

Women, Peace and Security in 2017



In lieu of our regular round-ups on women, peace and security for December and January, we bring you some of the analysis and research conducted in 2017. Our February update will be published in early March.

January to March

The year began badly when, in one of his first decisions as president, Donald Trump reinstated the ‘global gag rule’. Also known as the Mexico City policy, the executive order prevents international NGOs that receive US government funding from providing abortions or information about them as part of family planning services. Laura Shephard argues that Trump’s order runs contrary to key provisions of the WPS agenda on the ‘protection of women’s rights and bodies’, which the United States has acceded to as a permanent member of the UN Security Council. The reinstatement caused global concern, with strong reactions in nations such as Kenya.

The year also saw a rise in female engagement in so-called Islamic State, culminating in the call to arms for women in October. Ester E.J. Strømme wrote a Peace Research Institute Oslo policy brief exploring how women who join the terror group are portrayed, what roles they take on and why, and how they are received when they return to the West. That’s often significantly different to the treatment men receive. This research report by ASPI’s Sofia Patel digs deeper into the world of women who’ve been involved with violent extremism, suggests changes to existing policy and to countering

violent extremism structures to incorporate lessons from those women's experiences, and argues that women's involvement in countering and preventing violent extremism is vital.

In February, Security Council Report, an independent think tank focused on the work of the UN Security Council, published its fifth report evaluating the council's performance in advancing the WPS agenda in 2016. While it notes some progress, such as the establishment of an informal experts group on WPS and the invitation to women's civil society representatives to brief the council at country-specific meetings, it acknowledges that considerable implementation gaps remain.

April to June

In May, the UN Security Council held an open debate on sexual violence in conflict. Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed pointed out that perceptions on the issue have changed and that it's now agreed that tackling sexual violence is a prerequisite for peace and security. Nevertheless, the root causes of sexual violence in conflict remain. The prosecution of perpetrators also remains inadequate, especially when the crimes are committed under the UN flag. The Women's International League for Peace & Freedom provides an overview of the secretary-general's report.

Canada joined the small club of countries that have applied a feminist lens to some of their policies. For example, Sweden's foreign policy has officially been feminist for the past three years. Now, Canada's feminist foreign aid policy promises that 'at least 80 per cent of Canada's international assistance will target the advancement of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls' by 2021. The Overseas Development Institute's Caroline Harper put the announcement into context, while critics asked important questions.

July to September

The middle of the year marked the beginning of the end for marry-your-rapist laws across North Africa and the Middle East. Morocco took steps in 2014, and now Tunisia, Lebanon and Jordan have followed and repealed or changed their laws. The gruesome practice has colonial roots and is still legal in many countries.

Sexual exploitation and abuse in UN peacekeeping missions continued to hit the headlines. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres made it a priority issue, establishing a high-level task force in his first week in office and releasing his *Report on special measures for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse: a new approach*. The report notes the important link between women's participation in UN peacekeeping missions, and efforts to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse. This long assessment by Azad Essa exposes a lack of international will and explains why offenders have little to fear of prosecution. Similarly, Andrea Booth explores why sexual exploitation is still happening in the peacekeeping environment. Jeni Whalen's report for the International Peace Institute recommends reforms for member states and the UN.

The Asia Foundation published *The state of conflict and violence in Asia*, which provides 'a concise overview of the diversity and complexity of conflict and violence' in 14 Asian countries. A major focus is gender-based violence and it also deals with domestic violence, terrorism, sectarian violence, and the plight of many religious minorities, while examining emerging patterns.

October to December

Global events showed that the use of rape as a weapon of war isn't a relic of the past. Reporting by the Associated Press and Human Rights Watch provided further strong evidence that Rohingya women in Myanmar have been subject to a methodical campaign of rape by Myanmar's security forces. Life for Rohingya women in refugee camps in Bangladesh can offer solace but also new challenges.

Monash Gender, Peace & Security published its final report on gender perspectives and women's roles in preventing violent extremism. The project started with a pilot in Indonesia that explored connections between women's participation and leadership and their perceptions of violent extremism. Co-author Jacqui True summarised the project's early findings and highlighted the importance of drawing on local women's knowledge when developing strategies for countering and preventing violent extremism.

In the US, the bipartisan Women, Peace, and Security Act of 2017 became law. The legislation aims to increase the participation of women in negotiation and mediation. Council on Foreign Relations senior fellows Rachel Vogelstein and Jamille Bigio identify the three main facts about the act, note how it will allow increasing involvement of women in international security efforts, and analyse how it can advance American security strategies.

The Global Women, Peace and Security Index was launched near the end of 2017. Anu Mundkur and Laura Shepherd recently questioned whether the research actually serves as a WPS index. Report authors Jeni Klugman and Marianne Dahl responded.

In Australia, the outcomes of nationwide roundtables on WPS were published. The WPS Coalition created space for women to discuss what peace and security means to them and how that should influence the next edition of the country's national action plan due in mid-2019.