

TAKING STOCK OF THE WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY AGENDA:

Agenda for a Feminist Decolonial Approach

Summary Report from Workshop 1–2 October 2025,
Copenhagen, Denmark

Organised by Oxfam Denmark, Women's Council Denmark, DanChurchAid and
Danish Family Planning Association, on behalf of the Danish WPS CSO Network

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ABBREVIATIONS

CSO / CSOs	Civil Society Organisation(s)
EU	European Union
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
LGBTQIA+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Intersex, Asexual and related identities
NAP / NAPs	National Action Plan(s)
ODA	Official Development Assistance
SGBV	Sexual and Gender Based Violence
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
UN	United Nations
UNSCR 1325	United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security
WHRD / WHRDs	Women Human Rights Defender(s)
WLO / WLOs	Women-Led Organisation(s)
WPS	Women, Peace and Security
WRO / WROs	Women's Rights Organisation(s)

BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

This summary presents the key reflections and outcomes of a two-day workshop held in Copenhagen on 1–2 October 2025, marking the 25th anniversary of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (WPS). Organised by the Danish WPS civil society organisation (CSO) Network, the event gathered stakeholders to assess progress, examine persistent challenges and consider future directions for advancing the WPS agenda.

Participants included Danish civil society and academic members of the Network, alongside partner organisations from Africa, Europe and the Middle East, including WROs and WLOs and feminist networks from Burkina Faso, Egypt, Ethiopia, Lebanon, Morocco, the Occupied Palestinian Territory as well as regional African networks.

The workshop formed part of a two year learning project assessing the WPS agenda, implemented by Oxfam Denmark, Women’s Council Denmark, DanChurchAid and the Danish Family Planning Association (DFPA) with support from Global Focus. It convened Danish and international civil society actors to strengthen collective strategies for advancing gender justice and the WPS agenda in an increasingly complex global context. The workshop also came at a pivotal time for Denmark’s global engagement, as Denmark launched its fifth National Action Plan (NAP) on WPS (2025–2029), assumed a UN Security Council seat for 2025–2026 and held the EU Council Presidency in 2025 – offering important opportunities to champion WPS commitments.

This leadership comes amid rising armed conflicts, climate-induced disasters, democratic backsliding and organised backlash against women’s rights and LGBTQIA+ movements, all of which are eroding hard-won gains. At the same time, women’s rights organisations (WROs), women-led organisations (WLOs), women human rights defenders (WHRDs), and LGBTQIA+ rights organisations continue to face systematic underfunding and exclusion from decision-making spaces, despite their proven frontline roles in prevention, crisis response, recovery and peacebuilding.

Using a participatory and collaborative approach, the workshop strengthened shared understanding among Danish and international CSOs of the relevance of the WPS agenda amid intersecting crises, including climate change, conflict and backlash against women’s rights. It generated co-created insights to inform WPS policy and programming and support shared learning on progress and challenges in implementing the agenda. The process also reinforced collaboration within the Danish WPS CSO Network and with international partners, helping advance Denmark’s global WPS leadership across the UN, EU, NATO and beyond.

LEARNING FROM GLOBAL CONTEXTS

The workshop was opened by Helene Forsberg, director of Women's Council Denmark and coordinator of the Danish WPS Network, who emphasised how the work for WPS is now "more important than ever". After a brief introductory session with all participants, the first substantive session began with presentations from WRO, WLO and WHRD representatives.

These presentations offered a rich and multilayered picture of how the WPS agenda is progressing and contested across diverse contexts, anchoring the workshop in lived realities and experiences. Speakers highlighted both common challenges and region-specific insights, underscoring the urgency of protecting women's rights and strengthening feminist leadership. This, they argued, is central to reclaiming the WPS agenda in line with its foundational principles.

The Moroccan CSO participant, who primarily works with **gender-based violence (GBV)**, described how the Moroccan national context is shaped by militarisation, colonial legacies and shrinking civic space, despite Morocco's constitutional commitment to gender equality. Progressive legal reforms, including laws on violence against women and human trafficking, coexist with resistance to fully implementing equality provisions. Feminist discourse is increasingly constrained by weak protections for free expression. Her organisation has advanced UNSCR 1325 through preventive diplomacy, promoting a culture of peace and supporting women's economic and political empowerment. Yet, she stressed that feminist actors today wield less influence than in previous years,

as conservatism and political hesitation undermine progress.

