

# NATO, WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY

## How can Finland promote gender equality at the heart of NATO?

Discussion Paper For the  
Development Policy Committee  
28 May 2025

Development Policy Committee Publications 2025:1

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DEVELOPMENT  
POLICY COMMITTEE



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## Introduction

With the deterioration of the security policy environment in 2022 and Finland's subsequent NATO membership, integration into the alliance has become increasingly central to Finland's foreign, security and defence policy (FSDP).<sup>1</sup> The focus of Finland's security policy has shifted to supporting NATO's deterrence and collective defence. Finland's Women, Peace and Security (WPS) work has yet to respond to this change. Correspondingly, the significance of military crisis management within NATO, where WPS work has been significantly developed over decades, has diminished in relative terms. NATO has nevertheless already shifted its attention to how WPS work could be advanced in the future as part of the alliance's deterrence and collective defence. According to NATO, Europe's worsening security environment has gendered impacts on women and girls, and women have a significant role both in national defence and in building societal resilience. The gender equality concept is also increasingly being targeted by disinformation campaigns that challenge societal cohesion and resilience.<sup>2</sup>

Amidst this changing situation, NATO is considering a re-prioritisation of the WPS agenda. Finland would have contributions to make to this development work based on its prior expertise. In this regard, Finland should make use of its own WPS capacity and broader political capital as effectively as possible. In terms of Finland's advocacy work, it is crucial to understand both NATO's internal challenges and the opportunities related to Finland's potential influence. As a full member of NATO, Finland has better opportunities and a stronger obligation<sup>3</sup> to influence NATO's WPS work. This has also been noted in the foreign and security policy report guideline, according to which "Finland advocates an ambitious approach to NATO's Women, Peace and Security agenda and NATO's Human Security concept. Finland supports the development of NATO's Women, Peace and Security work in a manner that enhances the implementation of the agenda across all NATO core tasks, including deterrence and defence."<sup>4</sup>

This discussion paper seeks to identify concrete measures through which Finland can promote, in accordance with FSDP, an ambitious approach to NATO's Women, Peace and Security agenda through its foreign and security policy and development policy.

The following three main questions guided the analysis:

1. What are the key issues that Finland should primarily seek to develop within NATO, and how?
2. What are the processes guiding the implementation of NATO's 1325 programme that should be enhanced to ensure that Women, Peace and Security is visible in all of NATO's core tasks?
3. How should the links between Finland's foreign and security policy and development cooperation be strengthened so that Finland's impact in strengthening gender equality within NATO would be as effective as possible?

The following focal questions helped prioritise the work:

- a) How are Women, Peace and Security (WPS) objectives taken into account in NATO's main tasks, and what is NATO's overall view of its WPS policy?
- b) What opportunities do member states, and Finland in particular, have to influence the planning and implementation of NATO's WPS activities, so that NATO's action programme translates into concrete practices in its core tasks?
- c) What are Finland's potential areas of strength and practical expertise, that could be provided to NATO in a way that would be impactful for both parties?

This discussion paper is based on a commission from the Development Policy Committee (DPC) operating in connection with Finland's Ministry for Foreign Affairs (MFA). It was produced in collaboration between three independent foreign, security and defence policy experts under the DPC's guidance between November 2024 and February 2025. The main source material used in the analysis consists of research literature related to NATO and the WPS agenda, as well as anonymous background discussions in Finland and at NATO. The findings reflect a time when Finland's NATO membership is still in its early stages.

The discussion paper consists, in addition to the introduction and key concepts, of four sections. In the first thematic background chapter, we examine NATO's WPS content and its development in the 21st century. Secondly, we assess Finland's agency and strengths in implementing the WPS agenda, which could be useful in NATO advocacy. Thirdly, we map possible challenges in implementing and developing the WPS agenda both within NATO and nationally. Finally, we posit key conclusions that emerged from the material and present action recommendations for integrating the WPS agenda more concretely into Finland's foreign, security and defence policy.

