.

Senior-level staff working on gender equality issues should play a role in all major policy decisions, ranging from disaster response to global poverty reduction, yet this does not always happen. When gender advisors or WPS Advisors are not involved in decision-making, then gender equality often becomes an afterthought or is shortchanged as an issue to be addressed at some later date.

### 2. Siloed functions and processes.

Functional and regional bureau decision-making is sometimes siloed, leading to separate processes for integrating, implementing, and institutionalizing gender. Bureaus often identify opportunities to collaborate, but they are not consistent or mandated.

## OPPORTUNITIES

Despite these challenges and obstacles, there are reasons to be optimistic that progress can continue to be made. Interviewees identified multiple opportunities to institutionalize WPS and gender into U.S. policy, make programs more robust and effective, and support gender advisors in their day-to-day work.

*“Consultations are critical. Our approach is guided by being whole-of-government, whole-of-society, and then multinational, and then localize as much as we can. In some regions we are focusing on women-led civil society organizations and holding listening sessions on what security looks like to them. It must be localized.”*



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## KEY OPPORTUNITIES ACROSS AGENCIES

The following opportunities apply across all three agencies, including to:

### **1. Finalize the 2023 U.S. Strategy and National Action Plan on WPS.**

Gender and WPS advisors are playing a lead role in development and implementation of a new U.S. Strategy and National Action Plan, which will replace the 2019 Strategy. The Plan's development process offers a critical opportunity to address and resolve the challenges identified in this report. In addition, the drafting and approval process gives gender advisors an opportunity to further institutionalize the WPS work.

### **2. Broaden consultations with civil society organizations (CSOs).**

While all agencies have increased and made more consistent their consultations with civil society, every interviewee noted that it is important not only to engage those groups with WPS expertise, but also to engage those who bring complementary knowledge, including academics and think tank researchers. Additionally, it is critical that embassies, USAID missions, and regional combatant commands continue to regularly consult with local CSOs.

### **3. Increase engagement with the Women, Peace, and Security Bipartisan Congressional Caucus.**

The Congressional WPS Caucus has an important role to play. The bipartisan Caucus members can help broaden Congressional understanding, support, and engagement by encouraging their peers in relevant committees (Armed Services, Appropriations, and Foreign Affairs) to ensure USG integration, institutionalization, and implementation of the provisions of the WPS Act and, by extension, the Strategy and National Action Plan and other key policy documents. This includes supporting gender advisors and technical experts in advancing the WPS agenda as a critical part of U.S. foreign policy. While briefings, Member letters, hearings, and linking the Caucus with women peacebuilders is happening, more could be done to bolster these efforts and make them more strategic.

### **4. Develop an action plan on the National Gender Strategy (NGS).**

The NGS identifies several reform commitments, including creating consistent gender advisor position descriptions, encouraging that every operating unit have a stand-alone gender advisor, and revising standard evaluation criteria to add DEIA. The strategy is not directly connected to the WPS Act or its implementation, and further, the NGS is not public. However, the NGS progress report is available online [here](#).



## DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

### 1. Finalize the Draft DoD Instruction (DoDI) on WPS.

As noted, the DoDI is a foundational document that will greatly institutionalize WPS, as well as make it more clear how to integrate WPS throughout the agency. The draft has been completed and been opened for comment by DoD staff. It is currently being revised and finalized based on the comments and feedback.

### 2. Continue Training in the Combatant Commands.

With over 400 actively trained gender advisors/focal points (including 150 in the Indo-Pacific Command alone), continued training will help formalize these roles, build consistency, and institutionalize the work.

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## DEPARTMENT OF STATE

### 1. Update the Foreign Affairs Manual (FAM)<sup>1</sup>.

Under the Obama Administration, the FAM included a robust gender equality section. It was removed under the Trump Administration. The current Administration could reinstate this section using the 40 reform commitments noted in the NGS action plan to further the institutionalization of WPS.

### 3. Make WPS training more robust.

The WPS Act of 2017 requires training of relevant government personnel. Newly updated and overhauled WPS training will be implemented soon for DoS personnel.

### 2. Utilize the WPS Learning Exchange.

The WPS Learning Exchange, established in partnership with the U.S. Institute of Peace, has been launched and is designed to facilitate quarterly civil society consultations to build relationships, share lessons learned, exchange data, and brainstorm solutions.

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## U.S. AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

### 1. Complete the process of developing new implementation guidance.

Implementation guidance is forthcoming on the various policies related to gender, including the National Gender Strategy and WPS Strategy, which will give clear instructions to staff, beyond just gender advisors, on how to ensure gender is integrated into all policies and programs.

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1. The FAM and Foreign Affairs Handbooks (FAHs) are the comprehensive and authoritative source for the Department's organization, structures, policies, and procedures. They govern the operations of the State Department, the Foreign Service, and, when applicable, other federal agencies. The FAM (generally policy) and the FAHs (generally procedures) together convey codified information to State and USAID personnel and contractors so they can carry out their responsibilities in accordance with statutory, executive, and Departmental mandates.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

There are several ways the USG could further empower and support gender advisors, WPS advisors, and other personnel with gender in their portfolio, advance gender equality, and prioritize WPS as a policy tool across agencies. These recommendations are based on the data collected as well as other observations and experience from Our Secure Future's own work and advocacy.

## KEY RECOMMENDATIONS ACROSS AGENCIES

The following recommendations apply across all three agencies.

### **1. Establish a Senior Coordinator and Special Representative/Envoy for WPS.**

It is important to establish or assign a senior-level person with authority, budget, and staff to lead on the internal and external USG-wide WPS strategy and implementation. These positions could be housed in the Global Women's Issues Office at DoS and report to the Ambassador-at-Large or report directly to USAID's Administrator.

