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# Switzerland's Advancement of the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda

**Tools for Impact and modernization of the WPS agenda during Switzerland's term in the United Nations Security Council**

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# Executive Summary

English  As Switzerland has started its term as an elected member in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) in January 2023, this discussion paper explores the ways in which it can advance the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) Agenda during its term. WPS came about from the UNSC Resolution 1325 and has been one of the priorities of Switzerland's foreign policy in recent years. This discussion paper formulates the five key recommendations built upon the case studies of three neutral and like-minded countries – Austria, Ireland, Sweden –, and a questionnaire from experts in the WPS field. These recommendations and their tools are summarised in the table below. ●

| Key recommendations and tools | |
|---|---|
| **Recommendation 1:**<br>In every activity of the UNSC, integrate relevant aspects of WPS resolutions to mainstream the agenda.<br><br>**Tools:**<br>• WPS language<br>• Geographical & thematic meetings<br>• WPS press stakeouts | **Recommendation 2:**<br>Actively promote incorporating opinions of (female) academia and civil society into the decision-making at the UNSC, but also at the relevant FDFA departments.<br><br>**Tools:**<br>• Briefers<br>• Field visits<br>• Provide follow-ups |
| **Recommendation 3:**<br>Cooperate with relevant institutions and actors to reach the full potential of advancing the WPS agenda.<br><br>**Tools:**<br>• Presidency coalitions<br>• Informal Expert Group on WPS<br>• Other bodies | **Recommendation 4:**<br>Make a strategic use of timing to initiate discussions on relevant WPS issues and raise public awareness.<br><br>**Tools:**<br>• One-month presidency<br>• Open debates<br>• International Women's Day<br>• Use early stage of negotiations |
| **Recommendation 5:**<br>Modernise the WPS agenda by including discussions of growing relevance.<br><br>**Focus points:**<br>• Intersectionality<br>• Climate change<br>• Digitalisation<br>• Protecting women briefers | |

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<sup>Deutsch</sup> Im Januar 2023 hat das Mandat der Schweiz als gewähltes Mitglied des Sicherheitsrat der Vereinten Nationen (UNSC) begonnen. Dieses Diskussionspapier untersucht die Möglichkeiten, wie die Schweiz die Agenda «Frauen, Frieden und Sicherheit» (Women, Peace, and Security - WPS) während ihrer Amtszeit vorantreiben kann. Die WPS-Agenda wurde mit der UNSC-Resolution 1325 ins Leben gerufen und war in den letzten Jahren eine der Prioritäten der schweizerischen Aussenpolitik. Die Autor:innen dieses Diskussionspapiers formulieren fünf Handlungsempfehlungen, die auf Fallstudien von drei neutralen und gleichgesinnten Ländern - Österreich, Irland und Schweden - sowie einem Fragebogen von WPS-Expert:innen aufbauen. Die Empfehlungen und deren Instrumente sind in der untenstehenden Tabelle zusammengefasst. ●

| Handlungsempfehlungen und Instrumente | |
| --- | --- |
| **Empfehlung 1:**<br>Bei allen Aktivitäten des UN-Sicherheitsrates sollten die relevanten Aspekte der WPS-Resolutionen in die Tagesordnung aufgenommen werden.<br><br>**Instrumente:**<br>• Anwendung der WPS-Sprache<br>• Geografische und thematische Treffen<br>• Mediengespräche zur WPS | **Empfehlung 2:**<br>Aktive Förderung der Einbeziehung der Meinungen von (weiblichen) Akademiker:innen und der Zivilgesellschaft in die Entscheidungsfindung im UN Sicherheitsrat, aber auch in den zuständigen Abteilungen des EDA.<br><br>**Instrumente:**<br>• Briefers<br>• Besuche vor Ort<br>• *Follow-ups* bereitstellen |
| **Empfehlung 3:**<br>Zusammenarbeit mit relevanten Institutionen und Akteur:innen, um das volle Potenzial der WPS-Agenda auszuschöpfen.<br><br>**Instrumente:**<br>• Koalitionen während der Präsidentschaft<br>• Informelle Expert:innengruppe zu WPS<br>• Andere Gremien | **Empfehlung 4:**<br>Zeitrahmen strategisch nutzen, um Diskussionen über relevante WPS- Themen anzustossen und die Öffentlichkeit zu sensibilisieren.<br><br>**Instrumente:**<br>• Einmonatige Präsidentschaft<br>• Offene Debatten<br>• Internationaler Frauentag<br>• Frühes Stadium der Verhandlungen nutzen |
| **Empfehlung 5:**<br>Modernisierung der WPS-Agenda durch Einbeziehung von Diskussionen, die an Bedeutung gewinnen.<br><br>**Schwerpunkte:**<br>• Intersektionalität<br>• Klimawandel<br>• Digitalisierung<br>• Schutz von *women briefers* | |