## Key Concepts

**Women, Peace and Security:** NATO's Women, Peace and Security work refers to UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (Women, Peace and Security, WPS) from 2000 and subsequent resolutions on the same subject, which focus on the status, rights and agency of women in wars, conflict resolution and reconstruction. The 1325 agenda is often seen as consisting of three pillars: (i) participation: women's involvement in conflict resolution and security policy and reconstruction decision-making; (ii) protection: protecting women from violence in armed conflicts; (iii) prevention: preventing armed conflicts and the central role of women. NATO's WPS work has been led by the Secretary General's Special Representative for WPS since 2012. Resolution 1325 provides a mandate for, for example, GMO work within NATO and in the national defence of member states.

**Gender in Military Operations (GMO):** GMO is a NATO doctrine that guides gender-specific security needs in operational work and how the activities of armed forces affect different population groups, based particularly on the gendered needs of women, men, girls and boys. This strengthens the armed forces' situational awareness and understanding of the effects of operational activities and enables the consideration of different perspectives and themes.

**Human Security:** Human security (HS) refers to security threats facing civilian populations and is approached by NATO as a set of five themes: civilian protection, the involvement of children in armed conflicts, sexual violence in conflicts, the protection of cultural heritage, and issues related to human trafficking. HS work is conducted in NATO as a separate entity, which has key points of contact with WPS work, including in preventing conflict-related sexual violence. The Human Security Unit was established in 2019 under the WPS Special Representative, and the concept was incorporated into NATO's Strategic Concept in 2022. This aims to ensure that the actions required for human security are formally and practically integrated into each of NATO's core tasks.

## NATO and the Women, Peace and Security package

Nato has a comparatively long history of developing WPS work.<sup>5</sup> The organisation has had a Women, Peace and Security policy framework<sup>6</sup> since 2007, and the work has been led by the Secretary General's Special Representative since 2012. In NATO's Strategic Concept adopted in 2022, the WPS agenda was raised more prominently than before, and it was linked to all three of the alliance's main tasks: deterrence and collective defence, crisis management and cooperative security.<sup>7</sup> The policy guideline *NATO Policy on Women Peace and Security* (2024)<sup>8</sup>, drafted in support of the Strategic Concept, was approved at NATO's summit in 2024.

In the policy guideline, NATO defines four strategic-level objectives for its WPS work, three of which are consistent with the objectives of the UN's global WPS programme: (i) participation: women's involvement in conflict resolution and security policy and reconstruction decision-making; (ii) protection: protecting women from violence in armed conflicts; (iii) prevention: preventing armed conflicts and the central role of women. The fourth strategic-level objective focuses on gender-responsive leadership and accountability at all levels of NATO decision-making, and thus internally within the NATO organisation and nationally in member states.<sup>9</sup>

The change in the geopolitical situation is also evident in NATO's most recent WPS policy guideline. While the alliance's previous WPS guideline from 2018<sup>10</sup> briefly refers to NATO's collective defence last among the core tasks, the new policy guideline emphasises the importance of policy work in deterrence and defence. The WPS package and gender are seen as important in such things as counter-terrorism work, arms control and disarmament, responding to new technologies, chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) defence, and responding to cyber and hybrid threats. The policy guideline also pays attention to societal resilience, the exploitation of gender issues in disinformation campaigns, and digital violence against women and girls. NATO is currently drafting a new WPS action plan for implementing the policy guideline.

At the military level, NATO has made an assessment<sup>11</sup> of its force structure (NATO Force Structure, NFS) for implementing the human security policy programme in operational activities. The programme improves the security of civilian communities both on the territory of NATO countries and beyond. The background includes lessons learnt from Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine. The programme identifies and harmonises best human security practices, challenges and discontinuities in five cross-cutting areas (see box) in relation to NATO carrying out its core tasks.

## NATO's Key 1325 Actors

Next, we examine those key actors in NATO's WPS agenda that Finland should be able to influence through active involvement. It should be noted that the main responsibility for implementing WPS objectives lies with member states, whereby preparatory work takes place in parallel with NATO. We divide the examination into key actors operating at the political and military levels. From Finland's perspective, it would be essential to be able to influence decision-making, implementation and discussion also with civil society.

## Political Decision-Making

At the political level, member states' gender equality ambassadors, special experts and civil society representatives consult regularly at meetings convened by the WPS Special Representative.

The highest-level body guiding NATO's WPS work is the Special Representative operating under the direct authority of NATO's Secretary General. Since 2022, Irene Fellin of Italy has served as the Secretary General's Special Adviser. She leads both NATO's human security and WPS



work within NATO, supported by a small staff. The Special Representative convenes meetings of NATO member states' gender equality ambassadors to exchange experiences of implementing the WPS agenda at the national level, and to develop ways to strengthen links between the national level and NATO.

