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Joining the dots: from national to European level tools to implement UNSCR 1325

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Introduction

The aim of this discussion paper is to contribute to the reflection and discussions both at national and European levels on the implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325. It has a particular focus on the contributions of women's organisations as advocates, drafters and implementers of national action plans (NAPs) on UNSCR 1325 and strategies for its implementation. It also includes a civil society perspective on the extent to which EU Member States (MS) link their national policies on these issues to the relevant EU policy framework.

This paper builds on the body of work produced by EPLO in recent years and forms part of ongoing efforts to provide evidence-based contributions to the debate on these issues through meetings and written output. It consists of an analysis of key findings from a collection of civil society case studies on the implementation of UNSCR 1325 in Europe which EPLO has published to mark the 13th anniversary of its adoption. The collection builds on EPLO's 2010 publication entitled '21 Case Studies of Implementation of UNSCR 1325 in Europe' which provided an overview of European civil society involvement in lobbying for, drafting, implementing, monitoring and reviewing NAPs for the implementation of UNSCR 1325 and subsequent resolutions.¹

In order to both enhance the relevance of the analysis and to give it context, the collection on which this paper is based includes case studies from 15 EU MS complemented by experiences from four countries which are on the path to joining the EU and two non-EU European countries. The 20 case studies cover both those countries which have been or are currently affected by conflict, and those whose NAPs are focused on conflict situations beyond their own borders ("donor" NAPs). They also include X countries/provinces for which no NAP currently exists but where women's organisations are active and lobbying on the issue.

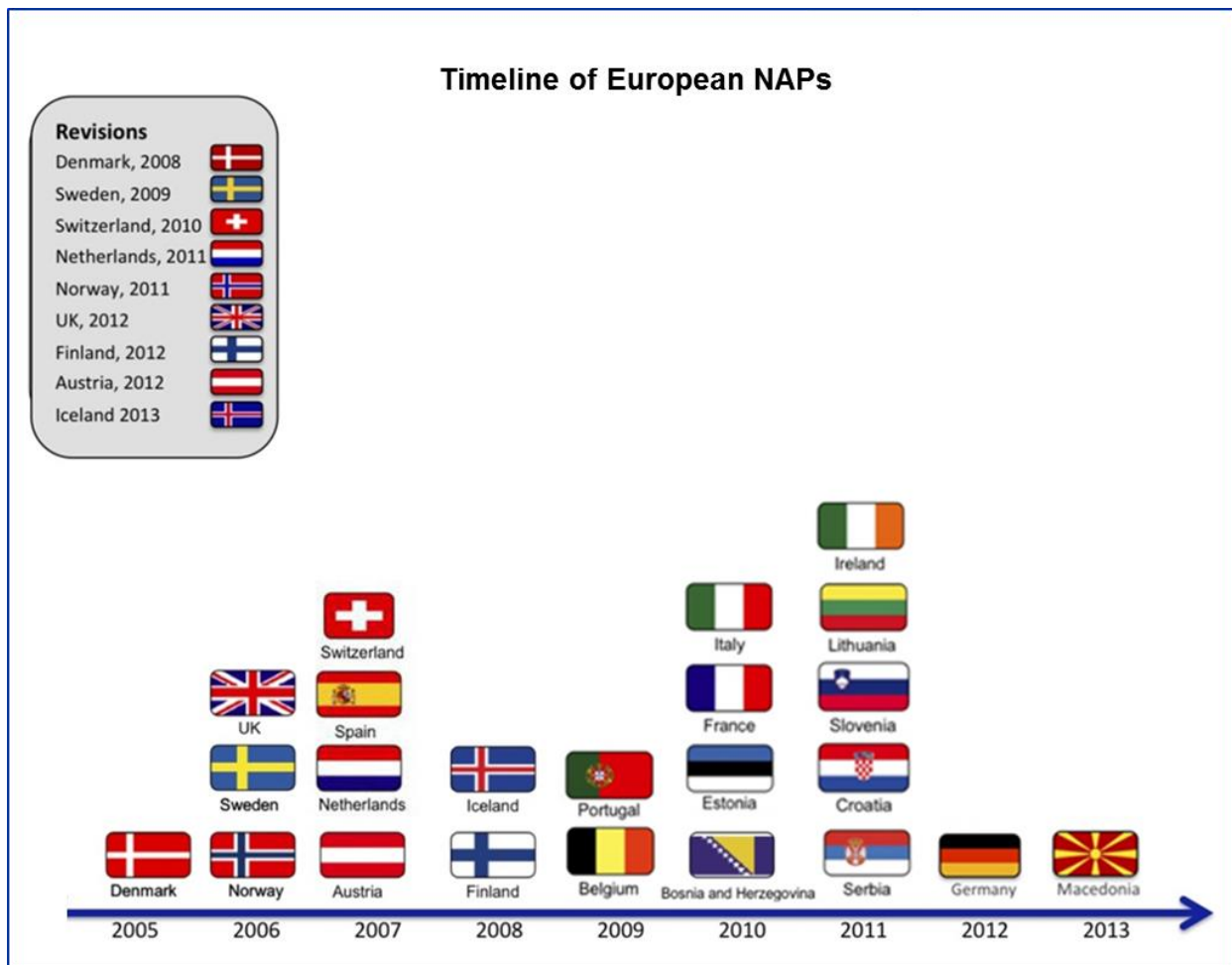
EU- and national level tools to implement UNSCR 1325: missed opportunities and potential for mutual learning.

