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# *The Role of the Private Sector in* **Advancing Women, Peace and Security** Policy Brief

Spring 2025

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## OVERVIEW

The private sector plays a critical role in advancing the Women, Peace and Security agenda — a framework for creating peace through strength and the implementation of more effective military planning and operations, specifically through the integration of women's unique perspectives and insights, improvement in women's economic security, and creation of more comprehensive and sustainable security policies. Women serve as a critical bulwark and support for their families, communities, and countries. By creating meaningful partnerships with governments and civil society, the private sector can leverage their capacities to bring creative and pragmatic solutions to complex peace and security issues.

The WPS framework, established through United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 in 2000, emphasizes the need for women's participation in peacebuilding, conflict prevention, and post-conflict recovery. It promotes women's equal and meaningful participation in peace

processes, peacebuilding, and security. While traditionally governments and civil society have been seen as the key actors in this space, the private sector is increasingly recognized for its potential to contribute to these goals.

The original framework of UNSCR 1325 focused on the effect of armed conflict on women and girls, and the impact of their representation and participation in preventing, mitigating, and resolving conflict. However, the WPS agenda has evolved over time, becoming more concrete with the passage of legislation like the WPS Act of 2017 in the US — which fortified women's inclusion and participation in peace and security processes and has necessitated a government-wide strategy on WPS to be implemented through interagency coordination, policy development, training, and education. This evolution has likewise underscored the links between the private sector and WPS, as well as the opportunity to connect business interests with WPS.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> A version of this brief was presented at the Thomson Reuters Women, Peace and Security Roundtable at the 79th UN General Assembly on September 23, 2024.

# Intersection of Women, Peace and Security and the Private Sector

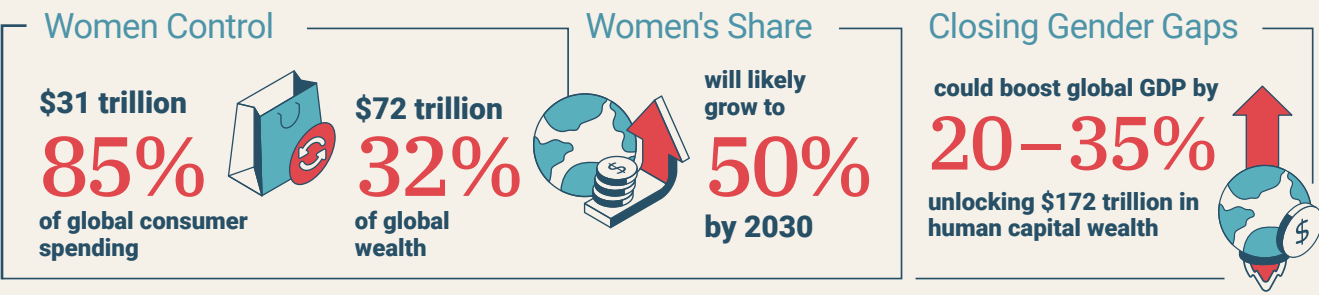
Reinforced by many international frameworks, the WPS policy agenda aims to create durable peace – a lasting peace that ensures stability, prosperity, and security for all.

Sustaining durable peace is complex and requires reinforcing several key systems, including good governance, economic development, and security provisions. A central premise of the WPS agenda is the critical role women play in sustaining peace, particularly in peacemaking, security, and economic prosperity. Thus, the treatment of women is also essential, as their involvement in decision-making processes has a direct impact on long-term peace, violence reduction, and the general health and well-being in society.

From an economic perspective, women represent the largest emerging market. They are also disproportionately impacted by conflict, with over 600 million women and girls living within 50 kilometers of active conflict zones.<sup>2</sup> In 2023, the percentage of women killed in armed conflicts doubled compared to the previous year; similarly, sexual violence in conflict rose dramatically, as UN-verified cases of conflict-related sexual violence increased by 50% and the number of girls affected by grave violations grew by 35%.<sup>3</sup>

Investment in women and girls can consequently help stabilize societies. Reducing inequality between men and women in fragile or conflict situations can raise economic growth, enhance financial stability, and make societies more resistant to violence and conflict. According to a 2015 McKinsey study, the female economy is larger than the economies of both India and China combined - and growing. Today, women control more than \$31 trillion in yearly consumer spending – reflecting 85% of total worldwide spending. As of 2020, women made \$24 trillion in total yearly earnings, up from \$20 trillion in 2018. Presently, they control 32% of total global wealth, equivalent to \$72 trillion; that sum is expected to grow to 50% by 2030.<sup>4</sup> According to many reports, closing the gap in decision-making could potentially increase global GDP by more than 20% to upward of 35% – essentially doubling the current global growth rate over the next decade and unlocking \$172 trillion in human capital wealth.<sup>5</sup>

Despite this, women remain underrepresented in decision-making processes that impact their lives, and societies, making their inclusion a critical goal. Empowering women economically can significantly contribute to a country's GDP growth and businesses that cater to women's needs, as well as involve them in leadership roles and beyond, are likely to see greater success.