Français  Alors que la Suisse a entamé son mandat de membre élu au Conseil de sécurité des Nations unies (CSNU) en janvier 2023, ce document de travail explore les moyens par lesquels elle peut faire progresser l'Agenda Femmes, Paix et Sécurité (Women, Peace and Security - WPS) pendant son mandat. L'Agenda Femmes, Paix et Sécurité est né de la Résolution 1325 du Conseil de sécurité des Nations Unies et a été l'une des priorités de la politique étrangère de la Suisse au cours de ces dernières années. Ce document de discussion formule cinq recommandations clés basées sur les études de cas de trois pays neutres et de même sensibilité - l'Autriche, l'Irlande et la Suède - et sur un questionnaire d'expert·e·s dans le domaine de la paix et de la sécurité. Ces recommandations et les outils qui permettent de les mettre en œuvre sont résumés dans le tableau ci-dessous. ●

| Recommandations et outils clés | |
|---|---|
| **Recommandation 1 :**<br>Intégrer les aspects pertinents des résolutions WPS dans chaque activité du Conseil de sécurité des Nations unies, afin que cela devienne une norme<br><br>**Outils :**<br>• Langage de WPS<br>• Réunions géographiques et thématiques<br>• Les points de presse de WPS | **Recommandation 2 :**<br>Promouvoir activement l'intégration des opinions des universitaires (femmes) et de la société civile dans la prise de décision au CSNU, mais aussi dans les départements concernés du DFAE.<br><br>**Outils :**<br>• *Briefers*<br>• Visites sur le terrain<br>• Assurer le suivi |
| **Recommandation 3 :**<br>Coopérer avec les institutions et les acteurs concernés afin d'atteindre le plein potentiel de l'avancement de l'agenda WPS.<br><br>**Outils :**<br>• Coalitions de la présidence<br>• Groupe d'expert·e·s informel sur la WPS<br>• Autres organes | **Recommandation 4 :**<br>Utiliser stratégiquement le calendrier pour lancer des discussions sur des questions pertinentes de WPS et sensibiliser le public.<br><br>**Outils :**<br>• Présidence d'un mois<br>• Débats ouverts<br>• Journée internationale de la femme<br>• Utiliser les premières étapes des négociations |
| **Recommandation 5 :**<br>Moderniser l'agenda du WPS en y incluant des discussions de plus en plus pertinentes.<br><br>**Points focaux :**<br>• Intersectionnalité<br>• Changement climatique<br>• Numérisation<br>• Protéger *women briefers* | |

# 1. Introduction

Switzerland is one of the newest members of the United Nations (UN), having joined in 2002.

Switzerland is one of the newest members of the United Nations (UN), having joined in 2002.[1] Despite this, Switzerland's ambitions as a member of the UN are best highlighted by the fact that it was elected a non-permanent member of the Security Council (SC) for the period 2023-2024.[2] Switzerland places the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda[3] as one of its priorities in its foreign policy, reflecting the increasingly important role that women have in peace and security - peace and state building. This is, for example, seen with their candidacy slogan, "A Plus for Peace".[4] The agenda has the potential to transform conflict cycles and violence to sustainable peace, to enable women to be active critical actors in all levels of peacemaking processes and to achieve gender justice.[5] Despite its global recognition, a lot remains to be done to implement the WPS agenda. As its non-permanent membership is a first time, it may be

challenging for Switzerland to find its place in the UNSC whilst also trying to leverage its UNSC seat to advance the WPS agenda. As such, this policy paper explores the following question:

> **How can Switzerland leverage its United Nations Security Council seat to promote advancement of the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda?**

Through examining related concepts and literature, case studies, and the responses of experts through a questionnaire, this paper provides structured policy recommendations for the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) and grants Switzerland a real and relevant opportunity for impact. ●

