



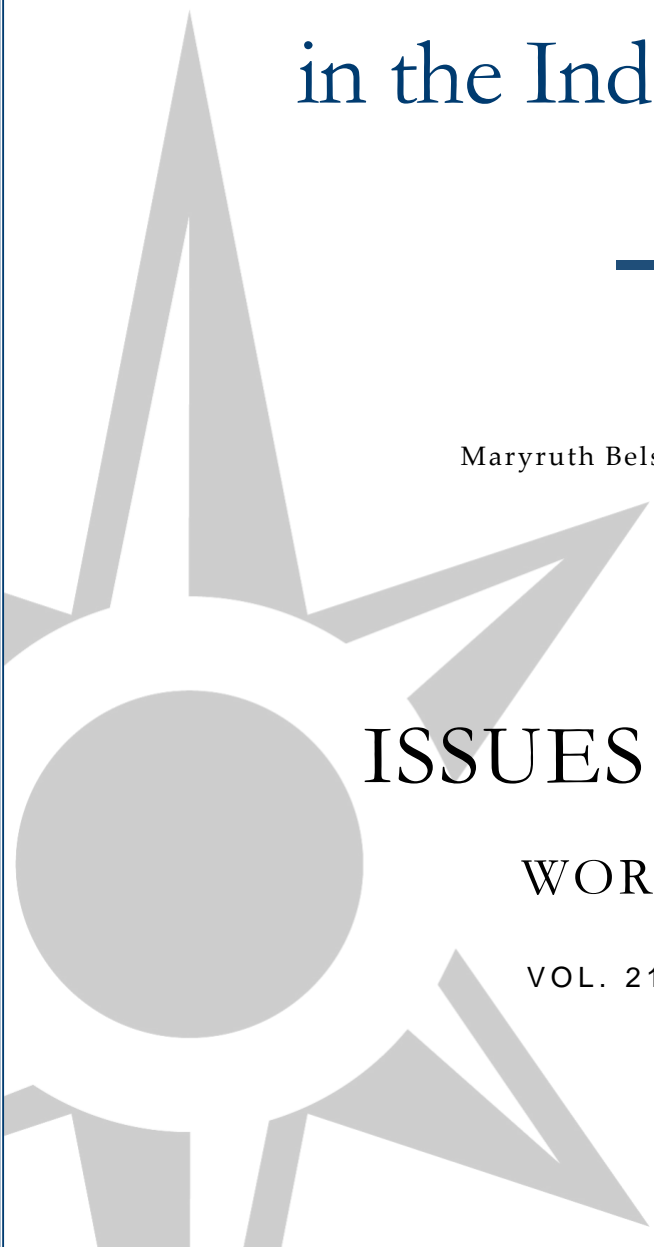
What the Biden-Harris Administration means for WPS in the Indo-Pacific Region

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The election of Kamala Harris as the first woman of color to serve as vice president of the United States is a beacon of hope for women everywhere. We explore how her groundbreaking election, alongside the new administration's visible support for gender equality, could advance women's rights globally. More specifically, we consider the implications of a Biden-Harris White House for the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda in the Indo-Pacific. A cornerstone of the WPS agenda is United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325). Passed in 2000, UNSCR 1325 recognizes the gendered impacts of conflict and the importance of women's inclusion in peace processes for long-term peace and stability. The WPS agenda consists of four overlapping pillars: Participation, Prevention, Protection, and Relief and Recovery. Addressing all four of these pillars is integral to ensuring full respect for human rights and cultivating sustainable peace. In this paper, we assess each pillar of the WPS Agenda from three angles—first, actions taken by Biden and Harris that indicate how they will engage with the WPS Agenda; second, progress and challenges to the implementation of the four WPS pillars in the Indo-Pacific; and, third, how the new administration could work with countries in the Indo-Pacific and other key stakeholders to overcome current challenges to the realization of core WPS objectives in the region.

INTRODUCTION

The Biden-Harris administration has made a commitment to advancing gender equality both at home and abroad. The election of Kamala Harris as the first woman to be vice president of the United States and the record number of women set to fill Biden's Cabinet are significant accomplishments for women's political participation.¹ Moreover, in the Biden-Harris "Agenda for Women," a comprehensive plan that will guide the new government's gender policy, Biden promises to improve women's financial security, protect their reproductive rights, address gender-based violence (GBV), and "ensure full implementation" of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda,² and pursuing ratification of the UN Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).³ (The only other countries that have not ratified CEDAW are Iran, Somalia, and Sudan.) In addition, President Biden has resolved to restore the US as a global leader for freedom, democracy, and human rights.⁴ As such, it is interesting to consider how his and Harris' leadership will influence international compliance with women's rights, either by setting an example to other nations or through America's multilateral engagement.

In this paper, we investigate how the incoming administration could help advance the implementation of WPS objectives in the Indo-Pacific. We explore the political positions of Biden and Harris through the lens of the WPS agenda and consider the potential impact that the Biden-Harris approach to foreign relations may have on the implementation of core WPS objectives throughout the Indo-Pacific. We also review the extent to which WPS has been implemented in the region and find that women continue to be underrepresented in politics and security, at the margins of formal peace processes, and exposed to high levels of gendered violence. We identify ways in which Biden and Harris can work with Indo-Pacific nations to promote the implementation of the WPS framework. We have formulated policy recommendations for all relevant stakeholders, including the new administration, governments in the Indo-Pacific, and the international community, that will facilitate the full realization of core WPS objectives in the region.

The paper is structured as follows: it starts by providing a brief overview of the WPS agenda, then discusses each of the four WPS pillars through Biden-Harris policies and in terms of their implementation in the Indo-Pacific, and concludes each section with policy recommendations.

¹ Meredith Conroy, "Updated: A Record-Breaking Number Of Women Could Be In Biden's Cabinet," *FiveThirtyEight* (blog), December 15, 2020, <https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/a-record-breaking-number-of-women-will-be-in-bidens-cabinet/>.

² "The Biden Agenda for Women," Joe Biden for President: Official Campaign Website, accessed February 1, 2021, <https://joebiden.com/womens-agenda/>.

³ United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, "Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women," accessed March 8, 2021, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cedaw.aspx>.

⁴ Robin Wright, "The World Likes Biden But Doubts the US Can Reclaim Global Leadership," *The New Yorker*, accessed February 16, 2021, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/our-columnists/the-world-likes-biden-but-doubts-the-us-can-reclaim-global-leadership>.

THE WPS AGENDA: OVERVIEW

UN Security Council Resolution 1325, which was adopted in 2000 and codifies the WPS agenda, recognizes the gendered impact of conflict and calls for the meaningful inclusion of women across the peace and security continuum.⁵ The agenda rests on four pillars—Participation, Prevention, Protection, and Relief and Recovery. *Participation* concerns women's full and equal participation in peacebuilding and decision-making. *Prevention* calls for preventing conflict by addressing its root causes and using a holistic perspective to understand the complex web of actors, structures, and relationships that fuel conflict. Prevention promotes supporting local women's peace initiatives as part of this holistic approach to ending conflict. *Protection* advocates for the protection of women and girls from GBV and sexual violence amid conflict and in other fragile settings. Finally, *Relief and Recovery* demands that humanitarian efforts meet the unique needs of women and girls. With this overview and understanding of the WPS Agenda and its four pillars, we review domestic policies adopted and supported by Biden and Harris and consider what this means for the advancement of core WPS objectives in the Indo-Pacific.

WPS PARTICIPATION

Introduction to the WPS Participation Pillar

Participation is a cardinal pillar of the WPS agenda and calls for strengthening women's meaningful involvement at all levels of decision-making, including in political institutions, formal peace processes, and the security sector.⁶ Research has shown that higher levels of gender equality in leadership structures is indicative of political stability and conflict prevention. On average, women are less likely to support armed conflict.⁷ Similarly, in policymaking, women are less likely to support spending on the military over community welfare, such as on schools, childcare, and food systems, all of which are essential for helping communities resist the development of internal and external violence.⁸

Beyond conflict prevention, women's leadership is important for both ending conflict and for rebuilding in post-conflict settings. In one study, researchers found that with increased female representation in national legislatures, the likelihood that a conflict would end in a negotiated

⁵ "Landmark Resolution on Women, Peace and Security (Security Council Resolution 1325)," Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement on Women | United Nations, accessed February 1, 2021, <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/wps/>.

⁶ "What Is UNSCR 1325?," United States Institute of Peace, accessed February 8, 2021, https://www.usip.org/gender_peacebuilding/about_UNSCR_1325.

⁷ Richard C. Eichenberg, *Gender, War, and World Order* (Cornell University Press), accessed January 28, 2021, <https://www.cornellpress.cornell.edu/book/9781501738142/gender-war-and-world-order/>.

⁸ Orlando C. Richard and Carliss D. Miller, "Considering Diversity as a Source of Competitive Advantage in Organizations," *The Oxford Handbook of Diversity and Work*, January 9, 2013, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199736355.013.0014>; Catherine Bolzendahl and Clem Brooks, "Women's Political Representation and Welfare State Spending in 12 Capitalist Democracies," *Social Forces* 85, no. 4 (June 1, 2007): 1509–34, <https://doi.org/10.1353/sof.2007.0061>.

settlement increased.⁹ Additionally, women's involvement in peacebuilding increases the probability that a peace agreement will last over 15 years by 35%.¹⁰ As gender equality in decision-making bodies increases, the likelihood of conducting peace negotiations with rebels also increases,¹¹ while the severity of violence following international crises decreases.¹² However, globally, women represented only 13% of negotiators, 6% of mediators, and 6% of signatories in major peace processes between 1992 and 2019.¹³

Women also have the potential to improve strategic decision-making within military structures by adding to diversity of thinking.¹⁴ This in turn may generate higher levels of stability and result in higher levels of compliance with international laws and norms.¹⁵ Additionally, it is possible that women's input has the potential to better inform decisions of proportionality that determine the level of value ascribed to civilian lives, though more research is required to determine whether a link exists on this issue.¹⁶

While increasing the number of women in all types of leadership is important, security practitioners stress that WPS should not be a topic relegated only to women. Donald Steinberg, founder of the *Mobilizing Men as Partners for Women, Peace and Security* initiative, has drawn attention to the need to have male allies for the WPS Agenda to succeed. Steinberg emphasizes that the principal objective of male leaders within the international security sector should be to "use our connections to open doors in the corridors of power for grassroots women from conflict regions who are fully capable of speaking for themselves; to hold global institutions accountable for their WPS commitments; to strengthen, empower and protect women peacebuilders; and to enlarge the WPS community of practice."¹⁷

⁹ Rebecca H. Best, Sarah Shair-Rosenfield, and Reed M. Wood, "Legislative Gender Diversity and the Resolution of Civil Conflict," *Political Research Quarterly* 72, no. 1 (March 1, 2019): 215–28, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1065912918785459>.

¹⁰ "Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding," UN Women | Asia and the Pacific, accessed February 1, 2021, <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/focus-areas/peace-and-security/conflict-resolution-and-peacebuilding>.

¹¹ Robert Ulrich Nagel, "Gendered Preferences: How Women's Inclusion in Society Shapes Negotiation Occurrence in Intrastate Conflicts," *Journal of Peace Research*, July 13, 2020, 0022343319899456, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343319899456>.

¹² Mary Caprioli and Mark A. Boyer, "Gender, Violence, and International Crisis," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 45, no. 4 (August 1, 2001): 503–18, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002701045004005>.

¹³ "Women, Peace, Power," UN Women, accessed February 3, 2021, <https://www.unwomen.org/news/in-focus/women-peace-security>.

¹⁴ Orlando C. Richard and Carliss D. Miller, "Considering Diversity as a Source of Competitive Advantage in Organizations," *The Oxford Handbook of Diversity and Work*, January 9, 2013, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199736355.013.0014>.

¹⁵ Dr. Jeni Klugman et al., "Can the Women, Peace and Security Agenda and International Humanitarian Law Join Forces?" (Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security, Georgetown University Law Center, & Oxford University, January 2021), <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/resource/can-the-women-peace-and-security-agenda-and-international-humanitarian-law-join-forces/>.

¹⁶ Claire Duncanson and Rachel Woodward, "Regendering the Military," *Security Dialogue* 47, no. 1 (2021): 20.

¹⁷ Ambassador Donald Steinberg, "Gender Equality in Peace and Security: The Role of Male Leadership" (Georgetown University Institute for Women, Peace and Security, June 24, 2020), <https://www.oursecurefuture.org/sites/default/files/georgetown-gender-equality.pdf>.

Biden-Harris on the WPS Participation Pillar

In the US context, the election of Kamala Harris as the first female vice president is a tremendous feat for women's participation. The ground-breaking nature of her election was echoed in her victory speech: "While I may be the first woman in this office, I will not be the last."¹⁸ This triumph is all the more poignant given Harris' own past struggles to be heard without interruption as a woman speaking to the US Senate and on the vice presidential debate stage.¹⁹

As part of the Biden-Harris promise to build a White House representative of the American public, an unprecedented number of women and people of color are expected to serve under the new administration. Twelve women have been selected to serve in Biden's Cabinet and Cabinet-level roles.²⁰ If confirmed, this Cabinet will boast the greatest number of women in US history, and—as no American Cabinet has ever contained an equal share of women and men—it could be the first to achieve gender parity. Moreover, with Harris as vice president and Janet Yellen as secretary of the treasury, women will have obtained positions within the "inner Cabinet." This traditionally male-dominated space comprises those with the closest ties to the president, including the secretaries of state, defense, treasury, and justice.²¹ Additionally, Biden has hired an all-female senior communications team,²² and Harris' senior aides are all women.²³ On December 30, 2020, Biden and Harris announced that they had chosen the first 100+ White House appointees, noting that 61% of these women identify as female.²⁴

Despite forging ahead on female political participation, the highest-ranking security position continues to be out of reach for women. Biden picked retired Gen. Lloyd Austin to act as his defense secretary instead of former defense undersecretary Michèle Flournoy.²⁵ If selected, Flournoy would have been the first female to assume the role. Many have criticized Biden's

¹⁸ "I Won't Be the Last': Kamala Harris, First Woman Elected US Vice-President, Accepts Place in History," *The Guardian*, November 8, 2020, <http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/nov/07/kamala-harris-victory-speech-first-woman-vice-president>.