The CSO representative working across Arab states region, working on **sexual gender-based violence (SGBV) and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR)** highlighted the resilience and innovation of young activists and digital advocacy networks. She emphasised that colonial legacies, restrictive family laws and systemic discrimination continue to shape women's lives, with sexual and gender-based violence remaining widespread. She reminded participants that feminist and queer movements remain severely underfunded and under-recognised, even though grassroots women have led life-saving responses during conflicts and violent outbreaks. She called for NAPs to promote decolonial and locally led approaches, integrate intersectional feminist expertise and elevate the voices of those working at the margins.

The Pan-African feminist network CSO representative highlighted work across Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe, where young feminists are shaping national and regional advocacy. Women's rights organisations receive under 1% of official development assistance (ODA) funding, and most NAPs depend on donor support. Feminist actors providing SRHR services in conflict zones are often first responders to the gendered impacts of climate change, displacement and crises, and yet they are sidelined due to negative perceptions of their 'agendas' as 'ideologically driven' rather than rights based. She called for stronger coordination

among feminist and human rights actors, alignment with frameworks such as the Beijing Platform for Action and renewed collective commitment to gender equality.

The Lebanese Family Planning Association (LFPA) CSO representative shared her experience implementing the first WPS NAP, launched in 2019, which has faced challenges from shifting political priorities and renewed conflict. She highlighted civil society's pivotal role in shaping and promoting the NAP, demonstrating the value of localisation in developing,

implementing and monitoring WPS initiatives. Following the 2024 war, the organisation shifted from development to humanitarian response, reaching 25,000 people through clinic-based and mobile services covering SRHR, SGBV protection, mental health and youth support. She emphasised that women's participation strengthens peace outcomes and called for WPS to be funded as a core agenda and for SRHR to be recognised as central to the WPS agenda. Looking ahead, LFPA plans to expand SRHR protection, develop online services and train young women as leaders.



The representative of the faith-based CSO from Burkina Faso shared how a multi-faith network in Burkina Faso is advancing peace through inter-religious dialogue. The network is small and struggles for funding but plays an essential role in strengthening women's participation, preventing violence, and supporting survivors of GBV. She noted that the WPS agenda remains little known at the local level, and women's participation in formal peace processes is still limited. She emphasised that future priorities include scaling up capacity building for women and girls, increasing community awareness of their rights, and building stronger partnerships to support women's engagement in peace and security efforts.

The CSO representative from Ethiopia, representing a faith-based approach described how her organisation works through networking, capacity building and resource mobilisation. She stated that Ethiopia's ongoing conflicts are leaving women and girls disproportionately exposed to GBV, displacement and denial of essential services. Key obstacles include women's underrepresentation in decision-making, limited government coordination, insecurity and lack of accountability for violence. She highlighted the need for women's inclusion in peace negotiations, gender-responsive approaches to reconstruction and stronger government partnerships with civil society.

SUMMARY

Participants highlighted that despite the proliferation of more than a hundred NAPs in addition to Regional and Global Action on WPS, implementation remains weak. Concerns were raised that large international NGOs often dominate NAP CSO engagement processes, sidelining those most affected by conflict, such as informal community and grassroots-based groups and networks led by refugees and women. The discussion further emphasized that in most armed conflicts, women on both sides continue to lead critical civil society efforts despite limited international recognition and support. Overall, participants underscored the need for sustained, long-term and flexible core funding, strengthened accountability and more meaningful engagement with WROs and women's rights advocates to ensure that WPS commitments remain grounded in lived realities, now more than ever.

DISCUSSING 10-YEAR SCENARIOS FOR THE WPS AGENDA

During the workshop the participants were invited to discuss four different scenarios for the future of WPS: Business as usual; Downward spiral: backlash & militarisation; Worst-case escalation: global conflict & authoritarianism; Utopian: decolonial liberation + regional collaboration. The objective was to discuss how global civil society can collaborate to further the WPS agenda, even in changing and unpredictable contexts.

1

SCENARIO: BUSINESS AS USUAL

In the Business as Usual scenario, the working group emphasised that even in restrictive or stagnant contexts, collective civil society action creates meaningful openings for change, especially when younger generations, equipped with knowledge of UNSCR 1325, bring new energy and innovative approaches to mobilisation. Participants highlighted the importance of intergenerational collaboration, engagement of religious and faith-based leaders to broaden community legitimacy, and stronger coordination among civil society, state institutions and regional networks.