### United Nations Security Council

According to the UN Charter, the UNSC is responsible for maintaining international peace and security.[6] Within the UNSC, the five permanent members — United Kingdom, United States of America, France, Russia and China — hold most of the power due to their veto right. The 10 non-permanent members are elected by the General Assembly and can also shape resolutions and decisions. The monthly rotating presidency is a great opportunity for elected members to focus on the issues that are most important to them, since the president can set the agenda for the UNSC's meetings, and to represent the UNSC in its relations with other organs of the UN and with states.[7]

### Women, Peace, and Security

In October 2000, the UNSC adopted Resolution 1325, in which the UNSC recognised for the first time women's role in peace and security. The Resolution calls on all states to systematically include women in peacebuilding and peacekeeping efforts and to address the impact of conflict on women and girls.[8] Since then, the UNSC has repeatedly shown its commitment to the WPS agenda. The UNSC has adopted nine additional resolutions, further highlighting the importance of gender in global peace and security.[9] Despite these resolutions, there is still a lot of space for improvement, as implementation, accountability and action are lacking.[10] Each year, two relevant open debates are hosted by the UNSC: in October on WPS and in April on conflict-related sexual violence.

# 2. Analysis

In its campaign for the UNSC seat, Switzerland emphasized the importance of advancing the implementation of the WPS agenda.

### 2.1 Switzerland's position on WPS

In its campaign for the UNSC seat, Switzerland emphasised the importance of advancing the implementation of the WPS agenda. Though WPS is not a standalone priority for its UNSC term, it is among the key aspects of 'building sustainable peace' which is one of Switzerland's four priorities.[11] Importantly, Switzerland does not see the need for a new resolution on WPS, but rather stresses the urgency of putting into practice the already existing ones.[12] Switzerland emphasises the following areas of focus:[13]

- Full, equal, and meaningful participation of women in peace and security should be ensured for all relevant agenda points of the UNSC (e.g., when mandating UN missions).
- Civil society should be included at the UNSC as well as throughout implementation on the ground. Switzerland

- proposes doing this, inter alia, by inviting civil society briefers to the UNSC, promoting networks and engaging with women peacebuilders during field visits.[14]
- Use available tools to address and prevent sexual violence. Here, the country stresses a community-based approach and accountability of perpetrators.[15] Additionally, Switzerland proposes use of sanction regimes in cases of sexual violence and giving the victims possibilities to seek help at the International Criminal Court.[16]
- Include more women in peacekeeping.[17]
- Ensure safety of, amongst others, female briefers of the UNSC and provide them with updates on how their suggestions are being used.[18]

Switzerland has accumulated unique expertise on WPS over the past 15 years since the development of its first National Action Plan (NAP) in 2007 and recently co-chaired the WPS Focal Points Network 2022. This experience makes Switzerland's statements on this topic credible. As the country draws attention to emerging themes such as the link between WPS and digitalisation, it can strategically use its UNSC seat to share its knowledge on the latter with SC members.[19]

To learn from the experience of past elected UNSC members with similar WPS ambitions, the case studies in the following section provide some insights into the noteworthy practices of other countries.[20] [21]

**National Action Plans**

Resolution 1325 urged countries to action. It sets out NAPs to systematically approach and bring about the WPS agenda by providing a blueprint for countries to set out their priorities, plan of action, and help prompt civil society actions.[22] The table below highlights the countries currently with a NAP in the UNSC during Switzerland's tenure.[23] It is divided into the permanent five, the 2022-23 elected members, and the new 2023-24 elected members;[24] noting that the 2024-25 are excluded due to uncertainty of candidacy and membership.

| Permanent | Elected '22-'23 | Elected '23-'24 |
|---|---|---|
| France | Albania | Japan |
| United Kingdom | Brazil | Malta |
| United States | Gabon | Mozambique |
| | Ghana | Switzerland |
| | United Arab Emirates | |

## 2.2  Case studies

Austria

Austria is a long-standing, neutral, member of the United Nations; akin to Switzerland, it also hosts one of the subsidiary regional headquarters. Austria has been a member of the UNSC thrice, namely: 1973 to 1974, 1991 to 1992, and, most recently, 2009 to 2010.[25]

Austria is also a member of several informal forums in relation to its position within the UN, including the 'Group of Friends of the Rule of Law' and the 'Group of Like-Minded States'.[26] These groups are informal, intergovernmental forums in which like-minded states actively pursue particular policies in conjunction and within relevant UN organs; though the number has recently increased, the value of 'Groups of Friends' in alliance-building should not be overlooked.[27] Realising interrelatedness and significance of the WPS Agenda, Austria is pursuing it on a regional, national, and international arena.[28] That is to say that it actively engages with the WPS agenda on several levels in a mutually beneficial manner. The international arena included its tenure in the UNSC, its development agency, and federal ministries with an international presence.[29] On a more local level, it draws in support from the general public and particular institutions that are

involved or have interests in pursuing WPS, including universities and the media.[30]