In 2010, when EPLO published its first assessment of the implementation of UNSCR 1325 in Europe, only 12 European countries had NAPs. Since then, NAPs have been adopted in an additional 11 countries making the current tally:

- **17 EU Member States:** Austria (first edition 2007, revised in 2012); Belgium (first edition 2009, second edition 2013); Croatia (2011); Denmark (first edition 2005, revised in 2008); Estonia (2010); Finland (first edition 2008, revised in 2012); France (2012); Germany (2012); Ireland (2011); Italy (2010); Lithuania (2011); The Netherlands (first edition 2007, second edition 2012); Portugal (2009); Slovenia (2011); Spain (2007); Sweden (first edition 2006, revised in 2009) and the United Kingdom (UK) (first edition 2009, revised in 2011)
- **2 non-EU European countries:** Switzerland (first edition 2007, revised in 2011) and Norway (first edition 2006 followed by Strategic Plan 2011-2013)
- **3 EU candidate countries:** Iceland (first edition 2008, revised in 2013); the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (2013) and Serbia (2011)
- **1 potential candidate country:** Bosnia Herzegovina (2010, currently under revision).

With a total of 23, Europe is the region with the highest number of NAPs anywhere in the world.

¹ See <http://www.eplo.org/eplo-publications.html>



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The number of European NAPs presents an opportunity for the EU as a regional organisation to learn from the expertise of its MS and to capitalise on it. This potential has not yet been fully exploited. The holistic EU policy framework to implement UNSCR 1325² was originally intended to complement existing strategies and tools at the national level. It included a commitment to provide a platform for EU MS to share best practices and identify joint interests on national implementation of UNSCR 1325, including challenges encountered. In practice, although EU MS' NAPs often include references to EU level commitments, there have been limited attempts to map existing efforts in conflict-affected countries or to coordinate action. The few examples of coordination or plans to maximise joint action are usually ad hoc initiatives led by single EU MS, EU delegations or civil society organisations (CSOs) in a limited number of conflict-affected countries.³

In the future, existing EU level structures such as the EU Task Force on Women, Peace and Security could provide a space to capitalise on the respective experiences and enhance the coordination of EU and EU MS' policies in this field.

² The [Comprehensive approach to the EU implementation of the United Nations Security Council Resolutions 1325 and 1820 on women, peace and security](#) and the [Implementation of UNSCRs on Women, Peace and Security in the context of CSDP missions and operations](#) (revised in 2012).

³ According to the draft of the second monitoring report on the EU Comprehensive Approach to UNSCR 1325, the EU delegations in Nepal, Fiji, Timor Leste and the Central African Republic among others report being part of coordination groups on UNSCR 1325.

It should be noted that the majority of NAPs covered in this study are those of “donor countries”. Most European NAPs tend to be focused on conflicts beyond their borders. Even those European countries which have their own recent experiences of conflict do not generally refer to them in their NAPs. This may represent a missed opportunity not only to learn from rich, if challenging, experiences closer to home, but also to develop policies which are rooted in lessons from Europe’s own experience of conflict and the inclusion/exclusion of women from peacebuilding processes.