Participants noted that in this scenario, NAPs remain a key achievement but require sustained advocacy, locally led strategies and translation into accessible languages to deepen grassroots ownership. Priority enablers included reinforcing partnerships with ministries, building on existing institutional initiatives and expanding awareness of UNSCR 1325 at community level.

Increasing grassroots' understanding of rights, obligations and available mechanisms empowers women, youth and community leaders to engage

meaningfully with local authorities, demand accountability, and connect local peace and security concerns to national and international WPS commitments. By enhancing community engagement and local initiatives, governments can increase the impact and effectiveness of their NAPs and vice versa. Advocacy strategies would need to focus on linking national legal and policy reforms to UNSCR 1325 commitments, securing government budget allocations, integrating gender equality commitments into donor programs, and addressing cross-cutting issues such as migration.

Participants concluded that international support is essential for sustaining coordination, strengthening networks and amplifying shared learning across NGOs, UN actors and regional partners. This is especially important among the younger generations, who are key drivers of political forces, in both forward-looking and conservative directions, especially in demographically young countries. By paying special attention to the next generation and their influence in peace and security processes, peace initiatives can be more sustainable, inclusive and comprehensive.

2

SCENARIO: DOWNWARD SPIRAL: BACKLASH AND MILITARISATION

The discussion underscored the need for proactive contingency planning, flexible strategies and continuous ethical reflection on how organisations can remain resilient while sustaining their mission under repression. This would include contingency planning that look into alternative funding mechanisms, alternative communication tools and cross-national partnerships. Furthermore, this may include protection of staff and communities, particularly in contexts where survival, visibility, and accountability may come into tension.

With formal participation mechanisms in peace processes and decision-making spaces collapsing, civil society would need to rely on informal channels, new alliances, and grassroots and digital mobilisation, especially youth-led efforts, in order to push back against authoritarian trends and maintain links with allied ministries and international partners.

Effective action under the prevention and participation pillars in this context is often limited, shifting the focus towards the protection pillar through immediate response to protection cases and minimising harm through provision of protection, GBV and SRHR services, advocating against attacks on these service facilities, and safeguarding what remains of legal and institutional formal

and informal protection mechanisms.

Participants furthermore highlighted the long-term protracted nature of crises and the importance of planning for burnout recovery and mental health support for women's rights and peacebuilding advocates and human rights defenders to sustain resilience and hope.

Despite the challenging environment, some entry points and opportunities were identified; some donors may continue flexible humanitarian and peacebuilding funding, regional solidarity networks could potentially persist and opportunities for joint advocacy may still arise. The group concluded that defending international norms, sustaining cross-border partnerships and nurturing solidarity and hope are essential survival strategies in the face of accelerating global deterioration.



3

**SCENARIO: WORST-CASE ESCALATION:
GLOBAL CONFLICT AND AUTHORITARIANISM**

“We need an actual movement – but people are exhausted.”

In this worst-case scenario, participants observed that many of its features – escalating militarisation, widespread surveillance, extremist rhetoric and the erosion of multilateral institutions – are already emerging globally. They highlighted how authoritarian and anti-rights movements, well-funded and strategically coordinated, are reshaping public discourse and dismantling protections for women, LGBTQIA+ people, and Indigenous peoples, while civil society actors increasingly have to operate under severe constraints or in exile.

The group reflected on the likely severe exhaustion and fragmentation within feminist and progressive movements under this scenario, debating whether survival would require working within existing systems, dismantling them entirely, or strategically doing both.

Participants stressed the need to overcome purist divisions, reclaim narrative power and counter disinformation with accessible, value-driven communication. Rather than competing over language or positioning, it is important to build broad-based alliances grounded in shared values and strategic objectives. Reclaiming narrative

power was seen as equally critical, particularly in contexts where feminist agendas are deliberately misrepresented as elitist, foreign or threatening to social cohesion. To counter disinformation and hostile framing, participants suggested more accessible, emotionally resonant and values-driven communication that speaks to lived realities, connects rights to everyday experiences and mobilises wider public support without diluting feminist principles. Participants warned that the potential dismantling of the UN under this scenario would severely compromise advocacy for structurally excluded communities, and that short-term, unstable funding continues to undermine long-term resistance.