Austria's small size first posed a hindrance to its candidacy campaigning with other UN members thinking it was punching above its weight. Ultimately, it successfully leveraged its reputation, moral capital, and involvement in the UN to gain its UNSC seat.[31] It is important to realise that Austria was open about its interests in the UNSC, highlighting its 'good' activities within the UN, which includes, for example, its involvement in the EU's implementation of UNSC Resolution 1325 on WPS.[32] Austria also used its 'Partners for Peace' position within the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) for the WPS agenda to be incorporated into the alliance; its alliance building, again, took the shape of 'friends for 1325'.[33] Even after its candidacy, Austria actively pursued and promoted the WPS.[34] Accordingly, "[among] these measures are increasing the proportion of women in peace operations and decision-making positions in international and regional organisations, integrating the content of [UNSC Resolution] 1325 in relevant training activities for peace operations, as well as preventing gender-specific violence and protecting the needs of women and girls in conflict and post-conflict situations."[35]

**Key-takeaways for Switzerland**

- **Gain external support for its goals**, including the WPS agenda, by leveraging its position within its existing alliances, including 'Groups of Friends' or building new alliances, and other like-minded institutions;[36]

- **Promote internal support** for its candidacy to gain the positive involvement and expertise of universities, think tanks, and the general public in pursuit of the WPS agenda.

Sweden has held a non-permanent member seat in the UNSC four times for the terms 1957-58, 1975-76, 1997-98, and 2017-18.[37] During Sweden's most recent membership of the UNSC, the state prioritised WPS issues to be more integrated in the 'core UNSC business'.[38] Sweden's approach in the UNSC was well-structured, planned, and consistent with the priorities of the WPS agenda. As a result, Sweden successfully contributed to the inclusion of more women's perspectives within the UNSC's discussions and analyses. Sweden also played an important role in the integration of WPS language into regular UNSC resolutions, as is further explained below.

Sweden adopted its first national action plan to implement the UNSC Resolution 1325 in 2006 and since renewed it twice.[39] It was the first country to adopt a feminist foreign policy in 2014, which included six long-term objectives on the pillars of women's rights, prevention, participation, protection from conflict-related sexual violence, economic empowerment, and recovery.[40] Margot Wallström was Sweden's Minister for Foreign Affairs from 2014 to 2019 and spearheaded the country's feminist foreign policy.[41] The fact that she served as the UN Special Representative for Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict from 2010 to 2012 facilitated the networking and cooperation with other elected members to progress the WPS agenda.[42]

Sweden actively cooperated with civil society organisations and academia to provide women's perspectives to the UNSC and raise awareness on WPS issues. The preceding elected member, namely Spain (2015-16), promoted female briefers from civil society organisations in conflict-affected situations in the UNSC.[43] Sweden continued to develop this approach and worked closely with both the civil society in New York near the UN headquarters and the civil society in Stockholm.[44] It was a strategy to ensure that women's perspectives form part of the UNSC's deliberations and decision making. Ann Linde, the Minister for Foreign Affairs remarked that "during our time in the Security Council, more civil society briefers than ever were invited which have resulted in more inclusive and better-informed discussions".[45] As a result, a gender balance among briefers of the UNSC was achieved for the first time in July 2018.[46] The internal support was raised by cooperating with national universities, research

institutes, think tanks and NGOs for expertise and discussed issues of the UNSC agenda.

Sweden also sought to improve the integration of WPS language in resolutions to make the WPS agenda more implementable. Understanding the UNSC power dynamics of veto powers of permanent members and constantly changing non-permanent member composition, during negotiations, Sweden strategically included WPS language in early drafts of resolutions.[47] Sweden was active in informally offering concrete proposals to integrate WPS issues into all items on the UNSC agenda and focused on the Informal Expert Group (IEG) on WPS rather than organizing Arria-formula Meetings which are informal meetings convened by a member of UNSC. The IEG on WPS was established in 2016 to facilitate a more systematic approach to the coordination of implementing WPS work through specific country-level analysis and direct briefings on WPS from UN leadership.[48] Recognising the IEG's key role in mainstreaming WPS into country specific deliberations and products, Sweden co-chaired the IEG on WPS for two years. In addition, Sweden had experts who overviewed all existing language in mandates for the peace operations and UN political missions and tried to ensure that WPS is taken into account for all peace processes. Overall, because of that, the peacekeeping mission mandates increased language on WPS in terms of frequency, clarity, and priority.[49]