## Existing Policy Frameworks that Promote Private Sector Engagement

Existing international frameworks, such as the UN Global Compact's Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs) or the WPS and Humanitarian Action (WPS-HA) Compact, offer companies guidelines on how to tangibly contribute to the WPS agenda.<sup>6</sup> The WEPs lay out key guiding principles:

- Establish high-level corporate leadership for Women, Peace and Security
- Implement enterprise development, supply chain, and marketing practices that empower women and men
- Ensure the health, safety, and well-being of all women and men workers
- Promote education, training, and professional development for women
- Promote private sector engagement with community initiatives for safer, stronger, and more prosperous societies
- Measure and publicly report on progress to achieve safer and more prosperous societies for men, women, boys, and girls

The WPS-HA Compact is a framework that encourages businesses to take action to promote women's peace and security. It provides a path for businesses to act on WPS, sets out thematic issues to prioritize and associated actions, and encourages strong partnerships, improved monitoring, and financing and advocacy.

Additionally, utilizing international policy frameworks such as the WPS agenda, the UN Global Impact, and the Sustainable Development Goals 5 (Gender Equality), 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions), and 17 (Partnerships for the Goals) can provide essential guidelines for private sector engagement.

While these efforts have come under some scrutiny, ultimately corporations are becoming more aware that they have an important role to play in advancing peace and security because it adds to their bottom line.

*"By creating meaningful partnerships with governments and civil society, the private sector can bring creative and pragmatic solutions to complex peace and security issues."*

<sup>2</sup> Emily Janoch et al., "Women in War," CARE International, May 29, 2024, [https://careinternationaluk.ams3.cdn.digitaloceanspaces.com/media/documents/WomenInWar\\_FINAL.pdf](https://careinternationaluk.ams3.cdn.digitaloceanspaces.com/media/documents/WomenInWar_FINAL.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> UN Women, "Facts and figures: Women, peace, and security," accessed February 25, 2025, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/peace-and-security/facts-and-figures#:~:text=Rising%20conflicts,%20in%202023%2C%20over%20%2C%2000%20injuries%20or%20death>.

<sup>4</sup> Nicole Casperson, "How Fintech Can Unlock the \$31 Trillion Female Economy," Forbes, Aug 22, 2023, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/nicolecasperson/2023/08/22/how-fintech-can-unlock-the-31-trillion-female-economy/>; "Global Female Income to Reach \$24 Trillion in 2020, Says Frost & Sullivan," PR Newswire, March 6, 2020, <https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/global-female-income-to-reach-24-trillion-in-2020-says-frost-sullivan-301016556.html>; Shelley Zalis, "The Feminization of Wealth: Rewriting the Narrative for Women Investors," Forbes, September 11, 2024, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/shelleyzalis/2024/09/10/the-feminization-of-wealth-rewriting-the-narrative-for-women-investors/>.

<sup>5</sup> United Nations, "Women and Girls – Closing the Gender Gap," accessed February 25, 2025, [https://www.un.org/en/un75/women\\_girls\\_closing\\_gender\\_gap#:~:text=In%20addition%2C%20it%20is%20an%35%20per%20cent%20on%20average](https://www.un.org/en/un75/women_girls_closing_gender_gap#:~:text=In%20addition%2C%20it%20is%20an%35%20per%20cent%20on%20average); Quentin Wodon et al., "How Large is the Gender Dividend? Measuring Selected Impacts and Costs of Gender Inequality," World Bank, February 2020, <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/3adf6e09-ae8f-5551-acae-9cb6ae63376a/content>.

<sup>6</sup> UN Global Compact, "Endorse the Women's Empowerment Principles," accessed February 25, 2025, <https://unglobalcompact.org/take-action/action/womens-principles>; WPS-HA Compact, "Women, Peace & Security and Humanitarian Action Compact Framework," accessed February 25, 2025, [https://wpscompact.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/WPS-HA-Compact\\_Framework-EN-Web.pdf](https://wpscompact.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/WPS-HA-Compact_Framework-EN-Web.pdf).