Decisions at the political level are prepared in committees and working groups, of which the highest in the hierarchy is the NATO Committee on Gender Perspectives (NCGP)<sup>12</sup>, specialising in NATO's gender equality work. Finland is represented in the working group by an expert from our permanent NATO delegation. The NCGP's task is to produce a political standpoint and guidance primarily for NATO's Military Committee. At the same time, it acts as an advisory body within NATO on gender-related issues. In each member state, at the national level, preparatory work for decisions is done by civil servants from both the MFA and the Ministry of Defence who draft national-level WPS policy.

Representatives of NATO countries, their partners and civil societies in conflict areas have, since 2016, convened in the Civil Society Advisory Panel (CSAP). Finland's Women, Peace and Security network has had a representative in the civil society organisations' CSAP for several years.

## Military Implementation

The military implementation of the WPS agenda in NATO's command and force structures is prepared by NATO's International Military Staff Office of the Gender Advisor (IMS GENAD). Its task is to draft military guidance for the aforementioned NATO International Staff Human Security Unit (IS Human Security Unit) and NATO's highest military leadership. The IMS GENAD office also acts as secretariat for the committee responsible for WPS activities within NATO (NATO Committee on Gender Perspectives, NCGP), and as an advisory body to NATO's Military Committee (MC). Additionally, NATO's strategic operational command (Allied Command Operations, ACO) and NATO's transformation command (Allied Command Transformation, ACT) have their own gender focal points, as do their subordinate joint operational commands (Joint Force Command, JFC) and tactical commands (LANDCOM, MARCOM, AIRCOM).<sup>13</sup>

In terms of our mandate, two levels of influence can be identified. At the political level, the aim is to gain visibility and opportunities for influence on NATO's WPS content. At the military level, on the other hand, the aim is to influence the position of women and girls in practical operational activities: in doctrines, command and control structures, personnel development, training and exercise activities, and preparedness and defence operations. The former can be realised through political-level influence and working within the human security framework. In this case, the NATO Secretary General's WPS Special Representative Irene Fellin, who is based at the IS, should be chosen as the point of influence. In addition, Finland's representatives exert an

influence, through their foreign and security policy civil service work, by participating in NATO's political-level committees and working groups.

In NATO's military structures, advocacy should begin from the highest preparatory level, NATO's International Military Staff (IMS Office of the Gender Advisor, IMS GENAD).

In terms of carrying out Finland's WPS work, it is important to be active at all levels of both political decision-making and military implementation in the administrative sectors of both the MFA and the Ministry of Defence, as well as in their subordinate agencies. For example, regarding military implementation, the human security and WPS agenda should permeate all of the Finnish Defence Forces' main tasks and processes at the national level. Impact would also be enhanced by familiarising and training employed personnel and every conscript age group, so that the perspectives of women and girls would become mainstreamed at all levels.<sup>14</sup>

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## Finland's strengths and practical expertise in implementing the WPS agenda

Finland promotes the implementation of the WPS agenda through such areas as its foreign, security, defence and development policy activities. In 2023, Finland published its fourth WPS action programme as a new NATO country.<sup>15</sup> Finland's priorities in implementing the WPS programme have included increasing women's participation in peace mediation and supporting women's rights in conflicts and post-conflict situations through development policy and cooperation tools. Cooperation with partner countries is an important theme in NATO's work, and this was also the case for Finland before its membership in the alliance.<sup>16</sup> From Finland's previous NATO cooperation and other work for the WPS agenda, areas of strength and practical expertise can be identified that Finland could continue to utilise in advancing the implementation of NATO's WPS policy guideline. These in particular involve:

- **Multi-stakeholder cooperation** in international crisis management organisations and in the planning and implementation of the national action programme. Finland's Women, Peace and Security network has extensive expertise in WPS themes.
- **Promoting interaction between crisis management operations and civilian populations.** Finland has engaged in civil-military cooperation (CIMIC) in all peacekeeping and crisis management operations to which military forces have been deployed.<sup>17</sup>
- **WPS implementation in civilian crisis management.** Finland has systematically increased the number of female experts sent to civilian crisis management operations, raising it to about 40 per cent of all deployed experts.<sup>18</sup> Finland has also invested in sending gender experts to civilian crisis management operations and missions. Ten of the civilian experts Finland sent to NATO in 2010–2023 were women, and two of them were gender experts.
- **Developing national and international training activities and special expertise related to human security.** The Finnish Defence Forces International Centre