**Key-takeaways for Switzerland**

- Actively **cooperate with civil society organisations and academia** and invite them as briefers;

- During negotiations, strategically include **WPS language** in early drafts of resolutions to gain support by UNSC members;

- Make use of the strategic role as co-chair of the IEG to **mainstream WPS into country specific deliberations and products**.

Being a neutral state since the 1930's, Ireland has served four terms as an elected member in the UNSC, namely 1961, 1981-82, 2001-02, and most recently in 2021-22.[50] Ireland is implementing its third NAP and pushes for progress on the agenda on a domestic and international levels alike.[51] Advancing the WPS agenda was thus also a key priority during its recent term in the UNSC, where Ireland co-chaired (alongside Mexico) the IEG on WPS.[52] At the same time, Ireland aimed to "advance the WPS agenda more broadly across all our work on the Security Council – including on country, thematic and peacekeeping files – as well as through ongoing engagement with civil society".[53]

One important initiative for mainstreaming WPS was the WPS presidency trio that Ireland launched together with Kenya and Mexico. In August 2021, the three countries circulated a joint statement committing to align their working methods and to take various actions to promote the WPS agenda during their consecutive UNSC presidencies in September (Ireland), October (Kenya) and November (Mexico) of 2021.[54] The commitments included: to attain a strong representation of women civil society speakers in UNSC meetings and gender balance among briefers, to ensure that products drafted by the UNSC include strong WPS language, to make WPS the focus of at least one mandated UNSC geographic meeting and to hold WPS press stakeouts.[55]

According to the UNSC Report, "while other [Security] Council members have previously emphasised some of these aspects, this was the first time that a fairly broad list of WPS commitments has been undertaken across three consecutive presidencies".[56] Moreover, the initiative followed up on some commitments already stated in previous UNSC resolutions such as the invitation of civil society briefers, including women's organisations, to thematic and country-specific meetings, expressed in Resolution 2242 (2015), while also introducing some new elements such as the press stakeouts to increase the visibility of UNSC work on WPS.[57] Finally, outside of its presidency month, Ireland co-hosted and participated in different Arria-formula meetings to keep the WPS discussion going.[58]

**Key-takeaways for Switzerland**

- As part of the **shared commitments** on WPS that Switzerland has joined, enhance **cross-presidency planning** and **maintain the momentum** for the substantial and sustained implementation of the WPS agenda;

- Integrate experiences and perspectives of **female civil society actors and peacebuilders** by inviting them as **briefers** and **speakers**;

- Hold **WPS press stakeouts** to increase the visibility of the topic in the media;

- Make use of the **strategic role as co-chair of the IEG** to facilitate the implementation and coordination of the WPS agenda.

## 2.3  Modernisation of the WPS Agenda

In addition to building on lessons learned from the three case studies on how Switzerland can best leverage its UNSC seat to advance the implementation of the WPS agenda, this chapter provides recommendations on key emerging topics that Switzerland should integrate into its strategy to contribute to the agenda's modernisation and advancement in terms of content.

`Intersectionality`

Fundamental to the WPS agenda is the aim to include involved and interested actors into the peace and security process to ensure a sustainable peace. Currently, peace and security are dominated by men.[59] Whilst the WPS agenda sought to overcome this barrier, it was based on the implicit assumption that the disproportionate impact of violence, conflict, and war on women is homogenous. This fails to take into account that the disadvantages may compound, for instance, with race, religion, sexuality, and socio-economic backgrounds known as intersectionality.[60] Without taking into account the concept of intersectionality, the WPS agenda may be ineffective in addressing the relevant needs of certain groups of women.[61]

To recognise the shortcomings of the existing WPS framework, it is important to widen the theoretical foundations of the WPS agenda and include the insights from intersectional and post-colonial feminist analysis. Additional criticism comes from another branch of critical social studies, the postcolonial studies. It essentially states that the WPS agenda is a system in which "Two-Thirds of Women are viewed from the One-Third world's point of view".[62] The main critique is that the way 'women' and the interests of this group are represented is based on 'Western' values which are influenced by the history of colonialism. This is despite the fact that Resolution 1325 passed through the "sheer effort, determination and personal conviction of several individuals serving on the [Security] Council at the time, in particular [...]  Bangladesh, Namibia, Canada, Jamaica and Mali".[63] Currently, the representation of women in developing countries as victims who lack skills or authority reproduces stereotypes and gender inequalities.

