

# Roundtable Report: Scottish Perspectives on the Future of the UK Women, Peace and Security National Action Plan

In March 2026, Gender Action for Peace and Security (GAPS), in partnership with the Scottish Peace Platform, facilitated a roundtable to engage Scottish perspectives on the future of UK Women, Peace and Security (WPS) and the [UK WPS National Action Plan](#) (NAP). Convening academics, civil society organisations and WPS practitioners, the event focused on understanding how WPS policy functions in Scotland, gathering priorities and recommendations on how the UK's WPS NAP can be more reflective of devolved contexts, and exploring priorities, barriers and opportunities for stronger collaboration between Scottish stakeholders, civil society and government. This report summarises the key themes and recommendations that emerged from the discussion.

The UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) and Ministry of Defence (MOD) are currently undertaking a refresh of the UK WPS NAP. This update is positioned as aligning the WPS NAP with the current Government's broader foreign policy and security priorities. The refresh is taking place in a very different policy environment than in 2023 when the current version was published. The UK is currently navigating what is defined as a strategic re-prioritisation of defence, toward a 'NATO First' approach that emphasises warfighting readiness and 'hard power', and an ambition to [raise spending](#) on defence to [2.5% of GDP](#) by 2027.

This shift toward a militarised approach creates significant challenges for core principles of WPS, such as promoting human security, and reduces the scope to advance transformative approaches, instead often reducing formal government WPS ambition to interventions such as increasing the presence of women in the armed forces. There has been significant [pushback](#) against this approach, with civil society organisations highlighting that a move toward 'hard security' does [not make UK citizens safer](#). In Scotland, the idea of increased military spending has been resisted, it is also closely viewed as a feminist issue. Increased defence spending will come at the cost of reducing the financial and political space for work on conflict prevention, peacebuilding and gender equality. Indeed, to [fund](#) increased defence spending, the Government committed to reducing Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) from 0.5% to 0.3% of Gross National Income (GNI).

At the same time as cuts, the FCDO is also undergoing a significant restructuring process that will see a substantial workforce reduction. Since the cuts were announced, [women's rights](#) and civil society organisations, alongside international [NGOs](#), have consistently underlined the catastrophic impact that reduced ODA spending will have on women and girls, as well as WPS and conflict prevention. They have also consistently raised [concerns](#) about the impact of structural changes within the FCDO that could lead to deprioritisation of conflict, peacebuilding and gender capacity and expertise.

2025 marked the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 that established WPS as a shared global agenda. The UK is a penholder for the WPS at the UN Security Council. The current global context does not provide an enabling environment for advancing the WPS agenda.

The **UN Secretary General's report on WPS** released in 2025 stated that we are facing an ongoing gender backlash with a 'stagnation and even regression' across many aspects of the WPS agenda. The **report** also found that despite record-numbers of women living in close distance to deadly conflict, 'in 2024, nearly 9 out of 10 negotiation tracks included no women' and that 'two thirds of mediation efforts did not include any women mediator'. As global funding cuts bite, the ability of women-led and women's-rights organisations to respond to an increasing number of crises is **greatly limited**.

Despite ongoing challenges, in the UK there are some signs of opportunity. In late 2025, the Foreign Secretary Yvette Cooper **stated** her commitment to ensuring that WPS is at the 'heart' of UK foreign policy and has continued **emphasise** tackling violence against women and girls in the UK and internationally, as well as ending impunity for **conflict-related sexual violence** (CRSV), with a particular focus on Sudan. In March 2026, when announcing new allocations for ODA and non-ODA spending, the Foreign Secretary committed to elevating women and girls as a priority across the FCDO. The announcement also included a commitment to protect central funding for programming on Violence Against Women and Girls, the Women, Peace and Security agenda and Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict. While these changes are welcomed, the cuts still mean that the UK is now reducing aid by **more than the United States**, and civil society organisations have continued to **emphasise** that prioritising women and girls requires ongoing and sustained resourcing.