¹⁹ Katie Rogers, "Kamala Harris Is (Again) Interrupted While Pressing a Senate Witness - The New York Times," *The New York Times*, June 13, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/13/us/politics/kamala-harris-interrupted-jeff-sessions.html>.

²⁰ "Biden Is on Track to Have a Record Number of Women in His Cabinet," *The 19th*, December 23, 2020, <https://19thnews.org/2020/12/biden-is-on-track-to-have-a-record-number-of-women-in-his-cabinet/>.

²¹ Meredith Conroy, "Updated: A Record-Breaking Number Of Women Could Be In Biden's Cabinet," *FiveThirtyEight* (blog), December 15, 2020, <https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/a-record-breaking-number-of-women-will-be-in-bidens-cabinet/>.

²² "Biden Hires All-Female Senior Communications Team, Names Neera Tanden Director of OMB," *The Washington Post*, November 29, 2020, https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/biden-hires-all-female-senior-communications-team/2020/11/29/5b60b58e-3277-11eb-a997-1f4c53d2a747_story.html.

²³ Emma Kinery, "Kamala Harris Announces All-Female Senior Staff; Tina Flournoy Chief of Staff - Bloomberg," *Bloomberg News*, December 3, 2020, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-12-03/harris-announces-an-all-female-slate-of-senior-staff-picks>.

²⁴ "President-Elect Joe Biden and Vice President-Elect Kamala Harris Announce Additional Members of White House Staff," 2020 Presidential Campaign Blog, December 30, 2020, <https://blog.4president.org/2020/2020/12/president-elect-joe-biden-and-vice-president-elect-kamala-harris-announce-additional-members-of-whit-1.html>.

²⁵ Lara Seligman and Nahal Toosi, "Biden's Pentagon Pick Frustrates Women Who Sought a Different History-Maker," *POLITICO* (blog), December 8, 2020, <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/12/08/biden-picks-austin-defense-flournoy-443678>.

decision to pass over Flournoy, arguing that it has "sent a terrible message to women trying to break into boys' clubs that have long controlled US military leadership."²⁶ With that said, Austin will be the first African-American leader of the Pentagon, making his nomination an equally barrier-breaking one.²⁷

There is still plenty to suggest that the new administration will be diligent about bolstering female participation in national security institutions. Biden appointed Avril Haines as the first female director of national intelligence²⁸ and Kathleen H. Hicks as the first woman deputy secretary of defense.²⁹ Six of Biden's staff nominees are active members of the Leadership Council for Women in National Security (LCWINS), a nonpartisan organization dedicated to improving women's inclusion in the US security sector.³⁰ Moreover, during the democratic primaries in 2019, both Biden and Harris signed a pledge organized by LCWINS that calls on the new president to ensure that at least 50% of national security Senate positions are filled by women.³¹ However, aside from the indicators previously mentioned and statements on supporting women's leadership globally, neither Biden nor Harris have specifically referred to supporting women as *peacebuilders*, an important element of the WPS Participation pillar.

The State of the WPS Participation Pillar in the Indo-Pacific

Already, Harris' election may be providing a signal for women worldwide to strive for greater authority within public institutions. Harris' election was widely celebrated in India, where her mother is from,³² with Indian women seizing the occasion to evaluate their position within Indian politics. A number of grassroots women's organizations held talks to discuss Harris' journey to office.³³ However, it remains to be seen whether Harris' election, alongside the new administration's commitment to fostering gender equality, will influence women's political participation in countries across the Indo-Pacific. Below, we map the current situation for female representation in the fields of politics and security in the Indo-Pacific.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ "Biden Picks General Lloyd Austin as First Black Pentagon Chief," France 24, December 8, 2020, <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20201208-biden-picks-general-lloyd-austin-as-first-black-pentagon-chief>.

²⁸ "Avril Haines Nominated As First Female Director Of National Intelligence," NPR.org, November 23, 2020, <https://www.npr.org/sections/biden-transition-updates/2020/11/23/938132034/avril-haines-nominated-as-first-female-director-of-national-intelligence>.

²⁹ "Hicks Takes Reins as Deputy Secretary of Defense," U.S. DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE, accessed March 5, 2021, <https://www.defense.gov/Explore/News/Article/Article/2496512/hicks-takes-reins-as-deputy-secretary-of-defense/>.

³⁰ "Press Release: LCWINS Applauds Announcement of Biden National Security Cabinet Nominees," Leadership Council for Women in National Security (LCWINS), accessed February 1, 2021, <https://www.lcwins.org/press/lcwins-applauds-announcement-of-biden-national-security-cabinet-nominees>.

³¹ Aaron Mehta, "Biden's Gender Parity Pledge Could Be Watershed Moment for Women in National Security," Defense News, November 24, 2020, <https://www.defensenews.com/pentagon/2020/11/24/bidens-gender-parity-pledge-could-be-watershed-moment-for-women-in-national-security/>.

³² Associated Press, "In India, Firecrackers and Prayers to Celebrate Harris' Win," *POLITICO* (blog), November 8, 2020, <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/11/08/india-kamala-harris-election-435087>.

³³ Thomson Reuters Foundation, "What Kamala Harris Means for Indian Women," *Thomson Reuters Foundation News* (blog), November 13, 2020, <https://news.trust.org/item/20201113160418-9lpcu/>.

Countries within East Asia and the Pacific have increased the representation of women in parliament from about 16 to 20% in the past 20 years,³⁴ yet this 4% increase is small compared to that in the Middle East and North Africa,³⁵ Central Europe and the Baltics,³⁶ and the United States,³⁷ where they have each boosted women's representation by 12% in the same time period. The lowest levels of women's representation in national parliaments can be seen in Vanuatu (2%) and Papua New Guinea (3%), with Japan (10%), Malaysia (15%), and Thailand (16%) not much further ahead.³⁸ By contrast, the highest women's representation levels are in Australia (30%), Timor-Leste (38%), and New Zealand (41%) but these levels are low compared to countries like Mexico (48.2%), Bolivia (53.1%), Cuba (53.2%), and Rwanda (61.3%).³⁹

It's also important to note that seeing women in more-powerful upper house roles is a far better indicator of *meaningful* gender parity than what is often token women's representation in lower houses. Like most regions, Asia falls behind with 17.7% of upper house seats occupied by women.⁴⁰ While some countries such as Indonesia have enacted quotas to increase the number of women holding public office, only Timor-Leste has met its quota.⁴¹ Impressively, Timor-Leste's Prime Minister has also avoided the trap of allocating only "soft" industries like health care to women ministers by appointing women in finance and justice ministerial roles.⁴²

Women's involvement in peace initiatives is also an important element of the WPS Participation pillar. The Philippines has forged ahead in this area, having appointed Miriam Coronel-Ferrer as the first woman in history to act as chief negotiator and sign a final peace accord between the Philippine government and an armed insurgent group, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, in 2014.⁴³ Still, in most cases women's contributions as peacebuilders in the Indo-Pacific

³⁴ "Proportion of Seats Held by Women in National Parliaments (%) - East Asia & Pacific | Data," The World Bank Data, accessed February 1, 2021,

<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SG.GEN.PARL.ZS?contextual=default&locations=Z4>.

³⁵ "Proportion of Seats Held by Women in National Parliaments (%) - Middle East & North Africa | Data," The World Bank Data, accessed February 1, 2021,

<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SG.GEN.PARL.ZS?contextual=default&locations=ZQ>.

³⁶ "Proportion of Seats Held by Women in National Parliaments (%) - Central Europe and the Baltics | Data," accessed February 1, 2021,

<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SG.GEN.PARL.ZS?contextual=default&locations=B8>.

³⁷ "Proportion of Seats Held by Women in National Parliaments (%) - United States | Data," The World Bank Data, accessed February 1, 2021,

<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SG.GEN.PARL.ZS?contextual=default&locations=US>.

³⁸ "Proportion of Seats Held by Women in National Parliaments (%) - East Asia & Pacific | Data," The World Bank Data, accessed February 1, 2021,

<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SG.GEN.PARL.ZS?contextual=default&locations=Z4>.

³⁹ Alex Thornton, "These Countries Have the Most Women in Parliament," *World Economic Forum* (blog), February 12, 2019, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/02/chart-of-the-day-these-countries-have-the-most-women-in-parliament/>.

⁴⁰ "Women in Parliaments: World and Regional Averages," Inter-Parliamentary Union, accessed February 1, 2021, <http://archive.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm>.

⁴¹ "Proportion of Seats Held by Women in National Parliaments (%) - Timor-Leste, Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam, Myanmar | Data," The World Bank Data, accessed February 1, 2021,

<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SG.GEN.PARL.ZS?locations=TL-PH-ID-TH-VN-MM>.

⁴² "The Role of Women in Making and Building Peace," United Nations (United Nations), accessed February 1, 2021, <https://www.un.org/en/chronicle/article/role-women-making-and-building-peace>.

⁴³ "The Philippines | CFR Interactives," Council on Foreign Relations, accessed February 10, 2021, <https://www.cfr.org/womens-participation-in-peace-processes/Philippines>.

continue to be external to formal peace processes.⁴⁴ Notable grassroots women's movements in Myanmar,⁴⁵ the Pacific Islands Region, the Philippines, and Timor-Leste have amplified women's voices in conflict mitigation.

In the Indo-Pacific, men still vastly outnumber women in national security institutions, particularly in senior roles. There have been some positive steps towards women's inclusion in national security institutions. In 2020, India took the decision to allow women to serve as army commanders⁴⁶ and South Korea appointed its first female two-star general in 2019, who was also placed at the helm of the Army's Aviation Operations Command.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, the number of women serving in militaries around the region is almost negligible—women comprise approximately 5% of national armed forces. However, for some countries this figure is even lower—in Myanmar, women account for just 0.2% of military personnel.⁴⁸ In addition, there are major barriers to women's entry into security institutions—for instance, female members of the Timorese navy are barred from serving at sea⁴⁹ and Indonesian women are forced to undergo virginity testing before being accepted into the military.⁵⁰

Policy Recommendations for the WPS Participation Pillar in the Indo-Pacific

Given the region's poor record on women's participation as decision-makers within national security and policymaking settings, there are many areas the Biden-Harris administration could focus on to advance the WPS Participation pillar in the region.

- Join the Elsie Initiative for Women in Peace Operations Contact Group, an effort to increase the number of female uniformed personnel in UN peacekeeping, which could be instrumental in increasing women's participation in security and peacekeeping settings. The initiative aims to help member countries overcome barriers to meaningful

⁴⁴ "Under-Secretary-General DiCarlo: 'Women's Contributions to Peace and Security Are Still Often Outside the Mainstream of Formal Efforts, and Too Frequently Undervalued' | Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs" (UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, October 2, 2020), <https://dppa.un.org/en/under-secretary-general-dicarlo-womens-contributions-to-peace-and-security-are-still-often-outside>.

⁴⁵ "Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding."

⁴⁶ "Indian Army Inducted 364 Women Officers in 2019," *The Economic Times - India Times*, March 2, 2020, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/indian-army-inducted-364-women-officers-in-2019/articleshow/74447248.cms?from=mdr>.

⁴⁷ "Female Soldiers Account for 6.8% of S. Korea's Armed Forces | Yonhap News Agency," *Yonhap News Agency* (blog), January 29, 2020, <https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20200129008600325>.

⁴⁸ "Integration of Women and Gender Perspective into the Myanmar Armed Forces to Improve Civil-Military Relations in Myanmar," *Army University Press*, accessed February 1, 2021, <https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/Military-Review/English-Edition-Archives/November-December-2019/Byrd-Myanmar-Gender-Armed-Forces/>.

⁴⁹ Dylan Nicholson and Dylan Nicholson, "HMAS Maitland Promotes Inclusion during Visit to Timor-Leste," *Defence Connect* (blog), March 11, 2020, <https://www.defenceconnect.com.au/maritime-antisub/5748-hmas-maitland-promotes-inclusion-during-visit-to-timor-leste>.

⁵⁰ "Indonesia: No End to Abusive 'Virginity Tests,'" *Human Rights Watch* (blog), November 22, 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/11/22/indonesia-no-end-abusive-virginity-tests>.

participation of women in security and police operations.⁵¹ Funding must also be appropriated to contribute to the UN Trust Fund for the Elsie Initiative.⁵²

- Direct the State Department to identify key stakeholders and partners in the Indo-Pacific with which to collaborate on how to increase women's participation in peace processes, government, and the security sector.
- Appoint a Women, Peace and Security Advisor to the US National Security Council to ensure White House prioritization of WPS principles and programs.
- Develop a roster of women peace negotiators from every Indo-Pacific state to make it easier to identify informed individuals who have the capacity to contribute to peacebuilding.⁵³ This work could build off the list already started by the ASEAN Women For Peace Registry (AWPR).⁵⁴
- Insist that inclusion of women in peace processes be a requirement and not an "nice to have" add-on, recognizing that women's participation increases success and length of peace negotiations.
- Prioritize gender mainstreaming within all decision-making processes and placement of gender experts at all levels within US federal security sector organizations.⁵⁵ Encourage Indo-Pacific countries to do the same.
- Encourage USINDOPACOM to apply lessons learned by other combatant commands. For instance, US Africa Command has focused on capacity-building support to troop-contributing African countries. US Southern Command emphasizes the participation of women in senior leader engagements with strategic partners, which has been especially important in their work to counter violent extremist organizations that try to exploit gender norms to gain community support.⁵⁶
- Emphasize with USINDOPACOM leadership that WPS is not a soft power issue on which only women should focus. Instead, leadership should stress the need to increase men as allies for WPS work within the security sector to ensure WPS efforts are not the sole responsibility of women. Encourage senior US and Indo-Pacific security sector leaders to support the *Mobilizing Men as Partners for Women, Peace and Security* Charter and join the initiative.⁵⁷

⁵¹ "Elsie Initiative for Women in Peace Operations," Government of Canada, February 21, 2017, https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/issues_development-enjeux_developpement/gender_equality-egalite_des_genres/elsie_initiative-initiative_elsie.aspx?lang=eng.