The rich experiences of those European countries which have already completed more than one implementation cycle and adopted revised or new NAPs should be captured through monitoring and evaluation (M&E) mechanisms. Where reviews and evaluations have taken place, they have proved to be valuable learning processes for the countries concerned and often (although not always) led to improved NAPs. However, to date, only Estonia⁴ and Ireland⁵ have published their monitoring reports. Other countries’ reluctance to make the results of their reviews public represents a major missed opportunity for mutual learning.

The EU has also already completed its first implementation cycle. It published its first monitoring report in 2011⁶ and is currently finalising a second. For the second iteration, it set an important precedent by sharing a draft of the monitoring report for consultation with CSOs and launching a discussion on refreshing its indicators, which are also referred to in many EU MS’ own NAPs.⁷ This could represent an important first step towards making the M&E processes at both regional and national levels more inclusive and enabling the intended beneficiaries of NAPs to participate in discussions on their impacts.

Key Findings

a) Actors influencing NAP development processes

- In most cases, the adoption of NAPs was the **result of intensive advocacy by women’s organisations**. Their strategies included awareness-raising campaigns on UNSCR 1325 and subsequent resolutions, promoting exchanges among women’s rights advocates (women and men) across different sectors in civil society and politics, producing analysis and preparatory work for the adoption of NAPs, including good practice guides; and advocating in regional and international forums for the implementation of UNSCR 1325 and the adoption of NAPs. For example, in 2010, a group of leading Irish women’s human rights, development, and humanitarian CSOs produced a good practice guide in which they set out six essential steps to develop an Irish NAP.⁸

- Numerous **civil society coalitions, working groups and platforms of CSOs** have been established in order to facilitate common advocacy and to provide input into the development of NAPs. This has generally helped to strengthen the capacity of women’s organisations to

⁴ [Estonia’s Action Plan for the Implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 “Women, Peace and Security” in Estonia 2010 – 2014: Implementation Report of the period of 22 October 2010 – 31 December 2011](#)
[Estonia’s Action Plan for the Implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on “Women, Peace and Security” in Estonia 2010-2014: Implementation report for the period 1 January 2012 – 31 December 2012](#)

⁵ [Mid-Term Progress Report: Ireland’s National Action Plan for UNSCR 1325 2011-2014](#)

⁶ Monitoring Report on the Comprehensive Approach to the EU Implementation of UNSCR 1325

⁷ See the background paper on [Lessons Learnt in Monitoring the Implementation of Women, Peace and Security Policies](#) which was produced in advance of the June 2013 Civil Society Dialogue Network policy meeting on monitoring the implementation of the EU Comprehensive Approach to UNSCR 1325.

⁸ [UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security: Towards an Effective and Inclusive Irish National Action Plan](#)

advocate for the implementation of UNSCR 1325 and to maximise their impact on the development of NAPs. For example, in the Netherlands, the gender platform WO=MEN facilitated the creation of a working group on UNSCR 1325 with the aim of coordinating civil society's contributions to the NAP. Civil society platforms are particularly useful since CSOs, particularly those active in conflict-affected countries, do not necessarily share a single, consensus view on how women, peace and security (WPS) issues should be prioritised and addressed in an NAP, and they bring different experiences to the table.

- In some countries, particularly in the Western Balkans, these processes have been **strongly influenced by international and regional organisations** and have, in most cases, involved only a limited number of CSOs. Although women's organisations in the region have been advocating for the implementation of UNSCR 1325 for several years, some case studies revealed concerns that the development of NAPs were more indicative of governments' efforts to gain international legitimacy rather than of genuine commitment to the UNSCR 1325 agenda. The issue of ownership of these NAPs and of their subsequent implementation reflects trends of progress in peacebuilding in these countries (i.e. often due to international pressure rather than locally-led initiatives).

b) Nature, focus and content of NAPs

- Very few NAPs were produced on the basis of **consultations with the intended beneficiaries**. Only a small number of countries reached out to women affected by conflict during the development of their NAPs. Of the countries analysed, Ireland appears to have undertaken the most extensive consultation with CSOs. The Irish NAP was the result of consultations with Irish CSOs and subsequently with women affected by conflict and living in Ireland as asylum seekers, refugees and migrants; an engagement with women living in Northern Ireland and affected by the conflict in the region, and a cross-learning initiative with women from Timor-Leste, Northern Ireland and Liberia. This consultation process was seen as a key mechanism for highlighting women's experiences of living with conflict and for improving the quality of the Irish NAP.