# Lessons from the Field:

## Business Coalitions and Peace Dividends

Lessons learned and best practices on private sector engagement can help create a positive impact on peace and security. Companies can support systematic change by leveraging existing policy frameworks and legal mandates to work with women to advance peacebuilding initiatives.

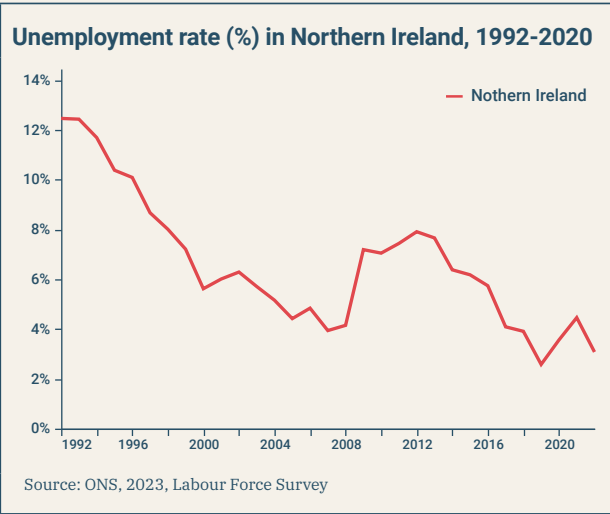
The following are examples of how the private sector can contribute to peace and promote the participation of women in peace and security decision-making through **peace dividends, industry coalitions, establishing codes of conduct**, and **coordinated efforts for peacebuilding**.

### Peace Dividends

The concept of “peace dividends” in the Northern Ireland context referred to the additional resources that governments and companies could redirect from security costs to economic development and welfare following the conclusion of fighting in 1998. These peace dividends can be realized in several ways, particularly with the involvement of the private sector. While data has been mixed on the success of peace dividends, research shows that since 1998 Northern Ireland has experienced the strongest employment growth of any region outside London, with the total number of people employed up by almost 23%. The unemployment rate in Northern Ireland also fell rapidly in the years after the agreement and remains lower than in Scotland, Wales or the northeast of England.”<sup>7</sup>

### Industry Coalitions

Another example of the private sector’s contribution to peace and security can be found in business coalitions working together with civil society for peace and security. A coalition of industry associations and other groups representing business and economic interests in Northern Ireland, the “Group of Seven,” participated in a “sustained push for peace through public messaging and private diplomacy based on the economic benefit peace would deliver.”<sup>8</sup> Presented as an apolitical voice formed to promote the ongoing peace negotiations, the group hosted neutral meetings between warring parties involved in the peace process and emphasized the economic benefits of ending the conflict. Individuals within these businesses also engaged in specific mediation efforts between some parties to help develop a shared resolution.



### Examples of Private Sector Investment

More private firms have invested in women’s participation as a means of advancing economic opportunities and growth:

**Proctor & Gamble:** In 2021, Proctor & Gamble committed to spending \$10 billion on women-owned and women-led business by 2025 by leveraging their purchasing power with women suppliers.<sup>9</sup>

**Coca-Cola:** In 2010, Coca-Cola committed to economically empowering five million women across its global value chain over the next decade. As of the end of 2020, the program achieved its goal of having enabled the economic empowerment of over six million women in diverse programs across 100 countries.<sup>10</sup>

**Dell:** Dell and the Women’s Peace and Humanitarian Fund launched a secure digital platform providing women peacebuilders with tools and resources, including a virtual library and a capacity building portal. While the technology bolsters their skillset, it also brings women together globally, allowing them to share best practices, facilitate dialogue, and exchange ideas.<sup>11</sup>

### Industry Codes of Conduct

The security sector and others have also taken steps to advance peace and security by creating international codes of conduct for companies that can offer a structured way for businesses to align their operations with ethical standards. Over a decade ago, through a collaborative process between governments, civil society, and businesses, a code of conduct was developed to protect human rights while ensuring that security services were provided responsibly. The International Code of

Conduct Association (ICoCA) provides a framework for internationally recognized standards and codes of conduct. It was formed in 2013 to ensure that “providers of security services respect human rights and humanitarian law.”<sup>12</sup> ICoCA serves as a form of quality assurance, signaling to consumers and investors that companies uphold ethical practices. Civil society has also played a crucial role in overseeing and auditing the process, ensuring companies adhere to set standards, in turn creating transparency in the process.