Despite the highly challenging context, given current political opportunities, the WPS NAP refresh could be a moment to strengthen UK commitments on WPS, and to think about new ways of working to advance the goals of the Agenda. While the NAP is a UK-wide document, it is viewed as being **highly centralised**, and the extent of involvement across the developed nations is uneven. This roundtable reflected a desire to consider civil society perspectives on how the refresh could better-embed the priorities and work of devolved nations to ensure stronger and more consistent delivery of WPS across the whole of the UK.

### **The current context in Scotland**

Foreign policy is a reserved matter in the UK, however, under the 1998 Scotland Act, the Scottish Government is able to pursue its own **approach** to international engagement and development, with certain parameters. Most relevant to WPS is the Scottish Government's position paper on **a Feminist Approach to International Relations** (FAIR). The FAIR and WPS agenda arguably both seek the same end-goal – some would conceptualise this as global peace and security for women, while others would see this as mobilising feminist insights to create a just, feminist world for all. Civil society and academics were closely involved in the development of the FAIR and it is **viewed as** a strong, valuable piece of work that should be implemented fully. The document takes a broader view than the NAP, focusing on issues such as climate justice and trade justice, as well as 'traditional' peace and security dynamics.

Examining the current picture for domestic and foreign policy in Scotland enables exploration of what leverage the Scottish Government has in terms of shaping UK WPS delivery. In recent years, Scotland has had some recent foreign policy 'wins', for example a recent **vote** in the Scottish Parliament to boycott the state of Israel and companies complicit in genocide and a **pause** in funding for arms companies supplying Israel.

In early 2026, the Scottish Government announced in its 2026/27 **budget** that there would be an **increase** for the International Development Fund which was allocated £16m, including £1m for humanitarian crises. This was framed by the Scottish Government and perceived by some as a clear departure from the approach taken towards international aid in Westminster.

Domestically, the **Equally Safe** strategy sets out the Scottish Government's overarching approach to tackling domestic abuse, and is internationally recognised and seen as 'gold standard'. The Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018 is the main legislative underpinning of Scotland's legislative framework on domestic abuse and is strengthened by other legislation, including the Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation (Scotland) Act 2005 and Housing (Scotland) Act 2025 (this includes duties on social landlords to develop, implement and maintain a domestic abuse policy setting out how they support their tenants experiencing domestic abuse). The framework combines prevention, protection and perpetrator accountability and adopts a public health approach, examining root causes rather than responding only to incidences of violence. The framework also facilitates multi-agency coordination across the government, policy and civil society. Scotland's approach is internationally recognised and could lead the way for advancing domestic abuse responses nationwide.

However, recent developments have underlined that Scottish progress on advancing women's rights and gender equality, both in foreign and domestic policy, is not always guaranteed. In 2024, the Scottish Government published its upcoming Programme for Government which **did not include** the Scottish Human Rights Bill, contributing to a sense of disillusionment among civil society organisations who had been heavily invested in this legislative process. Such a Bill would have incorporated the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) into Scots Law, something which has long been **called for** by the women's sector in Scotland. In 2025, the Scottish Government dropped its plan to criminalize misogyny through a specific bill, instead deciding to add 'sex' as a protected characteristic to the Hate Crime and Public Order (Scotland) Act 2021, a move that was **criticised by experts** and campaigners. At the same time as banning weapons sales to Israel in 2025, the Scottish Government also **reversed** a long-standing Scottish National Party policy of not supporting weapons manufacturers through public spending, citing the changed nature of geopolitics and the war in Ukraine, a decision that is in tension with the FAIR policy.

The women's rights sector in Scotland is vibrant and has a history of **working** on related commitments to the WPS agenda. Organisations such as **Engender** work to hold the Government to account on its commitments to gender equality and carry out shadow reporting on Scotland's commitments as a devolved nation to the **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women** (CEDAW), as the UK is a party to the convention. Despite the extensive activity of civil society organisations in Scotland, connectivity with civil society organisations in Scotland and England is limited, with clear opportunities for more cooperation around shared issues. One example of good cross-UK working on WPS is the **PeaceRep** platform. Funded by the UK Government, the programme is delivered in Scotland by Scottish and global scholars and provides extensive data and evidence relating to peace and transition processes. There is a sense that organisations or individuals based in Scotland working on WPS are often invited to London-based events and consultations at the last minute, perhaps due to their location in a peripheral part in the UK.

