

## Trajectories Of WPS As A Norm: How Has It Traveled In The Military Sphere?

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### ***ABSTRACT***

*Following the adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 and those following (often referred to as the Women Peace and Security - WPS - Agenda) many countries have developed concrete plans to implement the provisions outlined in this set of resolutions within their military organizations. Several have launched mentoring and leadership coach programs at the top leadership level, others have explored how to bring change at the bottom level of the military echelon. In any case, integrating WPS provisions is increasingly becoming an indicator of being a progressive, modern military in line with international standards. What is more, NATO itself has been integrating WPS at the highest levels since 2012 through a NATO Secretary General's Special Representative for Women, Peace.*

*However, how did the WPS norm travel to the military sphere? While a growing body of literature has explored the WPS norm and its implementation in other spheres, we still do not know much about how those norms travel in the military context and how key leaders help spread them and particular interpretation of them. Building on scholarship about how norms travel, this paper traces the transformation of the WPS norm as it traveled from the Swedish national context to NATO and, now, back to Sweden. It aims to provide a first illustration of how Sweden adapted, embraced and implemented the norm.*

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

In this short version of our paper, we introduce and explore the trajectories of United Nations' Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda as a norm in relation to its travel in the military sphere at the national and supranational level. The WPS agenda emerged on the basis of a first UN Security Council Resolution in October 2000: UNSCR 1325. This resolution was adopted under the UNSC presidency of Namibia, following many years of activism by feminists - indeed, it was "almost entirely the work of civil society and non-governmental organizations" (Cockburn 2012, 49). UNSCR 1325 has become the foundation for a cluster of resolutions that now includes nine additional resolutions (1820, 1888, 1889, 1960, 2106, 2122, 2422, 2467 and 2493) and is commonly referred to as the WPS agenda (Cook 2008, Shepherd 2020). It was designed as an intervention to encourage gender mainstreaming in international peace and security institutions, both at the UN and beyond where an important implementation tool have been so-called National Action Plans (NAPs) for individual states.

We begin with a general discussion of the idea of norms and develop how the WPS agenda might be considered a norm or a cluster of norms. We see value in starting a conversation between the broader literature on norms, which has begun to explore how norms are adapted into organization mainly via individual norm entrepreneurs, and the ongoing debates about WPS in the feminist literature, which points to the difficulties of mainstreaming gender into organizations. By combining these distinct, but related, strands of literature about change in organizations, we will be better equipped to understand and critically examine specific processes of change, including successful and failing strategies of translating and integrating WPS norms into military organizations.

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Following this discussion, we aim to continue with a brief excursion into the literature on military culture, in particular its gendered character. As feminist scholars have highlighted, due to the highly masculine features of military organizations mainstreaming gender is likely to be an even steeper uphill battle in the military than in other organizations. Our interest is both in exposing the gendered structures of military organizations into which WPS norms are being translated as well as in exploring the agency of different kinds of norm entrepreneurs within and without these military organizations. Our aim is to investigate these dynamics in the Swedish and Norwegian Armed Forces, which have explicitly committed themselves in the NAPs to implementing key features of the agenda. What is more, we are also interested in examining how NATO has adopted the agenda and contributed to its proliferation. While the agenda was developed in the early 2000, it was only in 2012 that NATO appointed a Secretary General Special Representative for Women, Peace and Security (currently Irene Fellin). Since then, however, NATO has committed itself to “integrating gender perspectives across its three core tasks (deterrence and defence, crisis prevention and management, and cooperative security) and throughout its political and military structures” ([https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_91091.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_91091.htm)).

“The WPS norms are a ‘work in progress’ – that is, they constitute a body of international norms where different practitioners, such as the military, play a significant role in converting political aims to meaningful practice” (Bæk & Skelsbæk 2023: 1). The cluster of resolutions that make up the so-called WPS agenda is often discussed in terms of ‘pillars’ of activity: (1) participation of women in peace and security governance and decision-making; (2) protection of women’s rights in conflict and conflict-affected settings; (3) prevention of conflict and forms of conflict-related violence (including but not limited to sexual violence in conflict); and (4) gender-sensitive relief and recovery in conflict and post-conflict transition (see also Shepherd 2020 for a more detailed overview). As Sindre Bæk and Inger Skjelsbæk (2023:2) point out, the international literature on WPS and the military has primarily focused on international operations (see for instance Deiana & McDonagh 2018; Westendorf 2019) which offers one possible avenue for WPS norms to be “brought back home”. There is also a significant amount of work that addresses the pillar of participation via the recruitment of women into national armed forces and, subsequently, UN peace operations. Less attention has been paid in the literature on how the varied WPS norms are internalized by returning military personnel, who are often subsequently appointed to more influential posts where lessons learned during deployment are integrated into their new routines.

When we turn to the IR literature on norms, we identify some helpful tools that could help us understand how WPS travels in the military sphere. Within the norm debate, norms are usually defined as “shared expectations about appropriate behavior held by a collectivity of actors” (Checkel 1998: 83). Norms, such as the norm of humanitarian intervention or restraint in war, play an important role in international relations, shaping key international security outcomes (Finnemore 2003; Kahl 2007). Usually norms emerge and spread through implementation processes and following a so-called ‘norm-life cycle’ (Checkel 1998; Finnemore and Sikkink 1998; Katzenstein 1996). A handful of studies has recently addressed the topic of norm contestation and started to explore its determinants (Lantis and Wunderlich 2018; Wiener 2018). These studies do not yet provide systematic evidence about different steps of norm contestation and decline, nor a theoretical framework to understand the conditions and processes under which decline happens. Nonetheless, they do push us to explore the non-linear nature of the norm implementation cycle in a way that might be useful to adopt when studying WPS as well.

Another strand of research about norms has more recently started to make sense of how norms are mutually reinforcing global-local dynamics (Acharya 2004). In particular, he writes that “many local beliefs are themselves part of a legitimate normative order, which conditions the acceptance of foreign norms” (Acharya 2004: 239). In that article, Amitav Acharya “describes how local agents reconstruct foreign norms to ensure the norms fit with the agents’ cognitive priors and identities” (Acharya 2004: 239). WPS norm clusters can be understood along similar lines, that is as a body of ‘foreign norms’ that encounter alternative normative orders or, conversely, reinforce existing ones. Feminist scholars studying WPS in a variety of global context provide ample evidence that a multiplicity of reactions can be observed in practice: For

example, if one focuses on the adoption of NAPs as the primary means of implementing the WPS norms, one might miss that not only were the first actors to adopt these norms regional organizations in Africa (Kirby & Shepherd 2021), but also it is during the consultation process that important norm transfer and contestation takes place.

Yet another body of conversation is starting to explore how norms spread thanks to the initiative of distinct individual agents. Kristine Eck and Chiara Ruffa (2022), for instance, explore how distinct norms of military professionalism were exported from the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst from the ‘metropole’ towards the newly independent countries. Specific norms of professionalism were exported from Sandhurst (1948-71) but the ways in which they were translated varied tremendously across newly independent countries depending on how the norm entrepreneurs made sense of it and translated it. For instance, while in some countries what was spread and learned was the importance of distinct organizational structures, in others it was more about norms of civilian control (which in fact lead some to overthrow the government). Following this logic, we also expect that WPS translation may depend on norm entrepreneurs’ visions and personal agendas.

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