Furthermore, people who do not identify as either man or woman, for instance, transgender and non-binary people, are commonly excluded from peacebuilding processes. The existing WPS related resolutions, mainly Resolution 1325, make no reference to the transgender or non-binary people, and fail to appropriately account for intersectionality.[64] [65] WPS currently fails to include all peoples into maintaining peace and security despite countries like Costa Rica having attempted to draw attention thereto.[66] We believe that the way forward for the WPS agenda is to serve as an effective framework to respond to the needs of different marginalised groups such as LGBTQ+ individuals, but also realise the difficulties of moving in this direction in the UNSC.

Consequently, we suggest directing more attention towards making sure that decisions of the UNSC are informed by diverse and informed perspectives:

- Apply intersectional and post-colonial approaches to the WPS agenda;
- Move towards a more inclusive definition of genders in the WPS agenda;
- Invite diverse briefers to more accurate portray perspectives into the WPS agenda;
- Ensure that the WPS language reflects the diversity of women and gender diversity in a broader sense.

**Climate Change**

A topic which we believe deserves more attention in the WPS agenda of the UNSC is climate change. While the two have been traditionally seen as separate issues, climate change is increasingly recognised as a security threat and is shown to not be gender neutral.[67] For instance, studies show that women and children are 14 times more likely to die in natural disasters than men.[68] Furthermore, livelihood insecurities, which result from changing climate can cause violent conflicts and forced displacement. These conditions are frequently associated with increased domestic and sexual violence as well as early child marriage. Recognising the disproportionate effects of climate change on women, it is important that they have means to define and effectively address the respective security risks.[69]

At the same time, evidence indicates a strong correlation between a country's performance in terms of implementing the WPS agenda and preparedness to respond to climate change.[70] As progress on WPS-related goals and climate change action appear to be complementary, it is desirable to ensure women can meaningfully participate in decision making on climate response. Due to its longstanding history, WPS-framework has a strong potential to contribute to that.

The importance of and risks posed by climate change has first been recognised in 2015 in the UNSC Resolution 2242 which highlighted that WPS should be 'a cross-cutting subject'.[71] In fact, there is currently an informal expert group on climate which Switzerland co-chairs together with the United Arab Emirates and Mozambique. Nonetheless, as of 2020, among selected 80 English NAPs only 17 have incorporated climate change related insecurities into the NAP with most extensive cover by Finland, Ireland and the United States.[72] Since Switzerland has no mention of climate change in its most recent NAP (adopted in 2018), we would like to raise awareness about this topic and encourage more attention towards it.

Based on these considerations, the following recommendations emerge:

- Promote women's and youth's active participation in discussions and action addressing climate-change related risks;
- Ensure that WPS language is present on discussions which relate to security issues caused by climate change;
- Include climate change into the next Swiss NAP;
- Use the opportunities like open debates to raise awareness on the interrelatedness of the security risks resulting from climate change and WPS.

### Digitalisation

With the online space being increasingly used for peacemaking and peacebuilding work, the link between WPS and digitalisation is becoming more important. Switzerland recognised this emerging issue early on and supported a study by the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders and the ICT4Peace Foundation that investigated the opportunities and challenges of digitalization for women peacebuilders.[73]

Evidence shows that advances in Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have the potential to contribute to the implementation of the WPS agenda by creating more inclusive platforms for activism, amplifying women's voices, and raising awareness for their priority issues.[74] Already today, women peacebuilders use ICTs, for example, to increase the reach of their communications, to monitor and document human rights violations, and to provide services such as psychosocial counseling to women affected by conflict.[75]

At the same time, however, women also continue to face significant technical, financial, cultural, and political barriers that prevent them from effectively using ICTs for increased inclusion in peacebuilding and conflict prevention. Internet access and connectivity in conflict-affected areas, for example, are often restricted by a lack of basic ICT infrastructure and extremely high costs to access ICTs, which is more prohibitive for women, who are disproportionately affected by poverty and often lack financial independence.[76] In addition, women and girls are more likely to lack basic and digital literacy, preventing them from accessing ICT tools at all, or at least in a safe way.[77] As a result, 200 million fewer women than men are online worldwide.[78]