- European countries' NAPs are primarily **outward-looking**, in that they focus on the country's role as a "donor" and "provider" of security and rarely address issues arising from conflicts taking place within or on their own borders. The NAPs of those countries which have direct experiences of conflicts rarely include provisions to address issues such as women's involvement in internal peacebuilding processes or the status of female victims of violence during a past conflict on their territory. For example, the UK government has argued that the Northern Ireland hostilities do not constitute an armed conflict under international law⁹ and, therefore, references to such events and ensuing processes in the NAP are unwarranted.¹⁰ (NB/ The Irish NAP, on the other hand, does make reference to the post-conflict status of Northern Ireland).

- There is a general sense that **more specific links between provisions in the NAPs and provisions in other domestic and external policies** are required in order to avoid situations in which WPS issues are entirely confined to NAPs. For instance, in the UK, the Building Stability Overseas Strategy (BSOS), a cross-governmental conflict policy, and related conflict assessment tools, have been launched without fully incorporating the principles of the NAP,

⁹ Wilmshurst, E., (2012), International Law and the Classification of Conflicts.

¹⁰ In 2011, the Westminster Associate Party Group on UNSCR 1325 set up an inquiry into Northern Ireland and UNSCR 1325 prompted by the 2008 CEDAW Concluding Observations and GAPS Global Checklist in 2010, which drew attention to the absence of Northern Ireland in the UK NAP. Written submissions have been received and the inquiry was scheduled to take place in October 2013

although some steps have been taken to remedy this in implementation as a result of advocacy by GAPS UK.

- **A number of themes are conspicuous by their absence in most NAPs:** conflict prevention as opposed to conflict resolution, access to justice, reparations and reintegration for victims of sexual violence in conflicts, elements of disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) policies, aspects of dealing with the past, weapons control, in particular illicit trade of small arms and light weapons; links between domestic and conflict-related violence, and the human trafficking of women and girls.

- Some CSOs are concerned about the **predominantly securitised approach** of their country's NAP and a corresponding weak or missing focus on human security. They tend to view people-centred approaches to resolving inequalities as key to transforming and preventing violent conflicts. However, most NAPs tend to replicate existing state-centred concepts of security. While increased participation of women in the security sector is desirable, the case studies indicate that many CSOs believe that this approach falls short of the expectations and letter of UNSCR 1325 and that NAPs should contain transformative elements regarding the conceptualisation of security rather than a formulaic “add women and stir” approach.

- EU MS' NAPs often contain references to **EU level commitments**. Their contributions to the implementation of the EU Comprehensive Approach to UNSCR 1325 and 1820 usually include participation in the EU Task Force on Women, Peace and Security, strengthening the integration of UNSCR 1325 and subsequent resolutions into Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions and operations, the secondment of gender advisers, encouraging the inclusion of WPS issues into country strategy papers etc. However, the lack of common priorities between the EU and MS leads to the fragmentation of activities or even duplication of efforts, particularly in those conflict-affected countries in which many EU MS are engaged. The case studies indicate that many CSOs believe that more could be done to coordinate, integrate and optimise MS- and EU level actions on UNSCR 1325.

c) From theory to practice: the missing link

- Unfortunately, NAPs continue to face substantial challenges in the implementation phase. This is largely due to the absence of basic elements to ensure action, in particular: a dedicated budget, sufficient commitment from the responsible institutions to implement the plan, concrete measures to achieve the set goals, clear lines of responsibility and adequate monitoring mechanisms. New and updated NAPs show **a steady improvement in the inclusion of the basic elements to ensure action**. In this context, the 2012-2015 Dutch NAP stands out not only for the substantial participation of civil society in its development but also for integrating the aforementioned elements, including a dedicated budget.

d) Evaluating the impact of NAPs

- NAPs are generally seen as useful frameworks for helping countries to translate their commitments into practice. They also often provide **impetus for the development of related plans**, policies and practices in the domestic arena. For example, in 2007, the Belgian Ministry of Defence signed a charter for the promotion of gender equality, and the implementation of the principles of UNSCR 1325.¹¹ In Ireland, following the adoption of the NAP in 2011, the Irish Defence Forces adopted its own action plan on UNSCR 1325.