Fincent coordinates the development of training solutions related to NATO's human security and monitors their correspondence to operational requirements. Many human security-related themes (including protection of civilians, conflict-related sexual violence) are directly relevant to implementing the WPS agenda. Finland is also a founding member of the Nordic Centre for Gender in Military Operations (NCGM) operating in Sweden. The NCGM guides and coordinates gender training taking place in NATO.

- **Developing national expertise in equality issues.** For example, the Finnish Defence Forces has participated in Finland's national WPS work both through the national action programme and with the defence administration's own WPS action programme by allocating human resources to, amongst other things, national equality and non-discrimination work.
- **Long-term support for developing countries' WPS work,** particularly through supporting the drafting and implementation of partner countries' national action programmes.

Finland also has many areas of expertise that, in the changed security situation, may gain new significance in NATO's WPS work, particularly in implementing NATO's deterrence and defence. These include particularly:

- Finland's **comprehensive security model** and support for societal resilience, in which different population groups' opportunities in developing society's comprehensive security should be examined in more detail.
- Expertise and authority related to **technological threats and digital violence against women and girls.** Finland has led the UN gender equality initiative Generation Equality's technology and innovation working group.
- **The role of gender in hybrid influence and disinformation campaigns.** The European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats, among others, has investigated the exploitation of different forms of identity in disinformation campaigns.<sup>19</sup> The MFA has paid attention in its investigative work to the anti-gender movement's effects on multilateral cooperation in Europe.<sup>20</sup>

## Challenges and Risks

Next, we examine the challenges and risks related to NATO's WPS programme both within NATO and in terms of Finland's national implementation.

### Challenges Related to NATO's Activities

A central challenge related to NATO's activities is considered to be the emphasis on the significance of the agenda directly related to NATO's core task (deterrence and defence) at the expense of other main tasks (crisis management, cooperative security). This is partly related to the deterioration of the security policy environment and the diminishing significance of peace issues in public discourse. However, it would be important that the WPS agenda relates essentially to NATO's first main task – deterrence and defence – not only to crisis management and cooperative security. In reality, the significance of the WPS agenda extends to all levels of NATO's activities, organisations, its command and force structures, and capability development and their use in such things as exercises, preventive activities, warfare and recovery. Concerning the first main task in particular, it would be important for NATO countries to have the internal capacity to respond to crises below the level of war (for example, hybrid attacks).

A second main challenge relates to the prioritising and under-resourcing the WPS agenda within NATO. Because most WPS work is done outside NATO's structures, the contribution of national authorities is important for implementing and pursuing the WPS agenda. A key challenge in this respect relates to the scarcity of national resources, weakening both the deployment of NATO's WPS Action Plan and the scope for implementing National Action Plans. Similarly, NATO's own structures (e.g., IMS GENAD, the Gender Adviser's office) rely heavily on member states' funding. For example, the positions of head and deputy head of NATO's Military Staff GENAD office are unfilled. Likewise, there are no specifically appointed gender or WPS experts at all organisational levels and in many sectors of NATO; instead, they implement the WPS agenda alongside their regular duties.

A third challenge regarding NATO relates to divergent views on defining the gender concept and the WPS package. In NATO's military activities, gender analysis examines the gendered security needs and agencies of women, men, girls and boys. In some NATO countries, gender is seen more diversely or is dealt with more intersectionally alongside other identities. Similarly, globally prevailing anti-gender narratives

attempt to slow down or even prevent the deployment of principles jointly agreed upon within NATO and to influence the societal resilience in NATO countries.<sup>21</sup> There are also considerable differences between the political and military sides in prioritising the WPS package and in the approaches chosen. In Finland, the term gender has been used in the Defence Forces only for activities outside the country in crisis management operations<sup>22</sup>, and work to advance WPS or gender work within the Defence Forces has only begun to be promoted with NATO membership.