Even if these infrastructural, financial and skill barriers to accessing online spaces can be overcome, gender norms and cultural stereotypes further limit women's ability to use ICTs for empowerment and inclusion. Women often do not own their own devices, have less time for online engagement due to the disproportionate burden of unpaid care and domestic work and face greater restrictions due to gendered expectations and social norms.[79]

In addition, women peacebuilders working online are often subjected to targeted, online and offline gender-based violence such as hate speech, abuse and death threats, and are at the risk of surveillance, retaliation and human rights violations by their governments.[80] This problem is compounded by a lack of adequate, functioning and gender-responsive reporting and accountability mechanisms for violations of women's rights and gender-based violence online. Even though an increasing number of legal and normative frameworks for protection in the online space have emerged, most of them are gender-blind or not properly implemented.[81]

Switzerland should therefore continue to raise awareness for the link between WPS and digitalization. It should raise awareness in the UNSC on the need to:

- Increase investments in universal, affordable and secure access to the internet, particularly for women and girls in conflict-affected areas;
- Include digital literacy and capacity-building components for women and girls in humanitarian and peacebuilding programs;
- Promote the development of gender-responsive ICT platforms, products and services by involving more women, women's organisations and gender equality experts in the development process;
- Complement existing legal and regulatory frameworks with new laws and policies to effectively extend the protection of women's rights to the currently underregulated online space;
- Ensure that a gender perspective is applied to all discussions, policies and laws related to ICTs and security.

### Protecting Women Briefers

Despite the plethora of barriers and threats that women around the globe encounter, many including peacebuilders, human rights defenders and civil society advocates continue to mobilize to advance gender equality and the WPS Agenda.[82] Their voices provide insights into the perils and spaces for improvement and are thus of utmost importance. Nevertheless, under the status quo, safety concerns for female briefers may discourage or even forbid some to interact with the UNSC and therefore hinder their contribution to the WPS agenda. Even though the UNSC has repeatedly shown its commitment to WPS, a significant gap remains when it comes to protecting women human rights defenders and peacebuilders.[83]

While most briefers irrespective of gender face the risk of reprisals, intimidation, and negative criticism upon interaction with the UNSC, retaliation against women typically targets their personal behavior, their moral conduct, or their sex lives.[84] Similarly, as discussed above in the intersectionality section, marginalised groups such as individuals that do not identify as male or female and are part of the LGBTQ+ are also at increased risk of reprisals.

Sexual and gender-based violence, verbal abuse, surveillance, and online violence are just a few of the repercussions that females and marginalised groups may have to confront throughout their careers as activists and human rights defenders. A survey performed by UN Women demonstrates that among women civil society representatives who briefed the UNSC between January 2021 and May 2022, 9 out of 32 respondents reported experiencing reprisals.[85] This alarmingly high percentage should be a call to action for the UNSC and its member states. Unfortunately, the experiences of female briefers are highly underreported and the UNSC lacks the necessary official guidance on how to counteract these risks.[86] As a result, perpetrators remain largely unpunished, awareness on the topic is low, and women are inadvertently discouraged from engaging with the UNSC.

Given that security and safety are pivotal preconditions for women to be able to brief, we recommend that Switzerland urges the UNSC to:

- Ensure accountability of perpetrators by being explicit on condemnation of acts of intimidation or reprisals;
- Perform risk assessments, prepare protection plans and identify risk mitigation measures. When appropriate, publicly discuss the briefers' experiences to increase the political cost for perpetrating states - while ensuring that no more harm is being done;
- Use positive language in relevant literature on women briefers and human rights defenders to show the significance of their work;
- Adopt an official guidance document on how to prevent and address reprisals;
- Increase awareness by officially documenting acts of aggression, intimidation and reprisals against women briefers;
- Provide effective legal remedies to victims. ●

# 3. Recommendations

With its long-standing tradition of WPS engagement and innovative ideas, Switzerland's statements on WPS within its "A Plus for Peace" campaign are credible and valuable.

With its long-standing tradition of WPS engagement and innovative ideas, Switzerland's statements on WPS within its "A Plus for Peace" campaign are credible and valuable. Importantly, the progress which can be achieved during its mandate will strongly depend on the global geopolitical situation, the will of other members but also the preparedness of Switzerland to make use of every opportunity. The analysis shows that the attention and scope of action regarding the WPS has been increasing over the years. Consequently, Switzerland has a diverse range of possibilities to advance the implementation of WPS-related resolutions, but also faces high expectations to continue the existing initiatives.