This sense of disconnection is exacerbated beyond the Central Belt of Scotland, with travel to and from the Highlands and Islands an additional barrier to in-person attendance that is often not considered by organisers based in the South of England.

The work of civil society organisations, including those in Scotland, also often intersects with both foreign and domestic policy. Those working to address violence against women and girls (VAWG) will support women and girls who are refugees and asylum seekers, including from fragile and conflict affected settings. NGOs working on issues relating to migration will experience similar intersecting issues, such as migrant women experiencing domestic abuse, or navigating the asylum system whilst dealing with untreated conflict-related trauma. Work by civil society organisations to advance arms control and counter the proliferation of nuclear weapons, which emerged at the start of the century in part through the work of pacifist, **anti-militarist and peace movements**, also sits at this intersection. The focus on the prevention of armed conflict and protection of women in conflict also closely **links** the Agenda with efforts to control weapons and this issue is mentioned in WPS NAPs globally. Despite the clear links, domestic-focused civil society organisations often do not describe themselves as engaging with the WPS agenda or WPS NAP, and it is reported to not be a feature of cross-sector policy discussions. However, these issues are key to ongoing insecurity globally and both the UK and Scottish Government have obligations to act in accordance with the law and legal frameworks.

While considering the Scottish Government's current approach, it is important to note that Scottish elections will take place in May 2026 and will influence Scotland's international approach moving forward. Given growing politicisation around gender equality issues, with a particularly toxic public debate over transgender rights in Scotland, there is some concern that implementation of the WPS agenda will be significantly influenced by the composition of the new government and parliament.

### **Domesticating WPS in the UK**

The current NAP for the first time included a reference to **domestication** of WPS. This was seen as a long-needed recognition that foreign and domestic policy do not operate in isolation and that gender equality, women's rights and inclusive security are interconnected across all policy contexts - not only overseas.

There is no shared definition of 'domestication' or agreement on whether it should be a primary focus of UK Government WPS delivery. Some argue that a focus on domestication by the UK Government exemplifies that the approach of the UK and other Global North countries toward implementing UNSCR 1325 has been colonial and incorrect, focusing only on WPS as an issue in the foreign policy domain and based on a '**racialised hierarchies**'. In most Global Majority countries, there is no mention of domesticating WPS because Governments are solely focused on delivering WPS principles and commitments domestically. While this might be true, the reality is that for a long period the UK and other governments have conceptualised WPS as being '**done to**' **other countries**, without internal action. This has led to **missed opportunities** to adopt policies that could support women in the UK and reduces credibility when working with partners in the Global Majority. This will include **working with WROs in the Global South** who are experts on issues of concern in the UK, such as social cohesion and hate crime prevention, to understand how UK responses can be improved.

It is noted that longstanding power-dynamics and historical context should be recognised when discussing WPS implementation and domestication. In particular, it was shared that Global North countries have been responsible for driving global conflict and instability and therefore it is logical that they provide support through the WPS agenda.

There is also no coherent agreement if or how domestication should be delivered in practice. Some would also avoid using the term domestication, focusing instead on national implementation of WPS. Others would understand WPS domestication as applying the principles of WPS to domestic policy areas where such an approach would be beneficial. For example, on issues relating to asylum and migration, the UK Government makes commitments to protecting women fleeing crisis and conflict; however, these commitments to protection are not upheld upon arrival in the UK. A domestic approach can also support work on policy areas where the foreign and domestic clearly intersect, such as arms exports. This is seen as particularly important given a perceived lack of discussion in Scotland around the domestic arms trade despite the ongoing push for re-armament and increased defence capabilities. However, some practitioners and civil society in Scotland note that they would be more likely to use the FAIR as a policy framework to challenge the Scottish Government on issues such as arms trade, rather than WPS commitments and the WPS NAP.

Domestication is often thought of in relation to implementing WPS programming, however it could also encourage gender-sensitive governance more broadly, including the embedding of WPS principles within wider policy approaches so policies and systems are gender-sensitive rather than gender-blind.