⁵² "Policy Brief: US Leadership on Women and Foreign Policy: Recommendations for the 116th Congress" (One Earth Future), accessed February 4, 2021, https://www.oursecurefuture.org/sites/default/files/wps-recommendations-for-congress_web.pdf.

⁵³ "Women, Peace and Transforming Security: Visions of the Future of Women, Peace and Security for NATO" (Office of the NATO Secretary General's Special Representative for Women, Peace and Security, October 31, 2020), 37, https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2020/10/pdf/201110-wps-essay-transforming-security-e.pdf.

⁵⁴ "ASEAN Women For Peace Registry (AWPR)," ASEAN Institute for Peace and Reconciliation, accessed February 17, 2021, <https://asean-aipr.org/asean-women-peace-registry/>.

⁵⁵ Queenie Pearl Tomaro, "Mainstreaming Women, Peace, and Security in ASEAN," *ASEAN-Australia Strategic Youth Partnership* (blog), October 29, 2020, <https://aasyp.org/2020/10/29/mainstreaming-women-peace-and-security-in-asean/>.

⁵⁶ Jim Garamone, "Women, Peace and Security Initiative Militarily Effective," *US Department of Defense* (blog), August 21, 2020, <https://www.defense.gov/Explore/News/Article/Article/2407094/women-security-peace-initiative-militarily-effective/>.

⁵⁷ "Mobilizing Men As Partners | The Case for Inclusion," Our Secure Future, accessed February 8, 2021, <https://www.oursecurefuture.org/projects/mobilizing-men-wps/initiative-structure>.

- Track WPS training more thoroughly within USINDOPACOM. By law, the US Department of Defense (DOD) must incorporate WPS principles, including in combatant command strategies. Through the Daniel K. Inouye Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies (DKI APCSS) and the US Army Pacific, USINDOPACOM's WPS office has recently conducted workshops to improve the integration of WPS principles in disaster response support and humanitarian assistance. DKI APCSS has promoted the use of the PMESII-PT/GSP4 Gendered Security Analysis Tool (GSAT), which takes gendered security principles (based on the four pillars of WPS) into consideration when assessing the political, military, economic, social, information, infrastructure, physical environment, and time variables of the operational environment.⁵⁸ It also makes use of the Gender Analysis in Strategic Planning tool developed by the Department of State for its training.⁵⁹ These and other educational tools are used to provide programming to defense and security sectors within Indo-Pacific countries, such as the Women's Mentorship Program in Mongolia.⁶⁰ DKI APCSS tracks the percentage of women attending its courses, and shows an improvement from 11% in 2000 to 30% in 2020.⁶¹ This work is important, but could be strengthened by also tracking and looking to increase the number of men participating in WPS training.
- Make WPS education a requirement for all senior-level security leaders regardless of gender and integrate it into existing training for US and Indo-Pacific military personnel at all levels.⁶²

WPS PREVENTION AND PROTECTION

Background on the WPS Prevention and Protection Pillars

Two other closely linked and important aspects of the WPS agenda are the Prevention and Protection pillars. The Prevention pillar looks to address root causes of gender inequalities as sources of conflict, seeks to support women as peacebuilders, and focuses on holistic approaches to preventing violence at any scale, but especially violence against women and girls before societal-level violence breaks out. The Protection pillar focuses more specifically on shielding women from violence within conflict, post-conflict, and fragile settings. At the heart of both pillars is what threatens women's safety in fragile and conflict settings: the deeper and often hidden structures that impact women as defined by patriarchal and patrilineal gender

⁵⁸ "PMESIPT-GSP4-GSAT-Gendered-Security-Analysis-Tool_MINNICH" (Daniel K. Inouye Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies (DKI APCSS), July 2020), https://apcss.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/PMESIPT-GSP4-GSAT-Gendered-Security-Analysis-Tool_MINNICH_20200726.gif.

⁵⁹ "DOS-Gender-and-ICS-Training" (Daniel K. Inouye Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies (DKI APCSS)), accessed February 1, 2021, https://apcss.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/20180515_DOS-Gender-and-ICS-Training1533-1.pdf.

⁶⁰ "DOS-Gender-and-ICS-Training" (Daniel K. Inouye Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies (DKI APCSS)), accessed February 1, 2021, https://apcss.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/20180515_DOS-Gender-and-ICS-Training1533-1.pdf.

⁶¹ "Women Peace and Security (WPS) | Course Enrollment Trends for Women," Daniel K. Inouye Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies (DKI APCSS), August 21, 2020, <https://apcss.org/home/programs/women-peace-and-security/>.

⁶² Jim Garamone, "Women, Peace and Security Initiative Militarily Effective," *US Department of Defense* (blog), August 21, 2020, <https://www.defense.gov/Explore/News/Article/Article/2407094/women-security-peace-initiative-militarily-effective/>.

norms. Patriarchal norms focus on subordinating women to men by defining power structures such that men maintain dominance. Patrilineal norms are common in societies in which a family's name, titles, rights, and land are passed down through the male side of a family.⁶³ When either type of norm is codified into law, the subjugation of women becomes structural, and can be seen in regulations that define marriage age, inheritance rights, property ownership, who can obtain a divorce, and who has custody over children. In conservative communities in which humans are divided into two groups based on gender (group A for men, group B for women), group A frequently possesses all the power to determine who is subordinate, makes decisions, controls resources, has agency, and how conflicts between the groups are resolved. In such situations, it is easy to see how group A could ignore or punish group B should group B protest the arrangement (e.g., through gender-based violence).⁶⁴

Both patriarchal and patrilineal norms and laws have been shown to increase the likelihood that women will experience violence since they permit the use of violence to ensure compliance with hierarchical structures that benefit men.⁶⁵ Examples include intimate partner violence (IPV), acid throwings, female genital mutilation, honor killings, and so on. According to Hudson, et al., "Societies established on a foundation of female subordination simultaneously promote the normalization of violence as a means of dispute resolution. Individual men who participate in group-sanctioned, violent coercion of women are more likely to become fighters willing to use force to obtain political ends."⁶⁶ Consequently, family law is one of the easiest ways to visualize unequal gender norms and track how society instability increases as gender inequality increases.⁶⁷ The Prevention pillar of the WPS Agenda, therefore, focuses on addressing these root gender norms in order to stabilize communities and prevent violence from developing.

The Protection pillar, on the other hand, focuses on the violence women experience as civilians in conflict settings. This can take many forms. Sexual violence, especially when rape is used as a weapon of war, is the most obvious threat to women civilians. Rape and sexual violence are used as methods of ethnic cleansing, as forms of terror to clear geographic areas, and in psychological warfare to tear at the fabric of society. Sexual violence leaves women with deep

⁶³ Abeda Sultana, "Patriarchy and Women's Subordination: A Theoretical Analysis," *The Arts Faculty Journal, University of Dhaka* June 2010-2011 (2011): 7, https://www.banglajol.info/index.php/2FAFJ/2Farticle/2Fview/2F12929/2F9293&usg=AOvVaw1KILKcVd5-HhWlvJrh_NQy.

⁶⁴ Valerie M. Hudson, Donna Lee Bowen, and Perpetua Lynne Nielsen, "We Are Not Helpless: Addressing Structural Gender Inequality in Post-Conflict Societies," *PRISM | National Defense University* 6, no. 1 (March 1, 2016), <http://cco.ndu.edu/News/Article/685045/we-are-not-helpless-addressing-structural-gender-inequality-in-post-conflict-so/>.

⁶⁵ Valerie M. Hudson, Donna Lee Bowen, and Perpetua Lynne Nielsen, "We Are Not Helpless: Addressing Structural Gender Inequality in Post-Conflict Societies," *PRISM | National Defense University* 6, no. 1 (March 1, 2016), <http://cco.ndu.edu/News/Article/685045/we-are-not-helpless-addressing-structural-gender-inequality-in-post-conflict-so/>.

⁶⁶ Valerie Hudson and Patricia Leidl, "Should Sex Matter in US Foreign Policy?," in *The Hillary Doctrine: Sex and American Foreign Policy* (Columbia University Press, 2015), Kindle location 2119, <https://www.universitypressscholarship.com/view/10.7312/columbia/9780231164924.001.0001/upso-9780231164924>.

⁶⁷ Mary Caprioli, "Gender Equality and State Aggression: The Impact of Domestic Gender Equality on State First Use of Force," *International Interactions* 29, no. 3 (July 1, 2003): 195, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03050620304595>.

physical, mental, and emotional scars that can take decades to heal and may have significant impacts on a woman's ability to earn a living or to reintegrate into her community.⁶⁸ Researchers have demonstrated that when a government fails to address the consequences of sexual violence through laws that hold perpetrators accountable and with systems that allow victims to seek redress, a community may struggle to recover from the violence, leaving it more vulnerable to future political instability.⁶⁹

Civilian women and girls are also more likely to suffer the indirect consequences of violence. In conflict zones, women experience greater loss of access to clean water, food, and hygiene; losses of property; and disruptions of normal life.⁷⁰ Additionally, as their husbands and fathers are killed in conflict, women often suddenly must take on head of household duties as well as childcare and earning an income for the family⁷¹—roles for which they may be unprepared because of cultural norms that have prevented them from learning the needed life skills.

Biden-Harris on the WPS Protection and Prevention Pillars

Despite Biden's substantial involvement in foreign policy as vice president from 2008 to 2016, and Harris' time on the Senate Committee on Intelligence, neither individual has specifically endorsed women's policies in international contexts. As a result, it is difficult to predict how they will approach the Protection and Prevention pillars in the Indo-Pacific. Nevertheless, by briefly examining their roles in issues that impact American women, we can find clues as to how their administration may advance women's issues globally.

As a senator, Joe Biden has taken steps to advance the implementation of policies that align with two pillars. In the early 1990s, Biden was disturbed by the fact that marital rape was virtually impossible to prosecute in most states, despite some 15% of American women experiencing marital rape annually.⁷² Consequently, he introduced a Senate Violence Against Women (VAW) bill in 1990, which was signed into law by President Bill Clinton in September 1994. The Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) has been characterized by Biden as his "proudest legislative accomplishment"⁷³ in large part because it was responsible for a 72% drop in intimate partner violence (IPV) rates from 1993 to 2011.⁷⁴

⁶⁸ Cassandra Clifford, "Rape as a Weapon of War and It's Long-Term Effects on Victims and Society" (7th Global Conference: Violence and the Contexts of Hostility, Budapest, Hungary, May 5, 2008), 7, https://www.peacewomen.org/sites/default/files/vaw_rapeasaweaponofwar_stopmodernslavery_may2008_0.pdf.

⁶⁹ Cassandra Clifford, "Rape as a Weapon of War and It's Long-Term Effects on Victims and Society" (7th Global Conference: Violence and the Contexts of Hostility, Budapest, Hungary, May 5, 2008), 7, https://www.peacewomen.org/sites/default/files/vaw_rapeasaweaponofwar_stopmodernslavery_may2008_0.pdf.

⁷⁰ Thomas Plümper and Eric Neumayer, "The Unequal Burden of War: The Effect of Armed Conflict on the Gender Gap in Life Expectancy," *International Organization* 60, no. 3 (2006): 724.

⁷¹ "Women in War: A Particularly Vulnerable Group? - ICRC," *International Committee of the Red Cross* (blog), 11:31:35.0, /eng/resources/documents/feature/2007/women-vulnerability-010307.htm.

⁷² Lily Rothman, "When Spousal Rape First Became a Crime in the US," *Time*, July 28, 2015, <https://time.com/3975175/spousal-rape-case-history/>.

⁷³ Mary Pat Treuthart, "Feminist-in-Chief? Examining President Obama's Executive Orders on Women's Rights Issues," *Chicago-Kent Law Review* 91, no. 1 (January 29, 2016): 37.

⁷⁴ Shannan Catalano, "Intimate Partner Violence: Attributes of Victimization, 1993–2011," *US Department of Justice*, November 2013, 19.

On women-focused policies, Harris has received both criticism and praise during her years in public life. As California attorney general, she pursued "tough on crime"⁷⁵ policies, some of which disproportionately affected low-income women.⁷⁶ Commentators have argued that as a Black female prosecutor facing intersectional racial and gender prejudices, she had to prove her commitment to tackling crime.⁷⁷ However, with the increased influence that comes with being a US senator, Harris championed criminal justice reform⁷⁸ and fought for women's issues within and outside the justice system.⁷⁹ She has also recently demonstrated her support for policies that protect women from violence. In 2019, Harris co-sponsored the EMPOWER Act to protect workers on Capitol Hill from harassment,⁸⁰ and a \$1 billion bill that would clear the 400,000 untested rape kit backlog sitting in police property rooms.⁸¹ Harris also frequently positions violence against women as an economic issue, arguing that with economic empowerment, women are far less likely to be trapped in abusive relationships.⁸²

The VAWA expired as of February 2019.⁸³ Though the House of Representatives passed a 2019 VAWA Reauthorization Act supported by all Senate Democrats, then-Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell refused to bring the bill to a vote. Going forward, Biden and Harris have made VAWA reauthorization one of the top first-100-day priorities and will expand it with clauses that provide greater justice and support for survivors; protection for young people experiencing sexual violence; laws to curtail online harassment, abuse, and stalking; and an end to the rape kit backlog.⁸⁴

⁷⁵ German Lopez, "Kamala Harris's Controversial Record on Criminal Justice, Explained," *Vox* (blog), January 23, 2019, <https://www.vox.com/future-perfect/2019/1/23/18184192/kamala-harris-president-campaign-criminal-justice-record>.

⁷⁶ "Will Kamala Harris Have the Support of Black Women? Don't Assume That | Shanita Hubbard," *the Guardian*, January 27, 2019, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/jan/27/kamala-harris-black-women-progressives-support-record>.

⁷⁷ "Kamala Harris Was a Tough-on-Crime Prosecutor in a Black Lives Matter Era," *The Appeal* (blog), accessed February 1, 2021, <https://theappeal.org/kamala-harris-was-a-tough-on-crime-prosecutor-in-a-black-lives-matter-era/>.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ Senator Kamala Harris, "Kamala Harris On Criminal Justice Reform, Women Incarceration - Essence," *Essence* (blog), July 26, 2017, <https://www.essence.com/news/kamala-harris-women-incarceration-rates-criminal-justice-reform/>.