A fourth challenge relates to the disconnect between the political guidance and military implementation of NATO's WPS agenda. Background discussions revealed that high-level policy guidance documents are often rather vague, which can weaken implementation at the operational level. As the agenda is quite broad, the most significant challenges related to its implementation are at the military level (operational and tactical levels). Problems previously identified by NATO in relation to enhancing human security include discontinuities between organisational levels, inconsistencies in understanding and implementation, deficiencies in WPS training scenarios, and differences in understanding of people-centeredness and the five cross-cutting themes, for example. Resolving these issues requires guidance from NATO's highest level.<sup>23</sup>

## Challenges related to implementing Finland's WPS agenda

Finland is recognised among NATO countries as a significant contributor to overall security. Finland has much to offer in terms of NATO's collective defence and deterrence, as well as crisis management and cooperative security development. However, NATO has so far assigned Finland a more modest role in NATO's WPS work. Based on the sources, the general impression is that, given its previous profile and expertise, Finland is expected to take part in developing NATO's WPS agenda. Experts consider other Nordic countries and Canada, for example, to be comparable to Finland.

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At present, there do not appear to be sufficient resources for WPS activities. A key challenge is related to prioritising the importance of the WPS agenda and resourcing the related tasks at both the political level and in implementation. Criticism has been directed at, among other things, the small number of personnel working on WPS issues both at NATO and at the national implementation level. Unlike in other Nordic countries, the Finnish Defence Forces have not appointed a full-time GENAD representative to the General Staff as a liaison officer at the NATO national level. This is seen as a shortcoming, as Finland's opportunities to influence NATO's WPS content and implementation have improved significantly since Finland joined NATO. The WPS expertise that Finland has acquired over the years is in danger of withering away.

A similar concern is also shared in the civil society sector, where civil society organisations' opportunities for influence are felt to be weak in relation to NATO's WPS work. NATO is still less familiar in Finland's civil society sector than many other international organisations, and its operating methods and decision-making processes are not sufficiently well known. A significant challenge arises from insufficient national utilisation of expertise when preparing NATO's policy guidelines. This may complicate the implementation of guidelines that are central to Finland's perspective. On the other hand, civil society organisations feel that through the MFA they have good opportunities to influence matters and that their expertise and cooperation are valued, but that there would be room for improvement in relation to NATO. A central challenge in this respect is that the preparation principles of the military-focused NATO's WPS agenda are not as well known in the civil society sector as, for example, those of other key international organisations, the UN and the EU. However, organisations have had a significant role in national WPS work, and the expertise accumulated from this is not fully utilised.