Despite bleak conditions, they emphasised that crises can open unexpected opportunities for women’s agency and transformative change. Strategies proposed included building solidarity networks grounded in mutual support and empowerment, strengthening digital security and imagining alternative governance models rooted in human rights and feminist principles.

Ultimately, the group concluded that this scenario demands radical rethinking, courageous action and renewed unity to confront accelerating authoritarianism and build new forms of collective power.

4

SCENARIO: UTOPIAN: DECOLONIAL LIBERATION AND REGIONAL COLLABORATION

In this best-case scenario, participants emphasised that the vision is not utopian but grounded in existing realities, noting that many elements, such as strong women-led organisations, active grassroots mobilisation and growing cross-sector collaboration are already taking shape. They highlighted that meaningful progress towards the WPS agenda is achievable when civil society, academia and government institutions build on current momentum, strengthen communication and deepen partnerships. Examples such as the extensive community chapters of Ethiopian CSOs illustrate how local community structures can foster sustained dialogue between citizens and state actors, enabling greater participation, improved prevention efforts and early warning mechanisms.

Key entry points and enablers identified included the strategic use of social media, collaboration with local humanitarian organisations, engagement with universities for evidence-based

advocacy and multisectoral cooperation linking gender equality, development, humanitarian action and peacebuilding.

Participants stressed the importance of documenting achievements to avoid backsliding, enhancing joint monitoring between CSOs, academia and governments, and integrating gender justice and climate justice agendas within the WPS work. They underscored that international partners can play a catalytic role by providing technical support, amplifying local voices in global spaces, offering global recognition of the work of local women's organisations and providing long and flexible funding mechanisms for more sustainable support for WROs beyond ad-hoc project funding. Overall, the group concluded that the best-case scenario is attainable if current strengths and good practices are reinforced, partnerships expanded, and the WPS agenda consistently elevated at national, regional and international levels.

SUMMARY: SCENARIO EXERCISE (10-YEAR HORIZON)

Overall, participants agreed that preparedness must operate in both directions: while civil society needs to be ready for the worst, it must also be positioned to seize moments of progress and recovery when they emerge. They noted that today's world is shaped by multiple overlapping crises, each requiring context-specific strategies rather than a one-size-fits-all response. Across all discussions, the group underscored the importance of effective communication and continuous knowledge-sharing between different regions and scenarios, ensuring that lessons learned in one context inform and strengthen WPS efforts globally. The future of the WPS agenda will depend on the sector's ability to adapt strategically, anticipating crises, mobilising collectively, reclaiming narrative power and leveraging existing institutional footholds while building new ones where existing systems and institutions fail.

PANEL DISCUSSION: 25 YEARS OF WPS

The workshop concluded with a public panel discussion bringing together the diverse group of experts and practitioners working across conflict, humanitarian and development contexts. The discussion opened with a keynote from Kristine Mærkedal, international director of DFPA, who emphasised that implementation of the WPS agenda remains far too slow. With conflict-related sexual violence having doubled in recent years, she argued the agenda is “needed now more than ever.”

Across regions, the speakers shared strikingly aligned concerns about the erosion of women’s rights, shrinking civic space, intensifying crises and the persistent underfunding of WLOs. Their reflections collectively painted a sobering picture of the global state of WPS, while also offering clear priorities for action.

KEY CHALLENGES

Across all interventions was the theme of rapid deterioration of civic space and the mounting pressures facing WROs. Panellists described heightened repression, digital surveillance and rising conservatism, alongside severe funding cuts that threaten the very survival of many feminist and grassroots groups.

Multiple speakers highlighted that international policies often fail to reflect the lived experiences of women in conflict settings. NAPs exist but are not implemented; international actors outline commitments without ensuring delivery on the ground. These challenges are unfolding against the backdrop of worsening conflicts and large-scale displacement, in which women face acute insecurity and barriers to essential services.

Another widely shared concern was the erosion of international systems, including growing concerns about the United Nations’ ability to uphold its own commitments, enforce international law, and protect women and civilians in situations of protracted conflict. This was seen as a political signal that norms around accountability, protection and human rights are increasingly contested and dismantled – a concern made acute by the failure to respond effectively to ongoing atrocities, including the genocide in Gaza.