There is also caution that any increased focus on domestication by the UK government will be a distraction, or used to justify withdrawal from multilateral spaces and delivery of WPS commitments internationally, or as a reason for further cuts to ODA. To counter this, civil society organisations must avoid any move to 'either or' thinking and advocate that domestication takes place alongside international delivery of WPS, not as a replacement.

Application of the WPS NAP across the UK lacks coherence. There is one explicit reference to Scotland in the current UK WPS NAP Delivery Plan, which is a commitment for the Scottish Government to lead delivery of [The Women in Conflict 1325 Fellowship](#). The majority of the other commitments in the NAP are to be led by the FCDO and the MoD. The Scottish Government has provided ongoing funding to the Fellowship which is delivered by the organisation [Beyond Borders Scotland](#) in partnership with the University of Edinburgh Law School. The Fellowship involves bringing women peacebuilders from conflict and post-conflict countries to Scotland for a one-week residential program consisting of peer-learning facilitated workshops and cultural experiences, held three times per year. Despite support from the Scottish Government, in each fellowship programme some of the selected participants have been unable to participate because of Home Office denial of VISA requests. While necessary support letters and proof of costs being covered are provided, some refusals are based on applicants' financial status. This has harmful impacts on potential participants and has financial implications for the programme fund. The WPS NAP is co-owned by the FCDO and the MoD, however the Home Office is an implementing partner.



While only a single example, the experience from the Fellowship highlights lack of cross-Government coordination on WPS delivery and how this can in fact impede implementation of commitments in the NAP. Furthermore, the challenges relating to visas have meant that women from conflict-settings have been denied the opportunity to develop skills and advocacy strategies relating to mediation, conflict resolution and feminist values that can be incorporated into their work in their own contexts. At a time when the UK Government is committing to prioritise women and girls in foreign policy, and when women's rights organisations face growing backlash and reprisals, the lack of WPS sensitive and joined-up action regarding visa denials is a clear missed opportunity to ensure that WPS programming is as successful as possible and advances the rights of women globally.

### **Key Findings on WPS in Scotland**

Growing focus on domestication of the UK NAP provides an opportunity to expand conversations and a sharing of perspectives around whether, and how, WPS could be delivered more effectively across all four nations of the UK and how devolved perspectives could be better-embedded.

Building on opportunities related to domestication should not result in a duplication of work that is already being delivered by the Scottish Government and civil society, particularly where Scottish policy approaches are viewed as more comprehensive or effective than in England. An individual WPS sub-National Action Plan for Scotland could potentially support better delivery of WPS in the Scottish context; however it is questionable whether this would be a good use of finite human and material resources. There are clear opportunities to build on the Scottish FAIR and this is seen as more valuable than embarking on a new policy process of developing a sub-NAP which will ultimately focus on similar issues. However, ways to reflect Scotland's different political context in the NAP could still be explored as an opportunity to imbue the UK plan with a more holistic and far-reaching understanding of the opportunities for the government to provide support and advance WPS. Examples of best practice in Scotland should be shared more widely, including through greater civil society collaboration across the rest of the UK. The FAIR and Equally Safe policies are clear examples, as is work done in Scotland on loss and damages, which has been viewed as an example of gender-sensitive decision-making in climate policy.

One proposed option would be to adopt a dual track approach. A dual-track approach would enable civil society to continue advancing existing good policy in Scotland and to promote greater accountability for Scottish Government delivery on gender equality and women's rights and security, whilst also ensuring that Scottish perspectives are better reflected in the NAP and opportunities for progress are taken advantage of. A dual-track approach would involve Scottish civil society organisations working on two levels. First, to influence the Westminster Government on the NAP refresh and its implementation of WPS policy to ensure that women's security and rights are advanced in the UK and globally in line with the feminist, anti-militarist principles that underpin the WPS agenda. This could include through civil society shadow reporting on WPS implementation in devolved contexts, however it must be noted that capacity within Scottish civil society organisations for such work is constrained. Second, to continue to work to influence the Scottish Government on implementing existing commitments and encourage greater activity on work that is dedicated to advancing the WPS agenda.