### Coordinated Efforts for Peacebuilding within the Private Sector

According to research, such interventions are more effective and sustainable when businesses are part of a larger system of organizations that partner with political and civil society groups and are integrated within larger governance plans for coordinated work. “Business association engagement is correlated with more consolidated peace. Because sustainable peace requires systemic change, sustained peace in these cases is more often associated with institutions able to operate at scale. Business associations or industry groups appear to be more effective partners for sustainable peace than individual firms.”<sup>13</sup>

Overall, business associations are far more effective in negotiating for peaceful resolution of conflict than one-off initiatives by individual companies.

The Ukraine Business Alliance is an ideal example. The Alliance was created by the McCain Institute in partnership with American technology and defense companies as a platform for private sector engagement with senior U.S. and Ukrainian government and military leaders and foreign policy experts to strategize innovative public-private partnerships to support Ukraine, including on advancing WPS.

<sup>7</sup> John Campbell, “Good Friday Agreement: Has Northern Ireland seen a peace dividend?,” *BBC*, April 3, 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-65168297>  
<sup>8</sup> Conor Seyle, Jinghong Wang, “Private Sector Peacebuilding: A Review of Past Cases and Lessons Learned,” *One Earth Future*, November 2019, [https://oneearthfuture.org/sites/default/files/documents/publications/Private\\_Sector\\_Peacebuilding\\_Report\\_DIGITAL.pdf](https://oneearthfuture.org/sites/default/files/documents/publications/Private_Sector_Peacebuilding_Report_DIGITAL.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> WeConnect International, “Proctor & Gamble Commits to Spending \$10 Billion with Women-owned and Women-led Businesses by 2025,” July 2, 2021, <https://weconnectinternational.org/procter-gamble-commits-to-spending-10-billion-with-women-owned-and-women-led-businesses-by-2025/>  
<sup>10</sup> CARE International, Corporate Case Studies, accessed February 25, 2025, <https://www.care.org/about-us/strategic-partners/corporate-partnerships/leadership-partners/>  
<sup>11</sup> WPSHA Compact Secretariat, “The Compact. Women, Peace & Security and Humanitarian Action,” January 14, 2025, <https://wpshacompact.org/how-the-private-sector-can-help-womens-empowerment-and-peace-2/>  
<sup>12</sup> International Code of Conduct Association, “About Us,” accessed February 25, 2025, <https://icoca.ch/about/>  
<sup>13</sup> Seyle, Wang, “Private Sector Peacebuilding: A Review of Past Cases and Lessons Learned,” *One Earth Future*.



# Anticipating Risks

Private sector engagement does not, however, always promote peace. There are many examples of where the private sector has prolonged, exacerbated, and profited from conflict situations.

For example, if companies are careless about inspecting their supply chains or are interacting with armed forces who “tax” them for their operations. Additionally, companies can profit from conflict by providing services to warring parties involved in the violence.

Beyond the risk of tokenism inherent to such initiatives, many businesses may also lack the knowledge, resources, or commitment to address WPS issues effectively.