Without stronger political will, the credibility of the WPS agenda risks further deterioration. Speakers also highlighted structural inequalities such as economic precarity, limited access to livelihoods and the effects of climate change as drivers that increasingly shape conflict dynamics and deepen gendered vulnerabilities. Youth, queer communities, displaced women and other structurally excluded groups were noted as particularly exposed, yet often overlooked.

ACTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Despite these challenges, panellists offered a series of concrete proposals for strengthening the WPS agenda. Many stressed the need to reassert accountability and ensure that international law, protection commitments and political obligations are upheld in practice.

This includes recognising how colonial legacies, power asymmetries, and geopolitical interests continue to shape conflict and insecurity, and ensuring that WPS does not become depoliticised or disconnected from the lived realities of women in occupied and conflict-affected



settings. Calls for explicit solidarity, including demands for a ceasefire in Gaza, accountability measures, and an end to impunity, underscored the need for a more principled and rights-based approach to peace and security.

A strong emphasis was placed on resourcing and protecting women-led and youth-led organisations, which remain at the forefront of response, innovation and resistance. Participants urged donors to provide long-term, flexible, and accessible funding directly to grassroots movements, and to strengthen the safety and wellbeing of activists and defenders at heightened risk. Across contexts, panellists highlighted the importance of investing in community-based initiatives – from training women peace ambassadors, providing dignity kits, and running shelters and mobile clinics, to countering misinformation, leading media advocacy and building alternative online communities.

Sexual and reproductive health and rights, economic justice, climate justice and intersectional approaches were reaffirmed as inseparable from peace and security. SRHR was described as life-saving and foundational to women's autonomy and participation, while access to livelihoods, resources and social protection was seen as essential for resilience and recovery. Integrating an intersectional lens – attentive to age, displacement, disability, race, sexual orientation and gender identity, and legal status – was highlighted as crucial for ensuring that WPS responds to the full diversity of women's experiences.

Together, the panellists offered both a stark warning and a source of inspiration. Their reflections made clear that revitalising the WPS agenda requires listening to, protecting and resourcing those working on the frontlines; reaffirming political commitments to accountability and human rights; and grounding peace and security approaches in the lived realities of women in all their diversity. The discussion underscored a collective responsibility to transform WPS from commitments into meaningful action, ensuring the agenda remains relevant, responsive and capable of addressing the urgent challenges facing women in conflict-affected settings today.

CONCLUSIVE THOUGHTS AND RESULTS

Drawing on diverse experiences from across regions, the workshop fostered a space for honest exchange, peer learning, and collective strategic thinking. By bringing together Danish and global CSOs, practitioners, and experts, the workshop set out to co-create insights and strategies that will shape future WPS policy.

The WPS agenda stands at a crossroads, shaped simultaneously by unprecedented backlash and untapped potential. Chronic underfunding, especially for young women-led, queer, grassroots, and community-based organizations remains a structural barrier that threatens to undo decades of progress. While the anti-rights movement benefits from coordinated, well-resourced strategies, many WROs survive from project to project funding. This asymmetry exposes a dangerous gap between global commitments and actual support for those implementing the WPS agenda in the most fragile contexts.

The scenarios collectively revealed that regression is not theoretical but already unfolding characterised by shrinking civic space, militarisation, surveillance, and the erosion of multilateral protections. At the same time, they highlighted how women's rights organisations, feminist activists, youth leaders, and community networks remain pivotal forces of resilience, innovation, and political courage.

Whether in Palestine, Ethiopia, Lebanon, Morocco, Burkina Faso or across African and Arab regional networks, participants demonstrated that feminist peacebuilding is already happening on the frontlines even as global systems falter. The tension between transformative aspirations and restrictive realities underscores that the future of WPS will depend on civil society's ability to adapt, anticipate crises, reclaim narrative power and hold governments to account, even as traditional institutions become less reliable.

The workshop also showcased the emergence of new entry points: solidarity networks that transcend borders and generations, hybrid models of activism that blend online and offline mobilisation, and increasing acknowledgement that SRHR, climate justice and economic justice are integral and not optional components of peace and security

Ultimately, the workshop concluded that reclaiming the WPS agenda requires both principled clarity and pragmatic strategy. The agenda's credibility depends on its ability to confront colonial legacies, challenge militarism and demand accountability for violations, from Gaza to the Sahel to the Horn of Africa.