⁸⁰ Jocelyn Frye et al., "Transforming the Culture of Power," *Center for American Progress* (blog), October 31, 2019, <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/women/reports/2019/10/31/476588/transforming-culture-power/>.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² Amanda Fortini, "Kamala Harris Is Ready to Talk About 'the Elephant in the Room,'" *InStyle.Com* (blog), October 14, 2019, <https://www.instyle.com/news/kamala-harris-breaking-barriers-interview-first-black-woman-president>.

⁸³ Kate Thayer, "The Violence Against Women Act Has Expired. Advocates Say That Sends a Dangerous Message and Are Pushing for Permanent Protections. - Chicago Tribune," *Chicago Tribune*, February 21, 2019, <https://www.chicagotribune.com/lifestyles/ct-life-violence-against-women-act-expired-20190220-story.html>.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

The State of WPS Protection and Prevention Pillars in the Indo-Pacific

Application of the WPS Protection and Prevention pillar principles within the Indo-Pacific still has a long way to go. Rates of violence against women vary widely among Indo-Pacific countries, but continue to be high in all: 37% of women in South Asia, 40% in Southeast Asia, and 68% in the Pacific have experienced violence at the hands of an intimate partner.⁸⁵ While the percentage of women who have experienced some kind of physical or sexual violence in their lifetimes is lowest in Bhutan at 15%, 46% of women living in Timor-Leste experience GBV, with the highest rates (68%) in Kiribati and Papua New Guinea.^{86, 87} South Asia is the region with the highest rates of acid attacks in the world: there have been 3,500 Bangladeshi victims in the past two decades, and 349 victims in India in 2014 alone.⁸⁸ Honor killings are also common in India and Bangladesh.⁸⁹ Asia also reported 20,000 intentional deaths of women and girls in 2017,⁹⁰ more than any other region of the world. Importantly, data on violence against women is extremely difficult to collect. As a consequence, most experts suggest the actual numbers are higher, especially in regions where IPV is culturally acceptable.⁹¹ Data collection challenges and the spike in GBV as a result of COVID-19 make the implementation of the Protection and Prevention pillars all the more urgent.⁹²

The Fragility Index is an assessment framework that indicates a society's vulnerability to collapse. Countries with higher levels of fragility generally tend to have higher levels of GBV. In a 2017 OECD case study of Bangladesh, researchers connected that state's high fragility with its low level of gender inequality.⁹³ The country ranks 39th highest out of 178 countries on the Fragility Index⁹⁴ and according to the UN Development Programme has a Gender Development Index (GDI) score of 0.904 (with a score of 1 being the highest level of inequality).⁹⁵ Women's low status, lack of autonomy over bodily health and finances, high levels

⁸⁵ "Focus Areas: End Violence against Women," UN Women | Asia and the Pacific, accessed February 1, 2021, <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/focus-areas/end-violence-against-women>.

⁸⁶ "Facts and Figures," UN Women | Asia and the Pacific, accessed February 1, 2021, <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/focus-areas/end-violence-against-women/evaw-facts-and-figures>.

⁸⁷ "KNOWVAWdata Regional VAW Map April 13 2019" (United Nations Population Fund | Asia Pacific, May 2019), <https://asiapacific.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/resource-pdf/kNOwVAWdata%20regional%20VAW%20map%20April%2013%202019.pdf>.

⁸⁸ "Acid Attacks in South Asia," *Yale Global Health Review* (blog), October 15, 2015, <https://yaleglobalhealthreview.com/2015/10/15/acid-attacks-in-south-asia/>.

⁸⁹ "Honour Killings By Region," *Honour Based Violence Awareness Network* (blog), accessed February 10, 2021, <http://hbv-awareness.com/regions/>.

⁹⁰ "Global Study on Homicide: Gender-Related Killing of Women and Girls" (United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime, 2018), https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/GSH2018/GSH18_Gender-related_killing_of_women_and_girls.pdf.

⁹¹ "Chapter 6: Violence against Women," in *World's Women 2015* (United Nations Stats, 2015), https://unstats.un.org/unsd/gender/downloads/WorldsWomen2015_chapter6_t.pdf.

⁹² "Elevating Women Peacebuilders amidst Covid-19," CSIS Briefs (Center for Strategic & International Studies, August 10, 2020), <https://www.csis.org/analysis/elevating-women-peacebuilders-amidst-covid-19>.

⁹³ "Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Situations: A Review of Donor Support," OECD Development Policy Papers, vol. 8, OECD Development Policy Papers, December 6, 2017, <https://doi.org/10.1787/b75a1229-en>.

⁹⁴ "Country Dashboard | Fragile States Index," Fragile States Index, Bangladesh, accessed February 3, 2021, <https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/>.

⁹⁵ "Bangladesh," United Nations Development Programme Human Development Indicators, accessed February 3, 2021, <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/BGD>.

of child marriage and GBV, labor market segregation, and lack of access to income and land all factor into Bangladesh's high GDI score. The country's gender inequality is foundational to the fragility felt in Bangladesh, which is evidenced in patronage-based and polarized politics, weak rule of law, discrimination of indigenous Pahari and Rohingya, and religiously motivated violence and terrorism.⁹⁶ Bangladesh is not the only country with high fragility and high GDI scores. On the Fragility Index, many countries in the Indo-Pacific rank as "high warning" (Cambodia, Philippines, Timor-Leste, and Bangladesh) or the more elevated status of "alert" (North Korea and Myanmar).⁹⁷ Most countries in the Indo-Pacific region rank poorly on the GDI, with many losing ground over the past 25 years on gender equality (see Table 1).⁹⁸

⁹⁶ "Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Situations: A Review of Donor Support," 8:34.

⁹⁷ "Fragile States Index 2020 – Annual Report" (The Fund For Peace, May 2020), <https://fragilestatesindex.org/2020/05/08/fragile-states-index-2020-annual-report/>.

⁹⁸ "Human Development Reports | Gender Development Index (GDI)" (United Nations Development Programme, 2020), <http://hdr.undp.org/en/indicators/137906#>.

Table 1: Indo-Pacific Countries Gender Development Index (GDI), 1995 to 2019 | UN Development Programme⁹⁹

HDI Rank	Country	1995	2019
8	Australia	0.964	0.976
133	Bangladesh	0.711	0.904
129	Bhutan	..	0.921
47	Brunei Darussalam	0.952	0.981
144	Cambodia	0.834	0.922
85	China	0.912	0.958
93	Fiji
4	Hong Kong, China (SAR)	..	0.972
107	Indonesia	0.881	0.94
19	Japan	0.953	0.978
23	Korea (Republic of)	0.91	0.936
137	Lao People's Democratic Republic	0.833	0.927
62	Malaysia	..	0.972
99	Mongolia	0.971	1.023
147	Myanmar	0.898	0.954
142	Nepal	0.754	0.933
14	New Zealand	0.971	0.964
155	Papua New Guinea	0.836	..
107	Philippines	0.961	1.007
11	Singapore	..	0.985
79	Thailand	0.976	1.008
141	Timor-Leste	..	0.942
117	Viet Nam	0.946	0.997

⁹⁹ Adapted from: “Human Development Reports | Gender Development Index (GDI)” (United Nations Development Programme, 2020), <http://hdr.undp.org/en/indicators/137906#>.

In terms of protection of women from violence in conflict settings, there are still areas for improvement in the Indo-Pacific. The most recent event of mass violence occurred in Myanmar when an estimated 17,000 Rohingya women and girls were raped as 700,000 Rohingya Muslims fled from Myanmar into Bangladesh.¹⁰⁰ A UN fact-finding mission concluded that Myanmar's military had used sexual violence routinely to inflict a culture of humiliation.¹⁰¹ Women from West Papua—an Indonesian province that has been blighted by a lengthy insurgency—are routinely subjected to sexual violence. Indonesian security agents habitually sexually assault Papuan women as a means of land-grabbing and as a form of punishment when their husbands are suspected to be involved in OPM (Free Papua movement) insurgent group.¹⁰²

Another metric for understanding the status of the WPS agenda in the Indo-Pacific is the number of National Action Plans (NAPs) adopted. NAPs are practical documents that outline a country's commitments to taking action to meet UNSCR WPS obligations. They allow civil society to hold governments accountable to meeting concrete policy and program objectives. Within the Indo-Pacific, many countries have yet to develop NAPs, including Bhutan, Brunei, Cambodia, Fiji, India, Laos, Malaysia, Maldives, Myanmar, Papua New Guinea, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Thailand, and Vietnam.¹⁰³

There has been some exploration of the idea of forming a regional bloc for addressing WPS, including through the 2015 ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on the Elimination of Violence against Women (ASEAN RPA on EVAW),¹⁰⁴ the 2016 Asia-Pacific Symposium on National Action Plans on Women, Peace and Security,¹⁰⁵ the 2017 Joint Statement on Promoting Women, Peace and Security in ASEAN,¹⁰⁶ as well as the 2018 inaugural ASEAN-Australia

¹⁰⁰ Nazmun Naher Shishir, "Violence against Women Is a Weapon of War," *The Business Standard* (blog), November 25, 2019, <http://tbsnews.net/opinion/violence-against-women-weapon-war>; Djaouida Siaci, "The Mass Rape of Rohingya Muslim Women: An All-Out War Against All Women," *Middle East Institute* (blog), September 29, 2019, <https://www.mei.edu/publications/mass-rape-rohingya-muslim-women-all-out-war-against-all-women>.

¹⁰¹ "UN Says Myanmar Uses Sexual Violence as Weapon of War," Anadolu Agency, August 23, 2019, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/americas/un-says-myanmar-uses-sexual-violence-as-weapon-of-war/1562804>.

¹⁰² Szilvia Csevar, "Sexualised Violence and Land Grabbing: Forgotten Conflict and Ignored Victims in West Papua," *London School of Economics*, August 2019, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/wps/2019/08/21/sexualised-violence-and-land-grabbing-forgotten-conflict-and-ignored-victims-in-west-papua/>.

¹⁰³ "National Action Plans for Implementation of UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security - National-Level Implementation," PeaceWomen, November 14, 2014, <https://www.peacewomen.org/member-states>. Countries that have adopted their own NAP include The Philippines, Nepal, Australia, Indonesia, ROK, Japan, New Zealand, and Timor-Leste.

¹⁰⁴ "ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on the Elimination of Violence against Women (ASEAN RPA on EVAW)," ASEAN | ONE VISION ONE IDENTITY ONE COMMUNITY, 2015, https://asean.org/?static_post=asean-regional-plan-action-elimination-violence-women-asean-rpa-evaw.

¹⁰⁵ "Report of the Asia-Pacific Symposium on National Action Plans on Women, Peace and Security," UN Women | Asia and the Pacific, 2016, <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/digital-library/publications/2016/12/nap-report>.

¹⁰⁶ "Joint Statement on Promoting Women, Peace and Security in ASEAN" (Heads of State/Government of the Member States of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, November 2017), https://asean.org/storage/2017/11/8.-ADOPTION_Joint-Statement-on-Promoting-Women-Peace-and-Security-in-ASEANACWC-Endorsed_rev2.pdf.

Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Dialogue.¹⁰⁷ In 2019, the Joint Statement was reaffirmed and included stronger and more specific language, but none of these attempts have resulted in a final agreement. Additionally, there is division within the region on how to approach the WPS Agenda, with the ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC) Blueprint 2025 making little mention of security concerns related to women and girls, sidelining most of that content by including it in the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) Blueprint 2025 where it will have little impact on the security sector.

Policy Recommendations for the WPS Prevention and Protection Pillars in the Indo-Pacific

On matters related to the WPS Protection and Prevention pillars in the Indo-Pacific, there are numerous opportunities for a Biden-Harris administration to push for implementation.

- Encourage all Indo-Pacific countries to adopt their own NAPs.¹⁰⁸
- Insist that all Indo-Pacific NAPs include provisions for sufficient resources to implement gender equity goals to ensure effectiveness.
- Develop regional accountability mechanisms and mechanisms for monitoring progress.¹⁰⁹ For instance, nations could join under a regional NAP-WPS bloc such as those created in the African Union and the European Union.¹¹⁰ Formalizing this work through a regional action plan (RAP) would provide an accountability mechanism for member states and would also be a way to galvanize collective action, both of which will be important in realizing WPS goals in the region. Given the significant difficulties in obtaining accurate state-level GBV data, as part of a RAP, a Biden-Harris WPS policy should insist on a regional mechanism for monitoring and analyzing gender-based violence levels, both within and outside of conflict settings. Such data would enable accountability of national governments and provide clear guidance on how to develop targeted laws that protect women and methods for redress for victims.¹¹¹
- Encourage states to see the safety of women and inequitable family law as barriers to internal stability rather than as moral imperatives, since many will be unimpressed by moral or norms-based arguments. Instead, develop a framework for rewarding those states that make progress toward reforms in these areas. Valerie Hudson and her research team recommend that rather than naming and shaming tactics, US foreign policy should focus on consulting local experts and making space for these experts to

¹⁰⁷ Sara E Davies and Katrina Lee-Koo, "ASEAN-Australia Women, Peace and Security Dialogue: The Implementation of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda: ASEAN and the Region" (Monash Gender, Peace and Security, April 2018), https://www.monash.edu/__data/assets/pdf_file/0015/1802031/Background-paper-ASEAN-Australia-WPS.pdf.

¹⁰⁸ "Report of the Secretary-General on Women and Peace and Security (S-2019-800)" (United Nations Security Council, October 9, 2019), <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Report%20of%20the%20Secretary-General%20on%20women%20and%20peace%20and%20security%20%28S-2019-800%29.pdf>.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ "National Action Plans for Implementation of UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security - National-Level Implementation."

¹¹¹ Jacqui True, "Conflict in Asia and the Role of Gender-Based Violence," Essays on The State of Conflict and Violence in Asia (Asia Foundation, 2017), https://asiafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Essays_on_The_State_of_Conflict_and_Violence_in_Asia.pdf.

work with respected elites to gain support for equitable family law and other WPS principles.¹¹² Soft power may allow US leaders to find greater advancement of the WPS agenda than hard tactics, especially given the long timelines of this type of cultural change.