¹¹ [*Charte pour la promotion de l'égalité des hommes et des femmes au sein du département de la défense et pour la mise en œuvre des principes de la résolution 1325 du Conseil de sécurité des Nations unies*](#)

- In many cases, the development of NAPs has provided a **window of opportunity** to strengthen the focus on women and gender equality in related external and domestic policies. For example, in Belgium, sexual violence and the empowerment of women were two of the priorities identified for development co-operation policies in post-conflict settings, in part as a result of the NAP implementation.

- **Key achievements** following the adoption of NAPs include the development of training packages on UNSCR 1325 and related resolutions, the appointment of staff in ministries with responsibilities for women, peace and security, the secondment of gender advisers to peace operations and missions, the establishment of teams with expertise on gender and conflict in relevant ministries, and the integration of a gender perspective in peace and security policies and operations. The Belgian Ministry of Defence's Department for Operations and Training established an 'Operational Gender Team', and developed an Action Plan entitled 'Gender mainstreaming in Operations'. It also employed a Belgian military officer in the Gender Section of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Secretariat.

- M&E mechanisms can help to hold relevant institutions accountable for the implementation of NAPs. However, not all NAPs include such mechanisms or relevant indicators. Although most European countries have conducted M&E exercises, **only Estonia and Ireland have made their monitoring reports publicly available**. In addition, since different countries adopt different M&E mechanisms, it is not always possible to compare their results. The progressive integration of and reference to EU indicators in some of these mechanisms could contribute to the collection of comparable data across EU MS.

- An emerging trend and good practice is the **increasing involvement of national parliaments** in activities related to the monitoring of the NAPs. For example, in 2011, the Advisory Board for the Equality of Women and Men in the Belgian Senate initiated an evaluation of Belgium's NAP which involved the organisation of hearings and the development of recommendations.

- Ultimately, **little information is available on the impact of European countries' NAPs in conflict-affected countries**. What little data is gathered tends to be focused primarily on reorienting national structures to accommodate more women (in some cases with a disproportionate focus on military structures) and a more gendered approach. The question of impact in conflict-affected countries seems to be both harder to achieve and to measure. One of the few available examples of an attempt to evaluate the impact of European countries' NAPs in a conflict-affected country is a study on the impact of Sweden's efforts to implement UNSCR 1325 in Afghanistan¹² which was published by three Swedish NGOs in 2012.

e) **Where UNSCR 1325 is not gaining traction**

- In those European countries where NAPs have not been adopted, state actors, CSOs and the wider populations generally either have a very limited knowledge of UNSCR 1325 or do not consider it relevant. For example, a survey conducted in Montenegro revealed that many female interviewees did not see UNSCR 1325 as an instrument for bringing about changes to their lives in terms of protection and empowerment. Similarly, the case studies indicate that many CSOs which are active in countries for which no NAP exists have **limited and often insufficient resources** to work on WPS issues and women's organisations tend to focus on domestic issues such as improving women's access to health, education and economic opportunities, and combatting and preventing gender-based violence. For example, the Czech

¹² [Missing the Target: A report on the Swedish commitment to women, peace and security in Afghanistan](#)

Women's Lobby and its members have prioritised a women's rights agenda which has a policy impact at domestic level but which does not include a foreign policy dimension.

Conclusions

The key findings from the 20 case studies show that NAPs have often been developed as a result of intense women's advocacy on UNSCR 1325. In addition, the processes involved in developing NAPs have also helped to strengthen women's organisations' awareness and advocacy on WPS issues.

At the same time, it appears that while NAPs are generally viewed as useful tools for translating countries' commitments into practice, they tend to be underutilised as policy instruments. Their implementation is hampered by the lack of a number of basic elements, not least a dedicated budget. The case studies indicate a link between the extent to which NAPs are perceived as locally-owned by CSOs and their level of implementation but more in-depth analysis would be required to prove it definitively. On the basis of the evidence collected, it appears that those NAPs which are developed through inclusive processes in which CSOs are involved as advocates, drafters and implementers have a better chance of being implemented.

The main achievements resulting from the adoption or implementation of NAPs include the appointment of gender advisers, the integration of gender perspectives into peace and security policies and the development of training packages on gender and UNSCR 1325 for military and civilian staff. What little information is available about the impact of NAPs in conflict-affected countries indicates that there is a gap between objectives set and results achieved. Consultation with the intended beneficiaries and coordination of NAPs at regional- and local levels are two viable options for trying to bridge the gap.