As a priority, this would involve civil society continuing to advocate that the Scottish Government develop an action plan for delivery of the FAIR, and particularly connecting the FAIR to other areas of Scottish Government policy that are in tension with its goals, such as devolved Government funding for arms manufacturing. Beyond a focus on specific policy areas, civil society organisations could also seek to influence Scottish and Westminster Governments on development of transformational approaches that drive structural change, rather than programming alone. As an example, a just transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy contributes to tackling the climate threats that disproportionately impact women.

Another priority would be holding the Scottish Government accountable for its commitments to **gender mainstreaming**. The Scottish Government have accepted the recommendations of the **National Advisory Council on Women and Girls** to establish a Centre of Excellence on Women and Girls, established a centre of expertise in the economy department, have established a senior leadership group on equality and human rights mainstreaming, and have recently published a mainstreaming strategy and action plan. However, a lack of gender competence, policy coherence and gendered decision making across government, policies, budgeting and initiatives remain key issues. Opportunities for greater involvement of the Scottish Government in existing mechanisms such as the Cross-Whitehall Working Group on WPS should also be explored. Civil society organisations can also engage with Scottish parliamentarians and Ministers to encourage greater buy-in to the NAP and UK WPS commitments, ensuring that devolved interests are embedded in the UK-wide approach. Overall, this dual-track approach would provide opportunities for expansion and growth whilst being pragmatic, avoiding over- burdening civil society stakeholders and 'reinventing the wheel' where strong and valuable policy work has already been done.

Where Scottish civil society organisations advocate for the UK Government to better reflect Scottish perspectives in the NAP and broader WPS policy, the most pragmatic approach would be to channel efforts toward strictly reserved matters, avoiding duplication of efforts relating to FAIR and other policy areas such as tackling VAWG. One example would be focusing on current and emerging threats relating to online harms, particularly with the evolution of artificial intelligence tools that will require ongoing regulatory development to mitigate risks, particularly for women and other vulnerable communities, including women peacebuilders. Advocacy efforts will be strengthened through greater connectivity between civil society organisations working across the UK, although this would require London- and England-based organisations being more mindful of Scottish-specificities for participation in events. Alongside sharing experiences and best-practice, organisations working more closely in Westminster can use advocacy opportunities to communicate Scotland-specific policy asks, highlighting that a truly four-nations approach will only serve to strengthen the Government's delivery on WPS.

## Recommendations

### UK Government

- **Strengthen existing mechanisms for WPS implementation:** Enhance opportunities for sharing Scottish perspectives on WPS through the Cross-Whitehall Working Group, including deeper involvement of Scottish Government representatives and explore opportunities for Scottish civil society organisations and experts working on WPS issues to contribute to the Group.
- **Engage UK-wide civil society organisations in WPS monitoring and implementation:** When engaging with civil society organisations on delivery and implementation of the WPS NAP, ensure that women's rights and civil society organisations from all devolved nations are represented and heard, including in formal consultation processes.

### Scottish Government:

- Continue to advocate for the people of Scotland regarding the WPS agenda, this includes influencing the UK Government and contributing to the WPS National Action Plan.

### GAPS and Scottish Civil Society Partners

- **Develop and advance cooperation to strengthen WPS delivery:** Scottish civil society organisations and organisations in the rest of the UK focused on WPS and gender equality in Scotland should establish stronger connections to share experiences and best practice and to promote greater accountability for UK-wide implementation of the WPS agenda through joint advocacy efforts. For example, through contributions to GAPS meetings and other WPS events.
- **Communicate best-practice across borders:** Share successful policy experiences from Scotland, with civil society organisations working in other parts of the UK, including expertise from the Equally Safe strategy, on climate change and the FAIR.

### Scottish Civil Society Organisations

- **Continue to promote WPS principles through Scottish Government programming:** Advocate for fuller implementation of Scotland's FAIR and CEDAW commitments, including attempts to integrate CEDAW into Scots Law, to advance delivery on gender equality and WPS core principles in Scotland, particularly in the new Parliament following the upcoming Scottish elections.
- **Communicate Scottish civil society perspectives on WPS with the UK Government:** Develop a shared policy briefing for the FCDO and other relevant policymakers outlining how Scottish perspectives can be embedded in the upcoming NAP refresh. GAPS should provide support with dissemination to relevant stakeholders including the FCDO, parliamentarians and Ministry of Defence.