- Push nations to develop laws that protect women’s bodily integrity and address gender disparities in decision-making councils.¹¹³ Changes to laws should include criminal code revisions related to acid throwings, honor killings, female genital mutilation, and GBV. These law revisions must protect and care for survivors and witnesses; prohibit informal financial settlements in criminal cases; and prevent obstructions of justice by setting codes of conduct for police, officials, judges, and prosecutors.¹¹⁴
- Cultivate long-term plans for WPS development in the region, recognizing that changing local religious and cultural customs requires time.
- Develop mechanisms for monitoring and countering any rollback of women’s rights advancement, which will inevitably arise and which has been a problem during the COVID-19 pandemic.¹¹⁵

WPS RELIEF AND RECOVERY

Introduction to Relief and Recovery

The Relief and Recovery Pillar, which was integrated into the WPS Agenda in 2007, calls for gender mainstreaming in humanitarian efforts. It is grounded in the understanding that gender norms impact all societies and that the inequalities these norms precipitate are exacerbated during disaster scenarios and in volatile settings.¹¹⁶ As such, the pillar calls for lessening the severity of these inequalities by making gender an integral component of humanitarian assistance. It emphasizes that emergency aid must incorporate the needs of women, especially those belonging to vulnerable groups who have been acutely affected by instability. Such groups include, but are not limited to, displaced women and girls, people with disabilities, survivors of GBV, and female widows.¹¹⁷ The Relief and Recovery Pillar demands that these groups be afforded active roles in recovery—not merely as participants, but as influential decision-makers who have the power to shape response plans.¹¹⁸ The importance of applying a gender-inclusive approach in humanitarian engagement is brought into sharp focus when examining three

¹¹² Hudson, Bowen, and Nielsen, "We Are Not Helpless: Addressing Structural Gender Inequality in Post-Conflict Societies."

¹¹³ Alexander L. Vuving, *Hindsight, Insight, Foresight: Thinking About Security in the Indo-Pacific* (USA: Daniel K. Inouye Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies (DKI APCSS), 2020), <https://purl.fdlp.gov/GPO/gpo147233>.

¹¹⁴ "'What Hell Feels Like': Acid Violence in Cambodia," Human Rights Watch, February 4, 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2019/02/04/what-hell-feels/acid-violence-cambodia>.

¹¹⁵ Hudson, Bowen, and Nielsen, "We Are Not Helpless: Addressing Structural Gender Inequality in Post-Conflict Societies."

¹¹⁶ National Defense University Press, "Women on the Frontlines of Peace and Security / with a Foreword by Hillary Rodham Clinton and Leon Panetta" (NDU Press, 2014).

¹¹⁷ "Women, Peace and Security and Humanitarianism – 3 Ideas for a Return to Radical Action," ODI, accessed February 8, 2021, <https://www.odi.org/blogs/17508-women-peace-and-security-and-humanitarianism-3-ideas-return-radical-action>.

¹¹⁸ National Defense University Press, "Women on the Frontlines of Peace and Security."

contemporary and ongoing crises: conflict and displacement, climate change, and the COVID-19 pandemic, all of which disproportionately impact women and girls.

Conflict and Displacement

Armed conflicts and mass atrocities committed against minority groups continue to plague much of the globe. Approximately 1.2 billion people are impacted by violence and insecurity,¹¹⁹ and it is predicted that by 2030 half of the world's extreme poor will live in war-torn and fragile countries.¹²⁰ Widespread violence has resulted in mass displacement—the global population of internally displaced people currently stands at 46 million,¹²¹ with women accounting for just under half of this figure (21 million).¹²²

Women and girls caught in the crossfire of conflict encounter numerous hardships due to their gender. A host of interlinked factors including the normalization of violence, militarized masculinities, and a lack of law enforcement combine to aggravate violence against women amid conflict. The most common form of violence against women is IPV,¹²³ which is believed to escalate during war due to economic fragility and a breakdown in normal marriage practices. A scaled-up military presence also increases the likelihood that women and girls will be the target of sexual violence and exploitation.¹²⁴ Steep rates of GBV in war zones deter girls from attending school, hindering their educational attainment¹²⁵—adolescent girls who live under conflict are 90% more likely to be out of school than girls in stable countries.¹²⁶ High rates of male mortality during war leaves many women widowed, prompting them to seek employment outside of the home. While this can increase female economic participation, the jobs available to conflict-affected women are usually low-paid and in the informal sector, where they are at risk of sexual exploitation.¹²⁷

¹¹⁹ Women for Women, "Why Women in Conflict," accessed February 12, 2021, <https://womenforwomen.org.uk/work-we-do/why-women-conflict>.

¹²⁰ Marcus C. Oxley, "Supporting Community Resilience in Armed Conflict and Protracted Violence - Putting Dignity Back into Humanitarian Assistance," *The Solutions Journal* (blog), October 25, 2018, <https://thesolutionsjournal.com/2018/10/25/supporting-community-resilience-armed-conflict-protracted-violence-putting-dignity-back-humanitarian-assistance/>.

¹²¹ ReliefWeb, "Record 50.8 Million People Displaced inside Own Countries by Conflict, Violence and Disasters - World," accessed February 12, 2021, <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/record-508-million-people-displaced-inside-own-countries-conflict-violence-and>.

¹²² Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, "The Female Face of Displacement: 21 Million Women and Girls Uprooted by Conflict and Violence around the World," IDMC, accessed February 12, 2021, <https://www.internal-displacement.org/media-centres/the-female-face-of-displacement-21-million-women-and-girls-uprooted-by-conflict-and>.

¹²³ Women for Women, "Why Women in Conflict."

¹²⁴ BRIDGE, "Gender and Armed Conflict," accessed February 12, 2021, <https://www.bridge.ids.ac.uk/bridge-publications/cutting-edge-packs/gender-and-armed-conflict>.

¹²⁵ Theirworld, "Why Girls around the World Are Still Denied an Equal Chance of Education," text/html, Theirworld (Theirworld, February 12, 2021), <http://theirworld.org/>, <https://theirworld.org/news/why-girls-are-still-denied-equal-chance-of-education>.

¹²⁶ UNDP, "Gender and Recovery Toolkit: Advancing Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Crisis and Recovery Settings," 2019.

¹²⁷ "Impact of Conflict on Gender," GSDRC, accessed February 12, 2021, <https://gsdrc.org/topic-guides/gender-and-conflict/relationship-between-gender-and-conflict-the-evidence/impact-of-conflict-on-gender/>.

Forcibly displaced women and girls also face high levels of abuse. Intimate partner violence is often prevalent within displaced communities due to forced marriage, widespread trauma, and socio-economic marginalization—80% of female Syrian refugees in Iraq live in daily fear of abuse.¹²⁸ Sexual violence is also endemic in refugee settlements as a consequence of overcrowded facilities. In 2018, Human Rights Watch met with women residing in a refugee camp in Greece. The camp, which was designed to house 640 people, had a population of 3,800. Many women said they did not use the showers for fear of sexual assault.¹²⁹ Underpinning and exacerbating this abuse is the dearth of legal support available to survivors.¹³⁰ Child marriage is also commonly practiced in displaced settings. Parents often view early marriage as a means of ensuring their daughters have financial stability and, by keeping them in the domestic sphere, marriage reduces their exposure to GBV. Rates of underage marriage are believed to be four times higher among Syrian refugees than they were in Syria before the eruption of war.¹³¹ Women in displaced contexts also face significant challenges to their economic empowerment. They often struggle to secure employment as a result of childcare expectations, host community discrimination, and legal barriers preventing them from working in their host country.¹³²

The gender dimensions of conflict and displacement highlight the importance of integrating women's needs into relief and recovery efforts. Elevating women's voices also contributes to long-term stability—women's political participation is associated with fairer policy outcomes and the consolidation of peace, while women's economic empowerment contributes to national prosperity.¹³³ Rwanda exemplifies how women's leadership in post-conflict recovery can cultivate durable peace. Many men were killed during the country's devastating genocide in 1994, leaving a population that was women-dominated. Women filled the leadership void, giving Rwanda one of the highest rates of female political representation in the world. Policies introduced by women politicians in the 1990s included a gender-based violence act and legislation that permitted land inheritance irrespective of gender. These two pieces of legislation are believed to have significantly reduced the risk of renewed conflict because sexual violence and land disputes were two of the leading drivers of violence between ethnic groups. Women also rapidly administered justice following the genocide—a provincial court staffed by mostly women convicted a greater number of perpetrators than the International Criminal Tribunal of Rwanda and the national courts combined.¹³⁴

¹²⁸ Women for Women, "Why Women in Conflict."

¹²⁹ Human Rights Watch, "Women Face Daily Dangers in Greek Refugee Camps," accessed February 12, 2021, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2018/10/women-daily-dangers-refugee-camps-greece/>.

¹³⁰ Chayn, "Challenges Faced by Women & Girl Refugees," Medium, November 18, 2015, <https://medium.com/@chayn/challenges-faced-by-women-girl-refugees-9e099c67c7de>.

¹³¹ UNFPA, "Asia and the Pacific Region: COVID-19 Situation Report No. 11," 2020, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/APRO_COVID-19_Regional_Sitrep_11_December.pdf.

¹³² Chayn, "Challenges Faced by Women & Girl Refugees."

¹³³ Permanent Mission of the UAE to the UN and GIWPS, "ADVANCING WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN POST-CONFLICT RECONSTRUCTION," 2020, <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Advancing-Women%E2%80%99s-Participation-in-Post-conflict-Reconstruction.pdf>.

¹³⁴ Karolina Svobodová, "Women in Post-Conflict Reconstruction Enhance Security in Rwanda," *Africa at LSE* (blog), April 2, 2020, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/africaatlse/2020/04/02/women-in-post-conflict-reconstruction-enhance-security-rwanda/>.

Climate Change

Climate change has and will continue to generate humanitarian crises that have implications for the safety of women, and consequently also implications for the security sector. Humans experience both direct and indirect impacts of a warming planet. Direct climate stressors include natural disasters such as floods, storms, and fires; existential threats from sea level rise and coastal degradation; and land-based water and resource degradation.¹³⁵ Any number of these direct stressors can lead to indirect stressors such as food price volatility, market instability, and unemployment.¹³⁶ As climate-related direct and indirect stressors combine with each other or with existing vulnerabilities, they can trigger riots, protests, internal and external conflicts, and mass migrations. As such, security experts consider climate change a threat multiplier in that it is expected to amplify existing stresses within and between communities. Additionally, experts note that direct stressors will threaten military installations, exercises, and critical infrastructure that supports military operations such as financial and energy systems.¹³⁷

The international community has recognized the gendered impacts of climate change, and in particular the numerous ways women feel climate impacts differently than men. Researchers have shown that when climate-related stressors interact with conservative gender norms and fragile community dynamics, they have a compounding effect on the well-being of women.¹³⁸ As a result, women and girls are exposed to higher disaster risks and losses and consequently are less able to adapt. Community values and laws that prevent women from owning land and resources; having control over their bodies, finances, or movements; and participating in the formal economy all increase a woman's climate risk.¹³⁹ Research has also shown that in general, women conduct 2 to 10 times more unpaid care work than men, including procuring and preparing food, collecting food and water, and providing care for sick and elderly family members.¹⁴⁰ Climate change will compound these burdens and further sideline women into informal economies. Moreover, the interaction of crises such as climate change and conflict with unequal gender norms results in the exacerbation of existing inequalities and has been shown

¹³⁵ Adelphi et al., "A New Climate for Peace: Taking Action on Climate and Fragility Risks, An Independent Report Commissioned by the G7 Members" (Berlin: G7 Environment, Conflict, and Cooperation, 2015), 5, <http://www.newclimateforpeace.org>.

¹³⁶ Adelphi et al., "A New Climate for Peace: Taking Action on Climate and Fragility Risks, An Independent Report Commissioned by the G7 Members" (Berlin: G7 Environment, Conflict, and Cooperation, 2015), 5, <http://www.newclimateforpeace.org>.

¹³⁷ "Is Climate Change a Security Risk?," Climate Security 101: A Project of The Center for Climate and Security, February 16, 2015, <https://climatesecurity101.org/faqs/is-climate-change-a-security-risk/>.

¹³⁸ United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, "General Recommendation No. 37 on Gender-Related Dimensions of Disaster Risk Reduction in the Context of Climate Change," Pub. L. No. CEDAW/C/GC/37, 553 (2018), 3, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511815485.028>; "Preventing Conflict, Transforming Justice, Securing the Peace: A Global Study on the Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 - World" (UN Women, October 12, 2015), 206, <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/preventing-conflict-transforming-justice-securing-peace-global-study-implementation>.

¹³⁹ Gotelind Alber, "Gender, Cities and Climate Change" (Cities and Climate Change Global Report on Human Settlements 2011, January 1, 2011), 8, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228969056_Gender_Cities_and_Climate_Change.

¹⁴⁰ Gaëlle Ferrant, Luca Maria Pesando, and Keiko Nowacka, "Unpaid Care Work: The Missing Link in the Analysis of Gender Gaps in Labour Outcomes" (OECD Development Centre, 2014), 1, https://www.oecd.org/dev/development-gender/unpaid_care_work.pdf.

to increase rates of GBV.¹⁴¹ Finally, morbidity and mortality rates among women and girls are higher during natural disasters, making women 14 times more likely to perish than men.¹⁴²

Not only are women and girls more profoundly impacted by climate change, they also possess specialized knowledge and skills that make them invaluable for addressing climate change and conflicts that arise out of it. Given the ways climate change impacts women disproportionately, global leaders now recognize the need to include women's voices in climate mitigation and adaptation planning. In the preamble of the Paris agreement, the document states: "Parties should, when taking action to address climate change, respect, promote and consider their respective obligations on human rights, the right to health, the rights of indigenous peoples, local communities, migrants, children, persons with disabilities and people in vulnerable situations and the right to development, as well as *gender equality, empowerment of women, and intergenerational equity.*" [emphasis added]¹⁴³ It goes on to note: "Parties acknowledge that adaptation action *should follow a country-driven, gender-responsive, participatory and fully transparent approach.*" [emphasis added]¹⁴⁴ Finally, it states, "Capacity-building should be guided by lessons learned, including those from capacity-building activities under the Convention, and *should be an effective, iterative process that is participatory, cross-cutting and gender-responsive.*" [emphasis added]¹⁴⁵ Recognizing that climate change is both a security risk and a threat multiplier to women's safety, it is important to position climate-related disasters as a significant threat. Relief and recovery plans should therefore include climate-related disasters.