The following recommendations should assist Switzerland in maximising its contribution to WPS throughout its term at the UNSC by providing a structured and comprehensive overview of the available tools.

**1.** In **every activity of the UNSC**, Switzerland should use its expertise to integrate relevant WPS aspects. To achieve this, following means can be resorted to:

- Pushing for integration of **WPS language** in all UNSC resolutions and statements (regardless of the topic and in terms of frequency, clarity, and priority).
- Recognising aspects related to WPS in **geographic and thematic meetings** of the UNSC.
- Holding **WPS press stakeouts** to increase the visibility of the topic in the media like Ireland did.

**2.** Switzerland should actively promote incorporating opinions of (female) **civil society** into the decision-making at the UNSC, but also at the relevant FDFA departments. This can be done by:

- Ensuring that women's perspectives form part of the UNSC's deliberations and decision making by inviting them as **briefers**. In this respect, Sweden and Ireland can serve as examples. Also, Swiss networks can be consulted for internal expertise and setting of priorities for UNSC.
- Engaging with female peace builders and women civil society organisations during **field visits** and missions.
- Informing briefers about how their recommendations are used by UNSC by **providing follow-ups**.

**3.** **Cooperation** with other actors and relevant institutions is necessary for Switzerland to reach the full potential of advancing the WPS agenda. The following ways can be considered:

- As part of the **shared commitments** on WPS that Switzerland has joined, enhance **cross-presidency planning** and **maintain the momentum** for the substantial and sustained implementation of the WPS agenda.
- Make use of the **strategic role as co-chair of the IEG** to facilitate the implementation and coordination of the WPS agenda.
- **Collaborate with other UN and non-UN bodies**. The impact of this can be seen from how Austria leveraged its position within 'Groups of Friends' and NATO's Partners for Peace to promote WPS.

**4.** Switzerland should make **strategic use of timing** to initiate discussions on WPS issues and raise public awareness. The most important dates are:

- The **one-month presidency** is a valuable chance to give priority to WPS on the UNSC agenda.
- The two **Open Debates**, one on WPS and another on conflict-related sexual violence, provide an opportunity to highlight the timely issues.
- Similarly, during the **International Women's Day** on the 8th of March the public attention globally is directed towards women.
- Introduce WPS related language early in the negotiations.

**5.** Switzerland should go beyond supporting the existing WPS Agenda and strive **modernisation** in the following four areas:

- Bringing innovation to the discussion on WPS through incorporating digitalization where it deems advantageous.
- Using insights from intersectional and post-colonial feminist analyses to address the shortcomings of current approach to WPS.
- Strengthen awareness on the interrelatedness of WPS and Climate Change response.
- Safeguarding security of women who assist the UNSC. ●

## Key recommendations and tools

**Recommendation 1:**
In every activity of the UNSC, integrate relevant aspects of WPS resolutions to mainstream the agenda.

**Tools:**
- WPS language
- Geographical & thematic meetings
- WPS press stakeouts

**Recommendation 2:**
Actively promote incorporating opinions of (female) academia and civil society into the decision-making at the UNSC, but also at the relevant FDFA departments.

**Tools:**
- Briefers
- Field visits
- Provide follow-ups

**Recommendation 3:**
Cooperate with relevant institutions and actors to reach the full potential of advancing the WPS agenda.

**Tools:**
- Presidency coalitions
- Informal Expert Group on WPS
- Other bodies

**Recommendation 4:**
Make a strategic use of timing to initiate discussions on relevant WPS issues and raise public awareness.

**Tools:**
- One-month presidency
- Open debates
- International Women's Day
- Use early stage of negotiations

**Recommendation 5:**
Modernize the WPS agenda by including discussions of growing relevance.

**Focus points:**
- Intersectionality
- Climate change
- Digitalisation
- Protecting women briefers

# Abbreviations

| | |
|---|---|
| FDFA | Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs |
| ICTs | Information and Communication Technologies |
| IEG | Informal Expert Group |
| LGBTQ+ | Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and others |
| NAP | National Action Plan |
| NATO | North Atlantic Treaty Organisation |
| SC | Security Council |
| UN | United Nations |
| WPS | Women, Peace and Security |

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