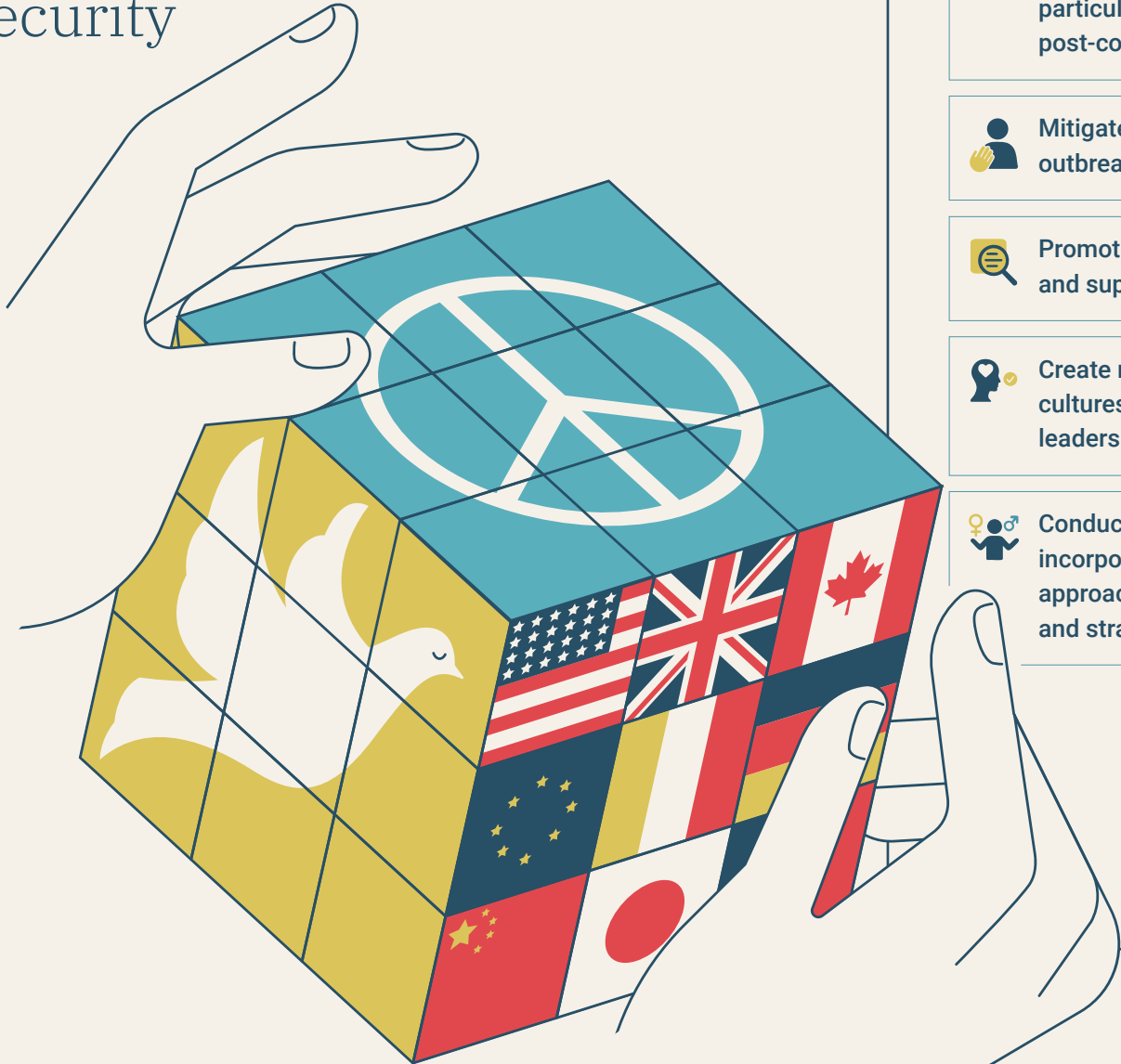
It is critical that private sector actors learn from previous experiences and use existing policy frameworks and legal mandates to work with women on systematic change for peace and security.

# Conclusion:

## A Durable Peace is Necessary for Longterm Peace and Security

The private sector has an essential role to play in advancing the Women, Peace and Security Agenda. The private sector is most impactful not only when working in partnership with others, but also when using tested and reliable peacebuilding models, including sustained dialogue about the root causes of grievances, coordinated public and private diplomacy promoting elite buy-in to peace, and systematic and inclusive approaches to economic development, security provisions, and reform.

Businesses that invest in women’s rights and peacemaking efforts not only contribute to their bottom line but also lay the foundation for sustainable economic development that is needed to create safe, stable, and secure societies.



# Recommendations:

## Private Sector Engagement with Women, Peace and Security

The private sector can play a vital role in advancing the WPS agenda, with multifaceted opportunities for collaboration in conflict-affected and post-conflict areas. Private sector engagement in WPS should not be limited to traditional corporate social responsibility activities; it can encompass

direct participation in peace negotiations, the promotion of women's equality, and the protection of the most vulnerable.

The private sector can collaborate with governments, civil society, and international organizations to advance WPS, on both an operational and strategic level.

### Operationally, companies can:

-  Reduce tension through hiring practices that include creating employment opportunities for women, particularly in conflict-affected and post-conflict areas
-  Mitigate or prepare responses to outbreaks of violence
-  Promote transparency in contracting and supply chain management
-  Create more inclusive corporate cultures and promote women to leadership positions
-  Conduct gender analyses and incorporate gender-sensitive approaches in business models and strategies

### Strategically, companies can:

-  Engage political leaders for peace and women's participation
-  Provide financial resources to peacebuilding and invest in infrastructure to rebuild economies
-  Conduct shuttle diplomacy
-  Advocate for equality between men and women in business practices
-  Convene dialogues to promote peace and security
-  Engage men and boys to help shift harmful cultural and social norms



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**Women make the difference.**