COVID-19

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic threatens to undermine decades of global progress toward gender equality. The health crisis has magnified existing gender-based disparities in the economic and social spheres. Women are losing their jobs more readily than men because they are overrepresented in high-contact industries badly hit by the pandemic. This is compounded by the uneven division of unpaid childcare, which overwhelmingly falls to women.¹⁴⁶ Burgeoning childcare demands are also imposing a significant burden on women healthcare workers. The World Health Organization has said that women account for around 70% of the world's health and social sector workers—in an industry that has an average gender pay gap of 28%.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴¹ "Climate Change Increases the Risk of Violence Against Women," *UNFCCC* (blog), November 25, 2019, <https://unfccc.int/news/climate-change-increases-the-risk-of-violence-against-women>.

¹⁴² "Facts and Figures: Economic Empowerment," UN Women, accessed January 31, 2021, <https://www.unwomen.org/what-we-do/economic-empowerment/facts-and-figures>.

¹⁴³ United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change: Agenda item 4(b), "Adoption of the Paris Agreement," Pub. L. No. FCCC/CP/2015/L.9/Rev.1 (2015), 1, <https://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2015/cop21/eng/109r01.pdf>. [emphasis added]

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 25. [emphasis added]

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 28. [emphasis added]

¹⁴⁶ Alexandra Topping, "Covid-19 Crisis Could Set Women Back Decades, Experts Fear," *The Guardian*, May 29, 2020, sec. World news, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/may/29/covid-19-crisis-could-set-women-back-decades-experts-fear>.

¹⁴⁷ World Health Organization, "Gender Equity in the Health Workforce: Analysis of 104 Countries," WHO (World Health Organization, 2019), http://www.who.int/hrh/resources/gender_equity-health_workforce_analysis/en/.

The pandemic has also triggered an alarming rise in gender-based violence. Bogotá, Colombia recorded a 225% increase in GBV reports since the beginning of the outbreak.¹⁴⁸ Global rates of domestic violence spiralled as quarantine measures took effect. Call volumes to domestic violence hotlines in Hubei, China climbed by 90% during the province's lockdown. In Brazil, Spain, Cyprus, Italy, the UK, and Germany, calls to hotlines increased by between 10 to 50% after national lockdowns were implemented.¹⁴⁹ The near universal spike in domestic violence has been attributed to social isolation and socio-economic stressors generated by the pandemic.¹⁵⁰

In addition, sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services—which encompass pre- and post-natal care, safe abortions, contraception, and treatment for sexually transmitted diseases—have been cut back at the expense of women's bodily autonomy and well-being. Eighty-six percent of respondents in a recent survey of 29 countries reported that their access to SRH services had been severely restricted amid the pandemic. The authors of the study believe that these restrictions have occurred for three reasons: SRH services have been diverted for COVID-19 efforts, family planning centers have been forced to close due to social distancing measures, and opportunistic leaders have taken advantage of the crisis to further their own agendas and ban abortion.¹⁵¹

Summary

Conflict, natural disasters, and health crises place immense strain on women and girls. As such, it is essential that all relevant stakeholders recognize the importance of the WPS Relief and Recovery Pillar and adhere to its principles by ensuring that women are included in the triple nexus of humanitarian aid, development, and peacebuilding.¹⁵² This nexus encompasses efforts to consolidate peace and security, advance post-conflict and post-disaster capacity building, reconstruct physical infrastructure, and restore the wellbeing of the population by addressing mental and physical health and reconstructing education systems.¹⁵³ The Biden-Harris administration has demonstrated its support for various aspects of the Relief and Recovery Pillar both through its domestic policies and in plans for international engagement. Below, we explore the Biden-Harris approach to gender inclusivity in response and recovery planning and

¹⁴⁸ "Highlights of Joe Biden's Plans to Support Women During the COVID-19 Crisis," Joe Biden for President: Official Campaign Website, accessed February 2, 2021, <https://joebiden.com/plans-to-support-women-duringcovid19/>.

¹⁴⁹ Emma Graham-Harrison et al., "Lockdowns around the World Bring Rise in Domestic Violence," *The Guardian*, March 28, 2020, sec. Society, <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/mar/28/lockdowns-world-rise-domestic-violence>.

¹⁵⁰ Anthony Morgan and Hayley Boxall, "Social Isolation, Time Spent at Home, Financial Stress and Domestic Violence during the COVID-19 Pandemic," Australian Institute of Criminology, October 20, 2020, <https://www.aic.gov.au/publications/tandi/tandi609>.

¹⁵¹ Margit Endler et al., "How the Coronavirus Disease 2019 Pandemic Is Impacting Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights and Response: Results from a Global Survey of Providers, Researchers, and Policy-Makers," *Acta Obstetrica et Gynecologica Scandinavica* n/a, no. n/a, accessed February 11, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1111/aogs.14043>.

¹⁵² ODI, "Women, Peace and Security and Humanitarianism – 3 Ideas for a Return to Radical Action," accessed February 8, 2021, <https://www.odi.org/blogs/17508-women-peace-and-security-and-humanitarianism-3-ideas-return-radical-action>.

¹⁵³ Australian Government, "Side by Side: Women, Peace and Security," n.d., https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/02_2013/wps_toolkit.pdf.

consider what this means for the Indo-Pacific from the perspective of three major threats to human security in the region: conflict and displacement, climate change, and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Biden-Harris on the WPS Relief and Recovery Pillar

Displacement and Conflict: The Biden-Harris Response

Biden and Harris have repeatedly demonstrated their commitment to safeguarding conflict-affected women and girls, whose welfare is at the heart of the Relief and Recovery Pillar. Shortly after becoming senator in 2017, Harris travelled to Jordan, where she visited one of the world's largest Syrian refugee camps. After returning, she penned an open letter to women around the world in which she drew attention to the severe oppression many women face when trying to express their political opinions.¹⁵⁴ Harris characterized the treatment of migrant women in the US as a "crime against humanity" after visiting a California detention facility that housed migrant mothers who had been separated from their children in 2018.¹⁵⁵ The following year, she wrote a letter to the US Office of Refugee Settlement which called on the agency to change its policies toward migrant children. She reprimanded the agency for its overcrowded facilities and poorly vetted staff.¹⁵⁶

Biden has also been a fierce advocate of vulnerable communities, and has developed policies that aim to protect displaced women and girls. In his COVID-19 response plan, he promised to increase funding to US crisis shelters at refugee settlements and expedite asylum seeker applications for victims of domestic violence.¹⁵⁷ He also issued an executive order on Feb. 4, 2021 which will increase the number of asylum seekers admitted to the US in the first year of his presidency. He said places will be prioritized for women, children, and other individuals who are being discriminated against due to their gender identity and/or sexual orientation.¹⁵⁸

Both Biden and Harris have expressly condemned the oppression of Uyghur Muslims by the Chinese government. Emerging reports reveal widespread acts of GBV committed against Uyghur women imprisoned in "re-education" camps and in the wider province of Xinjiang—detainees have reported being repeatedly sexually assaulted.¹⁵⁹ Moreover, a large number of

¹⁵⁴ "2020 Candidate Profile: Kamala Harris," USGLC, accessed February 11, 2021, <https://www.usglc.org/impact-2020/kamala-harris/>.

¹⁵⁵ John Bowden, "Kamala Harris: Trump's Treatment of Migrants Is 'a Crime against Humanity,'" Text, TheHill, June 22, 2018, <https://thehill.com/homenews/senate/393742-kamala-harris-trump-treatment-of-migrants-is-a-crime-against-humanity>.

¹⁵⁶ Rachel Frazin, "Harris, Gillibrand, Klobuchar Call upon ORR to Reform Migrant Children Policies," Text, TheHill, July 3, 2019, <https://thehill.com/homenews/senate/451563-harris-gillibrand-klobuchar-call-upon-orr-to-reform-migrant-children-policies>.

¹⁵⁷ "Highlights of Joe Biden's Plans to Support Women During the COVID-19 Crisis." Joe Biden for President: Official Campaign Website.

¹⁵⁸ "Biden Signs Order to Ramp up Refugee Admissions and Plans to Allocate 125,000 Spots next Fiscal Year," CBS News, accessed February 8, 2021, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/refugees-125k-allocation-biden-executive-order/>.

¹⁵⁹ Ewelina U. Ochab, "Behind The Camps' Gates: Rape And Sexual Violence Against Uyghur Women," Forbes, accessed February 11, 2021, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/ewelinaochab/2021/02/03/behind-the-camps-gates-rape-and-sexual-violence-against-uyghur-women/>.

Uyghur women are believed to have undergone forced sterilization in recent years,¹⁶⁰ resulting in a 24% drop in birth rates in the province in 2019.¹⁶¹ During an interview in 2019, Harris described China's record on human rights as "abysmal" and pressed the US government to intervene.¹⁶² In June last year, she co-authored a letter to Mike Pompeo in which she described the human rights abuse in Xinjiang as a "genocidal campaign" and urged the US government to respond.¹⁶³ Biden has also indicated he will take action on the treatment of Uyghur Muslims—in his first foreign policy speech as president, he drew attention to gross violations being committed in Xinjiang and stated that the US, with the support of its allies, will "push back on China's attack on human rights."¹⁶⁴

Climate Change: The Biden-Harris Response

Biden-Harris' first 100 days included recognition of the important role global warming plays in state stability and natural disasters. Within a week of being on the job, Biden announced the US would re-enter the 2015 Paris Climate Accords that Trump had previously exited,¹⁶⁵ and released an executive order stating that his administration would prioritize climate security and the development of a sustainable climate pathway as part American foreign policy.¹⁶⁶ In terms of international cooperation, the executive order stressed the need to build resiliency at home and abroad, touted green recovery initiatives, and directed the secretary of the treasury to work with international financial institutions such as the World Bank Group to promote economic stimulus packages, debt relief, and financing programs.¹⁶⁷

COVID-19 Relief and Recovery: The Biden-Harris Response

The economic fallout of the pandemic has been dubbed a "shecession" owing to its unequal impact on women. In the US, women dominate high-contact sectors severely impaired by the

¹⁶⁰ Lisa Reinsberg, "China's Forced Sterilization of Uyghur Women Violates Clear International Law," *Just Security* (blog), July 29, 2020, <https://www.justsecurity.org/71615/chinas-forced-sterilization-of-uyghur-women-violates-clear-international-law/>.

¹⁶¹ Priyanka Boghani, "How the US Has Reacted to China's Treatment of Uyghurs," *FRONTLINE* (blog), November 10, 2020, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/us-reacted-china-treatment-uyghurs/>.

¹⁶² US-China Perception Monitor, "China Policy Profile: Vice Presidential Nominee Kamala Harris," *US-China Perception Monitor* (blog), August 12, 2020, <https://uscnpmforum514537308.wpcomstaging.com/2020/08/12/china-policy-profiles-senator-kamala-harris/>.

¹⁶³ "Gillibrand-Harris Letter Re Forced Sterilization of Ethnic Minorities in China 6.30.20," accessed February 8, 2021, <https://www.gillibrand.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Gillibrand-Harris%20Letter%20re%20Forced%20Sterilization%20of%20Ethnic%20Minorities%20in%20China%206.30.20.pdf>.

¹⁶⁴ Andrew McCormick, "What Biden's Agenda Can Mean for Oppressed Uighurs," February 5, 2021, <https://www.thenation.com/article/world/biden-foreign-policy-uighurs/>.

¹⁶⁵ Michael Hirsh, "Why Biden Has a Better Shot at Saving the Climate Than Obama Did," *Foreign Policy* (blog), January 28, 2021, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/01/28/biden-climate-change-plan-obama-better-shot/>.

¹⁶⁶ "Executive Order on Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad" (The White House, January 27, 2021), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/01/27/executive-order-on-tackling-the-climate-crisis-at-home-and-abroad/>.

¹⁶⁷ "Executive Order on Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad" (The White House, January 27, 2021), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/01/27/executive-order-on-tackling-the-climate-crisis-at-home-and-abroad/>.

virus, such as hospitality and retail. Women are also struggling to work alongside mounting childcare demands, an expectation that falls to American women to a far greater degree than their male counterparts.¹⁶⁸ The culmination of these factors has led to a steep rise in female unemployment—the National Women’s Law Center reported that *all* of the 140,000 jobs lost in the US during the month of December belonged to women.¹⁶⁹ The increased burden of childcare is especially difficult for the large number of women working in the healthcare sector and other essential capacities.¹⁷⁰

Women's rights are also being threatened amid the crisis. Financial and social stress caused by the pandemic have increased abusive behavior, with lockdown measures confining victims to unsafe domestic environments.¹⁷¹ By May 2020, only a few months into the pandemic, domestic violence police reports and call volumes to hotlines had increased by approximately 10% in the US.¹⁷² Moreover, politicians in a number of states, including Texas and Louisiana, have used the virus to prevent women from obtaining abortions by categorizing terminations as an "elective" surgery.¹⁷³

The incoming administration's domestic COVID-19 response plan includes a comprehensive program to address the pandemic's economic and social consequences for women. On their transition website, the Biden-Harris team promised to protect women's financial security by increasing social security payments and streamlining access to unemployment insurance. They also aim to enhance women's economic empowerment by subsidizing women-dominated industries and awarding grants to small, women-owned businesses. In addition, they plan to support women essential workers by providing paid sick leave and free childcare.¹⁷⁴ Already the

¹⁶⁸ Titan Alon et al., "The Shecession (She-Recession) of 2020: Causes and Consequences," *VoxEU.Org* (blog), September 22, 2020, <https://voxeu.org/article/shecession-she-recession-2020-causes-and-consequences>.

¹⁶⁹ Courtney Connley, "A Year Ago, Women Outnumbered Men in the US Workforce, Now They Account for 100% of Jobs Lost in December," *CNBC*, January 11, 2021, <https://www.cnn.com/2021/01/11/women-account-for-100percent-of-jobs-lost-in-december-new-analysis.html>.