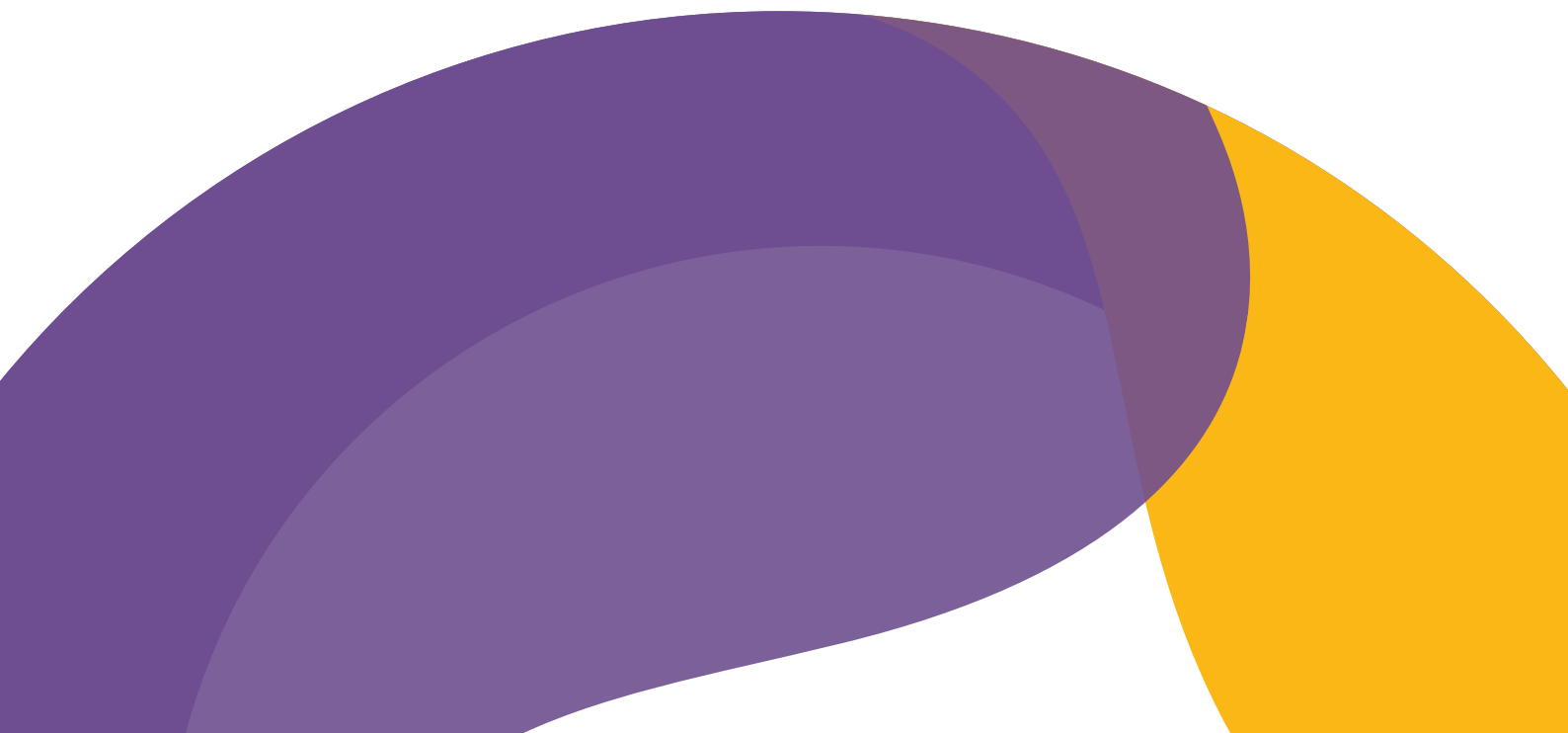


## Recommendations

**W**ith NATO membership, Finland has improved opportunities and also an obligation to support NATO's WPS package and the realisation of its objectives. At present, there is particular demand for advocacy work, as NATO develops ways to take the WPS package into account in the alliance's collective defence. Our recommendations to Finland's foreign, security and defence policy actors enable a more ambitious approach to NATO's WPS package.

1. **Finland should take a more active role in planning and implementing NATO's WPS policy guidelines**, particularly regarding NATO's first main task – deterrence and defence – by identifying key areas for NATO advocacy work. These include, for example, hybrid threats and technology influence. Additionally, lessons learnt previously from international crisis management should be applied by, amongst other things, developing the recruitment of women broadly to military tasks.
2. **National coordination of Finland's WPS policy practised in NATO should be based on multi-stakeholder cooperation**, in which all key experts from the civil service level to the civil society sector are included in preparing and assessing Finland's guidelines and policy. Regular information exchange and discussions with key actors would be beneficial.

3. **In the changed security environment, comprehensive security and societal resilience have been emphasised.** Finland's WPS special expertise should be better integrated as part of both the national comprehensive security field and in advocacy work within NATO as a cross-cutting theme, such as by developing the division of labour between civil and military cooperation (CIMIC).
4. **Finland should intensify cooperation among those allies who have deeper experience of WPS work in peacekeeping and crisis management operations.** For example, cooperation can be deepened with the Nordic Centre for Gender in Military Operations (NCGM) by returning a national expert to the centre as other Nordic countries do. Similarly, in NATO's partnership activities, initiatives should be encouraged and innovated for developing the WPS agenda with Finland's key partners and allies.
5. **Finland should increase resources and nurture expertise, as well as the knowledge base, in developing and implementing the WPS agenda nationally.** This could happen, for example, by establishing a full-time post at the Defence Command, including a liaison function in NATO's WPS programme, appointing responsible persons to branch headquarters and the National Defence University, and allocating resources to filling the GENAD position at NATO's Military Staff. Expertise in human security and WPS packages should also be increased in each authority's own field. Likewise, the volume of research supporting decision-making should be increased nationally. This should particularly take into account WPS themes identified as important for NATO's collective defence, such as comprehensive security, societal resilience, hybrid influence and technology threats.



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