### **2. Provide gender advisors with greater authority and resources.**

There are several ways to empower and give more authority to gender advisors, including making their job descriptions limited exclusively to gender issues, increasing their seniority level in the government pay scale, and giving them more decision-making authority over deployment of resources.

### **3. Include gender experts at the onset of decision-making.**

When critical decisions are being made, technical experts on gender should be in the room or should draft talking points for the person who will be in the room. Gender experts/advisors should be present during Interagency Policy Committee meetings on key country, regional, and thematic issues. Additionally, the Ambassador-at-Large for Global Women's Issues should be present at Deputy-level meetings. This ensures that when policies and strategies reach senior officials, gender perspectives have been integrated from the beginning.

### **4. Bolster diverse hiring practices.**

Hiring practices should be instituted that ensure that the right people are in the job and that they have a diversity of experience and knowledge on WPS.

### **5. Invest in training.**

All USG employees working in foreign policy and national security should be required to receive robust training on the history, importance, and potential impact of the WPS agenda and how to incorporate a gender lens into their work. The onus for integration of gender and advancing gender equity and equality should not only be on gender advisors.

### **6. Increase funding.**

While funding has increased for gender initiatives, funding for WPS remains low. Providing significant additional funding could greatly increase the effectiveness of gender advisors and programming in the field. This must be done through real resources, not unfunded mandates.

### **7. Support more professional development opportunities.**

Providing gender and WPS advisors with professional development and robust travel opportunities outside of gender-related issues and WPS programs — such as in nutrition, protection, and health — will further bolster their effectiveness.

## DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

### 1. Ensure consistent funding.

DoD needs to request WPS funding through the Planning, Programming, Budgeting, and Execution Process to help support WPS integration.

Currently, DoD gets specific funding for the WPS Act implementation, but that's a gift from Congress that could go away at any point. More consistent funding would help in hiring gender advisors, providing U.S. personnel with WPS training, and integrating WPS into security cooperation activities with partners.

### 2. Better align strategies and priorities.

While DoD has worked to align its gender analysis framework with that of DoS and USAID, more is needed. There are several important government-wide strategies and implementation plans, such as the WPS Strategy and the National Gender Strategy, that could be more effective with greater alignment and complementary approaches. Gender advisors are currently stretched thin, as they must provide input into each of these strategies, and pivoting from one strategy to another often surfaces tensions and leads to loss of time and energy.

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## DEPARTMENT OF STATE

### 1. Create senior-level WPS coordinators.

Having senior-level WPS coordinators in each of the regional and functional bureaus will help integrate WPS, make it less siloed, and take the full ownership off the Global Women's Issues office.

### 2. Evaluate Principal Deputy Assistant Secretaries' performance on their commitment to gender advancement.

The PDAS positions are held by Foreign Service Officers rather than political appointees and are critical leadership positions. Including a WPS and gender component in their performance review would encourage and build greater accountability for their role advancing this work.

### 3. Integrate WPS training for all DoS personnel.

Ensuring all DoS staff consistently receive WPS training will help create greater knowledge and understanding throughout the agency and will advance WPS implementation.

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## U.S. AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

### 1. Create a rapid and flexible funding mechanism for WPS.

Such non-expiring funds could help ensure that WPS and gender considerations are acted upon at the onset of an emerging crisis or conflict.

### 2. Provide more technical assistance to gender advisors in regional and functional bureaus.

Gender advisors in regional bureaus (usually one to two people) are responsible for implementing gender activities in programming throughout a large geographic region. To be more effective, the bureaus need more gender advisors and others with critical technical expertise to help with policy development and implementation at both the bureau and mission level.

### 3. Ensure greater accountability for gender integration.

Accountability is often put on the gender advisors for broad integration within programs, but there needs to be a means to hold any given program or desk officer, policy advisor, or technical expert within the agency accountable to working on and striving for gender equality and gender and WPS integration goals as per their implementation strategies and plans. Accountability means that USG staff at all levels incorporate a gender perspective throughout the program cycle, including the strategy and design stages as well as the implementation and monitoring and evaluation phases.

## CONCLUSION

Historically, gender inequality has remained outside the sphere of consideration for many security actors and policymakers. Unlike any other foreign policy agenda, WPS originated from a global constituency of nonstate actors – women. As a result, the WPS agenda promotes nonviolent, human rights-based approaches to peace and security decision-making. This approach explicitly acknowledges gender equality as intrinsic to a durable peace.

Furthermore, there is a solid body of evidence that shows the inclusion of women and a gender perspective increases the effectiveness of peace and security policies, programs, and practices. Since 2000, the international community, including member states and civil society, has been working to implement the WPS agenda. Today, gender advisors that are embedded within security and defense institutions are vital to creating effective foreign and defense policy.

This policy brief is intended to aid policymakers and practitioners in addressing how gender advisors are critical to promoting gender equality and shaping more effective policy and programming. Amid many challenges, they have done incredible work, but they must be more empowered and supported to achieve even greater gains in their roles.

The insights from the interviewees provide a starting point for how to strengthen the role of gender advisors and identify what steps need to be taken to make the institutional infrastructure for them more robust.

Gender advisors tasked with the WPS agenda are crucial to the success of international peace and security objectives. It is clear that policymakers who want to achieve more durable peace agreements, adopt policies to improve human security, and increase stability and effectiveness of policy and program implementation across sectors must engage more robustly with Gender Advisors to ensure success.



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# Gender perspectives improve security outcomes



OUR **SECURE** FUTURE

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Women Make the Difference

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