¹⁷⁰ Molly Kinder, "Essential but Undervalued: Millions of Health Care Workers Aren't Getting the Pay or Respect They Deserve in the COVID-19 Pandemic," *Brookings* (blog), May 28, 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/research/essential-but-undervalued-millions-of-health-care-workers-arent-getting-the-pay-or-respect-they-deserve-in-the-covid-19-pandemic/>.

¹⁷¹ Megan L. Evans, Margo Lindauer, and Maureen E. Farrell, "A Pandemic within a Pandemic — Intimate Partner Violence during Covid-19," *New England Journal of Medicine* 383, no. 24 (December 10, 2020): 2302–4, <https://doi.org/10.1056/NEJMp2024046>.

¹⁷² Emily Leslie and Riley Wilson, "The COVID-19 Pandemic Is Linked to a Ten% Increase in Domestic Violence Cases across the Country.," *LSE USCentre* (blog), June 11, 2020, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/usappblog/2020/06/11/the-covid-19-pandemic-is-linked-to-a-ten-percent-increase-in-domestic-violence-cases-across-the-country/>.

¹⁷³ Brittni Frederiksen, "State Action to Limit Abortion Access During the COVID-19 Pandemic," *KFF* (blog), August 10, 2020, <https://www.kff.org/coronavirus-covid-19/issue-brief/state-action-to-limit-abortion-access-during-the-covid-19-pandemic/>.

¹⁷⁴ "Highlights of Joe Biden’s Plans to Support Women During the COVID-19 Crisis," Joe Biden for President: Official Campaign Website, accessed February 2, 2021, <https://joebiden.com/plans-to-support-women-duringcovid19/>.

new government is following through on these commitments —on Feb. 5, 2021, Harris broke a 50-50 tie in the Senate and voted for a \$1.9 trillion COVID-19 relief plan for US citizens.¹⁷⁵

A cornerstone of the new administration's COVID-19 plan is addressing the surge in domestic violence. Their proposed strategies include sending additional resources to shelters and hotlines so they can remain open and COVID-secure. They also plan to donate technological equipment to providers, enabling them to reach victims through virtual channels. In the scheme, Biden promised to address politicians who have co-opted the crisis to suspend access to abortions.¹⁷⁶ On Jan. 28, Biden reversed a ban that prevented federal funds from reaching abortion providers.¹⁷⁷

The Biden-Harris transition team has also said it will assist international recovery efforts, including those that support and protect women. Biden's global health agenda for women involves amplifying the voices of women leaders, mitigating gender-based violence by backing the "Safe from the Start Act" (a bill that ensures US foreign humanitarian assistance tackles GBV), and calling on global leaders to improve access to sexual and reproductive health.¹⁷⁸

Indo-Pacific WPS Relief and Recovery General

Conflict and Displacement: The Indo-Pacific

Protracted conflict in the Indo-Pacific has compounded overlapping gender disparities in the social, economic, and political spheres.¹⁷⁹ Violence against women is disproportionately high in regional conflict zones. Around 15% of West Papuan women in a sample of 200 had experienced intimate partner violence.¹⁸⁰ Instability in Rakhine State has triggered high rates of early marriage, with 16% of girls marrying before reaching the age of 18. The prevalence of child marriage in the state has been attributed to extreme poverty and mass violence. In such contexts, parents may view child marriage as a way of relieving financial strain and protecting their daughters from physical or sexual assault by keeping them at home. Underage marriage debilitates girls' educational attainment, which will exacerbate the state's pronounced gender literacy gap (92.2% of men are literate compared to 79% of women).¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁵ Martin Belam, "Kamala Harris Uses Casting Vote to Pass Covid Relief Budget Resolution," *The Guardian*, February 5, 2021, sec. US news, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/feb/05/kamala-harris-casting-vote-us-senate-covid-relief-coronavirus-minimum-wage>.

¹⁷⁶ "Highlights of Joe Biden's Plans to Support Women During the COVID-19 Crisis," Joe Biden for President: Official Campaign Website.

¹⁷⁷ "Biden Allows US Aid for Abortion Providers and Expands Obamacare," *BBC News*, January 28, 2021, sec. US & Canada, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-55844717>.

¹⁷⁸ "Highlights of Joe Biden's Plans to Support Women During the COVID-19 Crisis" Joe Biden for President: Official Campaign Website.

¹⁷⁹ National Defense University Press, "Women on the Frontlines of Peace and Security."

¹⁸⁰ International Coalition for Papua, "Human Rights and Conflict Escalation in West Papua," 2020, <https://www.freewestpapua.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Human-Rights-And-Conflict-Escalation-In-West-Papua.pdf>.

¹⁸¹ Peninah Kimiri, Jordan Hoffman, and Christina Haneef, "CARE Rapid Gender Analysis of COVID-19 Myanmar - Rakhine State" (UN Women/ CARE, 2020), https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Myanmar%20RGA_Covid-19_Report_FINAL.pdf.

Women continue to be adversely affected by conflict long after it has ended. A lengthy insurgency in Timor-Leste—which ended after the country gained independence from Indonesia in 1999—promoted a culture of militarized masculinity and caused patriarchal values to become deeply entrenched in Timorese society. Women there today face multiple challenges, including poverty, high levels of domestic violence, and major obstacles to their political participation.¹⁸² Enforced disappearance and high rates of male mortality in Sri Lanka during the country's three-decades-long civil war produced a large number of female war widows. These women continue to experience immense trauma and struggle to support themselves and their families due to restricted access to financial resources and ongoing stigma.¹⁸³ Current data indicates that tens of thousands of women-headed households in Batticaloa, Eastern Sri Lanka are living in poverty.¹⁸⁴

The Indo-Pacific is also home to a sizable displaced population—the UN estimates that approximately 8 million individuals in the region have fled their homes due to violence, with Rohingya refugees comprising a large proportion of this figure.¹⁸⁵ The UN believes that women and children account for around 77% of all internally displaced people in Myanmar.¹⁸⁶ Rates of GBV among Rohingya refugees are staggeringly high. A recent survey revealed that 4% of adolescent girls in Rohingya refugee camps in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, had experienced GBV in the past four months. However, the authors believe that these figures conceal the full extent of the problem, as 64% of the girls in their sample reported hearing about incidents of sexual assault and 12% said they had witnessed it.¹⁸⁷

Climate and Relief and Recovery: The Indo-Pacific

In addition to the higher rates of political stability in many Indo-Pacific countries, this region has both higher climate risks and lower gender equality scores.¹⁸⁸ It is diverse both in terms of its climate risks and its state fragility profiles, but also because of its unique regional geography and weather patterns. As such, the region is expected to be under particularly high climate stress according to the Center for Climate and Security.¹⁸⁹ On risks to the security environment,

¹⁸² UN Women, "UN Women Timor-Leste," UN Women | Asia and the Pacific, accessed February 13, 2021, <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/countries/timor-leste>.

¹⁸³ Moises Saman and Michael Obert, "The War Widows of Sri Lanka," Pulitzer Center, accessed February 13, 2021, <https://pulitzercenter.org/projects/war-widows-sri-lanka>.

¹⁸⁴ GlobalGiving, "Empowering War Widowed Women in Sri Lanka," GlobalGiving, accessed February 13, 2021, <https://www.globalgiving.org/projects/empowering-war-widowed-women-in-sri-lanka/>.

¹⁸⁵ "UNHCR - Asia and the Pacific," accessed February 9, 2021, <https://www.unhcr.org/uk/asia-and-the-pacific.html>.

¹⁸⁶ "UNICEF Myanmar Humanitarian Situation Report #1 - 15 February 2019 - Myanmar," ReliefWeb, accessed February 11, 2021, <https://reliefweb.int/report/myanmar/unicef-myanmar-humanitarian-situation-report-1-15-february-2019>.

¹⁸⁷ Silvia Guglielmi et al., "Age- and Gender-Based Violence Risks Facing Rohingya and Bangladeshi Adolescents in Cox's Bazar" (IPA/ Yale/ Gage, 2020).

¹⁸⁸ "The Intersection of Global Fragility and Climate Risks" (USAID, November 2018), <https://www.climatelinks.org/resources/intersection-global-fragility-and-climate-risks>.

¹⁸⁹ "A Security Threat Assessment of Global Climate Change," Produced by the National Security, Military, and Intelligence Panel on Climate Change (NSMIP) (The Center for Climate Security, February 2020), 47, <https://climateandsecurity.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/a-security-threat-assessment-of-climate-change.pdf>.

infrastructure, and institutions, USINDOPACOM has assessed the region to be at between high and catastrophic threat levels depending on the warming scenario.¹⁹⁰

As a whole, the region is more exposed to physical climate risks than other regions of the world. Researchers have shown that in higher CO₂ concentration scenarios (i.e., assuming the full inherent physical risk of climate change in the absence of decarbonization), by 2050, of the 700 million to 1.2 billion people worldwide living with a "nonzero annual probability of lethal heat waves,"¹⁹¹ most of those people (between 600 million and 1 billion) will be in Asia.¹⁹² Consequently, "on average, between \$2.8 trillion and \$4.7 trillion of GDP in Asia annually will be at risk from an effective loss of outdoor working hours because of increased heat and humidity."¹⁹³ According to the same study, climate change will disrupt the region's GDP, damage infrastructure through flooding, stress water resources, decrease grain yields, and shift biomes much more dramatically than anywhere else on the planet. For instance, in Cambodia, 45% of the population lives in a high climate exposure area (the third highest country in the world based on percentage of population living in high exposure areas).¹⁹⁴ In the Indo-Pacific region broadly, women make up the vast majority of small-scale farmers, who are at the greatest risk of climate change's impact on the natural resources on which they depend.

Simultaneously, climate change will increase the impact of gender inequality. Researchers have found that climate change is driving an increase in child and forced marriages in Bangladesh.¹⁹⁵ As other livelihoods disappear because of climate change, men are also looking to dowry payments as a form of income.¹⁹⁶ This has added to the burden of the families of girls while positioning dowries as a form of capital accumulation for the families of men.

As in other regions, while women will be more severely affected by climate change, they are also the keepers of indigenous knowledge. Given women's close relationship to the land, many have already adapted to changing weather patterns and possess specialized knowledge of how to flex with a changing environment.¹⁹⁷ For instance, in Nepal, a women's group in Mugu and

¹⁹⁰ "A Security Threat Assessment of Global Climate Change," Produced by the National Security, Military, and Intelligence Panel on Climate Change (NSMIP) (The Center for Climate Security, February 2020), 47, <https://climateandsecurity.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/a-security-threat-assessment-of-climate-change.pdf>.

¹⁹¹ "Climate Risk and Response in Asia" (McKinsey Global Institute, November 24, 2020), <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/sustainability/our-insights/climate-risk-and-response-in-asia>.

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Jessica M Smith, Lauren Olosky, and Jennifer Grosman Fernández, "The Climate-Gender- Conflict Nexus: Amplifying Women's Contributions at the Grassroots" (Georgetown University Institute for Women, Peace and Security, 201AD), 3, <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/The-Climate-Gender-Conflict-Nexus.pdf>.

¹⁹⁵ Margaret Alston et al., "Are Climate Challenges Reinforcing Child and Forced Marriage and Dowry as Adaptation Strategies in the Context of Bangladesh?," *Women's Studies International Forum* 47 (November 1, 2014): 137–44, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2014.08.005>.

¹⁹⁶ "Marry Before Your House Is Swept Away," *Human Rights Watch* (blog), June 9, 2015, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2015/06/09/marry-your-house-swept-away/child-marriage-bangladesh>.

¹⁹⁷ Joint Submission by Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD) and Landesa, "Gender-Responsive Climate Policy with a Focus on Adaptation and Capacity-Building, and Training for Delegates on Gender Issues –SBI 44" (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, March 2016), 2, https://unfccc.int/files/documentation/submissions_from_non-party_stakeholders/application/pdf/550.pdf.

Mangri villages provided previously undocumented information on landslide activity in the region and vital information on the state of drinking water facilities. This information was used to help build a new drinking water facility and a canal that powers a watermill to replace one destroyed by a landslide.¹⁹⁸

National Action Plans could be used to inform the need for women's participation in climate adaptation and mitigation strategizing, but unfortunately most countries in the Indo-Pacific have excluded mention of climate change in these documents. Of the few countries with NAPs, only Bangladesh has directly referenced climate change in its NAP, though the country does not mention any set climate-related goals or actions.¹⁹⁹ Notably absent are mentions of climate change in the NAPs of Australia (NAP updated 2012), Japan (updated 2018), South Korea (updated 2018), New Zealand (updated 2015), and the Philippines (updated 2017).²⁰⁰

COVID-19 Relief and Recovery: The Indo-Pacific

Women in the Indo-Pacific are facing high levels of unemployment—the regional female labor-force participation rate declined by 1.3% between December 2019 and June 2020 (compared to 1% for men).²⁰¹ Women outnumber men in industries that have been badly damaged by the pandemic. For instance, women dominate the garment sector in the Asia-Pacific (80% of employees are female), which has incurred substantial losses—clothing purchases made by major importing countries fell by 70% in 2020.²⁰² Moreover, many women who work in the informal sector are under threat of losing their jobs,²⁰³ which is particularly concerning because informal sector workers lack basic social security and are ineligible for unemployment benefits.²⁰⁴

Gender-based violence has escalated in the Indo-Pacific since the beginning of the outbreak. Mirroring trends in the US, calls to domestic violence hotlines have risen significantly across the Indo-Pacific since lockdown measures were put in place.²⁰⁵ An expanded security presence needed for the enforcement of coronavirus restrictions has generated additional threats to women's physical integrity—women from Malaysia and the Philippines have reported being

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 4.

¹⁹⁹ Elizabeth S Smith, "Climate Change in Women, Peace and Security National Action Plans," *SIPRI Insights on Peace and Security* 2020, no. 7 (June 2020): 26.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 26–30.

²⁰¹ International Monetary Fund, "Navigating the Pandemic: A Multispeed Recovery in Asia," 2020, <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/REO/APAC/Issues/2020/10/21/regional-economic-outlook-apd>.

²⁰² ILO, "Women Hit Hard by COVID-19 Impact on Garment Sector," Press release, November 20, 2020, http://www.ilo.org/asia/info/public/pr/WCMS_761496/lang--en/index.htm.

²⁰³ ILO, "As Job Losses Escalate, Nearly Half of Global Workforce at Risk of Losing Livelihoods," Press release, April 29, 2020, http://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_743036/lang--en/index.htm.

²⁰⁴ World Economic Forum, "COVID-19 Could Bring about a 'new Deal' for Millions of Asia's Informal Workers," accessed February 2, 2021, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/05/informal-workers-asia-coronavirus-covid19-employment-deal/>.

²⁰⁵ United Nations ESCAP, "The Covid-19 Pandemic and Violence Against Women in Asia and the Pacific," 2020, https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/d8files/knowledge-products/20201119_SDD_Policy_Paper_Covid-19.pdf.

sexually harassed by security agents at checkpoints.²⁰⁶ Meanwhile, school closures are predicted to cause a spike in child marriage and sex trafficking.²⁰⁷ For women and girls living in unstable settings where the incidence of GBV is already high, the repercussions of the pandemic will be disastrous. Camps for Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh have already reported higher rates of domestic violence than usual.²⁰⁸

Several countries and organizations have enacted measures to address the gendered effects of the health crisis. The Thai government instituted a three-month cash transfer program for informal sector workers who are ineligible for social security programs.²⁰⁹ States and civil society organizations have expanded their modes of communication with survivors of GBV. The Australian government published extensive online instructions for victims of domestic violence. Women's networks in India introduced the innovative "Red Dot Initiative," which asks women experiencing domestic violence to wear a red bindi to signal to neighbors that they are being abused.²¹⁰ Authorities and organizations operating in areas with low rates of digital literacy have carved out new means of reaching victims—GBV workers in Rohingya refugee settlements have been carrying out door-to-door checks.²¹¹ International Alert in Myanmar conducted a nation-wide anti-GBV campaign using social media, pamphlets, and posters. As part of the campaign, International Alert created an online database that listed all national service providers and gave information on updated referral pathways. They also placed posters on public transport containing anti-violence messaging targeted at men and circulated videos that had been translated into all major ethnic languages.²¹² Similar steps have been taken to help women obtain SRH services. Vietnam, Bhutan, and Indonesia all collaborated with the United Nations Population Fund to create toll-free hotlines and telemedicine schemes. Indonesia has been particularly successful on this front—its COVID-19 SRH telemedicine program has been used by over 3,000 young people.²¹³ In rural areas of Nepal where Internet access is limited, midwives and nurses have travelled on foot between villages to deliver medical care.²¹⁴

²⁰⁶ "Covid-19 Is a Test of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda in the Asia-Pacific," *The Strategist*, June 29, 2020, <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/covid-19-is-a-test-of-the-women-peace-and-security-agenda-in-the-asia-pacific/>.

²⁰⁷ United Nations ESCAP, "The Covid-19 Pandemic and Violence Against Women in Asia and the Pacific."

²⁰⁸ Devon Cone, "Gender Matters: COVID-19's Outsized Impact on Displaced Women and Girls," *Refugees International*, accessed February 11, 2021, <https://www.refugeesinternational.org/reports/2020/5/4/gender-matters-covid-19s-outsized-impact-on-displaced-women-and-girls>.

²⁰⁹ Ugo Gentilini et al., "Social Protection and Jobs Responses to COVID-19: A Real-Time Review of Country Measures," n.d., 104.

²¹⁰ United Nations ESCAP, "The Covid-19 Pandemic and Violence Against Women in Asia and the Pacific."

²¹¹ Kettie Jean and Jason Miks, "Preventing a Silent Crisis for Rohingya Women and Girls during COVID-19 Pandemic," accessed February 11, 2021, <https://www.unicef.org/coronavirus/preventing-silent-crisis-rohingya-women-and-girls-during-covid-19-pandemic>.

²¹² "Reducing Gender Inequalities through Responding to COVID-19 and Its Impacts," *International Alert*, accessed February 11, 2021, <https://www.international-alert.org/covid-19-peacebuilding-response/reducing-gender-inequalities-through-responding-to-covid-19-and-its-impacts>.

²¹³ UNFPA, "Asia and the Pacific Region: COVID-19 Situation Report No. 11," 2020, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/APRO_COVID-19_Regional_Sitrep_11_December.pdf.

²¹⁴ Elizabeth Wilkins, "The Impact of COVID-19 on Human Fertility in the Asia-Pacific Region."

WPS Relief and Recovery Policy Recommendations

Conflict and Displacement Policy Recommendations

The gendered impact of conflict and displacement makes it both critical and urgent that governments and policymakers develop Relief and Recovery policies that meet the needs of women and girls and strengthen their economic and physical security. Governments and other relevant stakeholders should consider taking the following measures:

- Make sure that women have a say in the design of relief and recovery efforts, either by deploying female engagement teams, through direct consultation, or by inviting women's civil society organizations to help develop relief and recovery plans. It would be particularly beneficial for governments to open channels of communication with women's groups that represent marginalized or stigmatized communities, including Rohingya women's groups and groups representing widows.²¹⁵
- Ensure the systematic and meaningful participation of women in both short- and long-term recovery measures. Women and women's groups should be involved in physical reconstruction as well as in the rebuilding of educational, judicial, and political institutions following unrest.²¹⁶
- Introduce gender training for armed forces so that members of the military and other security agents are aware of gender disparities and capable of responding to gender-based violence during humanitarian operations.
- Support initiatives that protect and empower displaced women. Immediate efforts include providing funding and other resources to crisis shelters in refugee camps. To elevate displaced women in the long term, governments should make their voices and perspectives a part of democratic decision-making. Donors and policymakers should adopt measures to empower refugee women in the long run, including through income-generating schemes and by investing in their education.

Climate-Specific Policy Recommendations

In relation to climate-based risks, the Biden-Harris administration should encourage governments to apply the following principles to relief and recovery planning:

- Compel leadership within each nation's security sector to recognize climate change as a threat multiplier and request that they undertake threat assessments to ascertain country-specific risks to women. Develop risk mitigation plans to address gender and climate security risks.²¹⁷
- Encourage states to address climate challenges and resultant social consequences on women, such as increases in child marriage and GBV, when developing mitigation strategies.²¹⁸

²¹⁵ National Defense University Press, "Women on the Frontlines of Peace and Security."

²¹⁶ Australian Government, "Side by Side: Women, Peace and Security."

²¹⁷ "Women, Peace and Transforming Security: Visions of the Future of Women, Peace and Security for NATO," 39.

²¹⁸ Alston et al., "Are Climate Challenges Reinforcing Child and Forced Marriage and Dowry as Adaptation Strategies in the Context of Bangladesh?"

- Ensure that states develop gender-responsive adaptation policies that offer climate justice by giving women the right to human development, human rights, and gender equality.²¹⁹
- Work with states to develop policies that empower women economically, politically, socially, and legally to increase their resilience against the impacts of climate change. This should include policies that confer land and tenure rights on women, laws that allow women's meaningful participation in setting climate policies, and regulations that give women decision-making power in democratic processes.²²⁰
- Insist that states partner with affected women and girls and use their specialized knowledge and community networks to design, implement, and monitor strategies for adapting to climate change and natural resource degradation.²²¹
- Work with Indo-Pacific states to revise (or complete) their NAPs to include climate-related stressors, scarcities, and consequences on the human security of women.²²²

COVID-Specific Policy Recommendations

To counter the pandemic's gendered effects, governments should consider replicating some of the measures presented in "Highlights of Joe Biden's Plans to Support Women During the COVID-19 Crisis" alongside other practices that are already in place in the Indo-Pacific. To combat the economic toll of the pandemic on women, states should:

- Increase social security payments and extend income replacement schemes to informal sector workers. Cash payments could be used where access to credit is limited.
- Support sectors that employ high numbers of women. Governments should use grants or loans to supplement salaries so that badly hit industries do not make employees redundant. Grants should be awarded to female-led enterprises.
- Provide services for all essential workers, including free childcare, paid sick leave, and paid family leave to alleviate the burden of childcare for women working in the health sector and other essential roles.

In order to prevent GBV and counter restrictions to SRH services, governments and the international community should act rapidly to:

- Support organizations that assist survivors of GBV. Governments should categorize these organizations as essential and provide them with additional resources to help them cope with the surge in violence.
- Develop alternative modes of assistance for survivors. Governments and the international community should help shelters and hotlines increase their online visibility so they can continue to reach victims. Updated referral pathways and other key information should be circulated widely online and through traditional media, including

²¹⁹ Joint Submission by Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD) and Landesa, "Gender-Responsive Climate Policy with a Focus on Adaptation and Capacity-Building, and Training for Delegates on Gender Issues –SBI 44," 3.

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ "Preventing Conflict, Transforming Justice, Securing the Peace," 407.

²²² Ibid.

via pamphlets and posters. Innovative signalling measures should be adopted, like India's Red Dot initiative.

- Stem the tide of GBV by working with local organizations and other agencies to create campaigns that discourage the use of violence.
- Designate family planning and community health centers as essential. Governments must not divert equipment and staff from these facilities, but instead send resources so workers can adequately protect themselves and provide a safe environment for patients.

Governments and international stakeholders should partner with civil society organizations to create telemedicine schemes so that women can continue obtaining medical care during the pandemic. Home medical workers should be harnessed to provide safe care to women living in rural areas or women who are unable to reach medical facilities.

CONCLUSION

This paper explored how the Biden-Harris administration could impact the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda in the Indo-Pacific. We reviewed domestic and international policies endorsed by Biden and Harris that align with the WPS Agenda. We also reflected on the current status of WPS implementation in the Indo-Pacific, finding that women continue to be at the periphery of most political process and peace agreements. To this end, we identified various instruments that the incoming administration can and should use to assist governments around the region in realizing core WPS objectives.

In the first section, we focused on the WPS Participation Pillar, which calls for enhancing women's participation at all levels of decision-making. Harris' election as the first woman vice president makes women's political participation a defining feature of the new administration. Biden has also given women prominent roles in politics and security. The new administration is leading by example in this area, and its emphasis on gender parity has already had a ripple effect in the Indo-Pacific—Harris' election sparked a discussion among Indian women about their own political engagement. However, there is still vast scope for improvement throughout the region—the percentage of women in ministerial positions and legislative roles continues to be exceedingly low. Some nations, like India and South Korea, have granted women more influential roles in their respective armed forces. However, women continue to comprise a meager proportion of security personnel across the region. Moreover, despite grassroots women's groups actively working to build peace in conflict-affected areas, women are largely excluded from formal peace processes. We recommended that the incoming government and USINDOPACOM encourage governments throughout the region to increase women's participation across the entire spectrum of politics, peace, and security.

The second section drew attention to the WPS Prevention and Protection Pillars, which call for the prevention of conflict and the protection of women from gender-based violence. We found that both Biden and Harris have advocated for measures to combat GBV. Biden spearheaded the 1994 Violence Against Women Act, while Harris has been at the forefront of developing mechanisms to counter sexual harassment and streamline assistance for survivors of GBV. Violence against women continues to be rampant across the Indo-Pacific and is particularly pervasive in fragile and war-torn settings. It is critical that governments adopt strategies to safeguard women's rights—not only because of the acute gendered effects of

violence and disaster, but also because women's safety has a direct impact on long-term stability. Such measures include National Action Plans, which a number of countries have yet to develop. The US government could play a key role in helping these states create NAPs and other measures that will protect women and girls from violence.

The third section examined the WPS Relief and Recovery Pillar, which recognizes that instability deepens pre-existing gender-based inequalities and calls for applying a gendered perspective to post-conflict and post-disaster recovery. Biden and Harris have championed policies that aim to prevent disasters and protect vulnerable populations. Biden has already re-affirmed America's commitment to the largest international effort to address climate change. The new administration has also made gender an important aspect of their relief and recovery efforts, both in their COVID-19 plan and by bolstering protections for forcibly displaced women and girls attempting to enter the US. In the Indo-Pacific, uninterrupted conflict and displacement, climate change, and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic are having a devastating impact on women and threaten to roll back progress made on WPS and regional security. These humanitarian crises are making women and girls more vulnerable to abuse, narrowing their economic opportunities, and hindering their education. While some countries have developed innovative ways of managing the gendered impact of these crises, many women continue to be in exceedingly defenseless positions vis-a-vis the aforementioned threats. It is imperative that governments around the region take greater action to protect vulnerable women and girls. In addition, the US government under Biden and Harris should encourage and assist regional governments in designing strategies that protect and empower women living in fragile settings.

THE NEXT FOUR YEARS: WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY IN THE INDO-PACIFIC

"Protect and empower women around the world" is the last of five planks of the Biden-Harris Agenda for Women,²²³ and includes support for women's leadership, elevating women economically, confronting GBV, and pursuing ratification of the UN CEDAW. Yet given the dual pandemic and economic crises, Biden and Harris will likely continue to concentrate efforts on domestic women's issues. No doubt this administration will be more progressive on WPS than even Obama was, especially given Harris' groundbreaking role as the first woman vice president. When combined with DOD's Strategic Framework and Implementation Plan which aligns with the WPS Act of 2017 and the US Strategy on WPS, and USINDOPACOM's subsequent application of WPS principles to personnel composition, "policies, plans, doctrine, training, education, operations and exercises," we should be optimistic about WPS in the Asia-Pacific in the coming years.²²⁴ Among elevated maritime security concerns, ongoing extremist violence, the continued North Korea nuclear threat, increasingly aggressive moves from China and Russia, cyberthreats on a variety of fronts, and the global recession and COVID recovery challenges, there are numerous opportunities for women to provide positive leadership and influence on security matters. In a subsequent article, we will dive deeper into the implications that the first-ever woman US vice president will have for participation of women in politics and leadership roles worldwide and the region's WPS Agenda.

²²³ "The Biden Agenda for Women."

²²⁴ "DOD Supports Women, Peace and Security Act, Official Says," *US Indo-Pacific Command* (blog), July 28, 2020, <https://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/2291521/dod-supports-women-peace-and-security-act-official-says/>.

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