

Women between War and Peace in Cyprus: The security sector as the missing link

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In April 2022, the “Action Plan on how to ensure women’s full, equal and meaningful participation in the settlement process/an eventual settlement process”, consisting of a series of recommendations by the Technical Committee on Gender Equality, was launched. The Action Plan is yet another document aimed at positively transforming the peace talks in Cyprus and ensuring the active participation of women in the process. Even earlier, in 2021, the Republic of Cyprus (RoC) introduced a Women, Peace and Security National Action Plan (WPS NAP). Nonetheless, the advancement of the WPS agenda into policy in Cyprus has been stymied by the issue of recognition,¹ which after decades continues to be the RoC’s main narrative and position. Despite various well-intended efforts by the UN to introduce more inclusive processes for civilians at a bicomunal level, little has been done to further develop hard security-related dimensions from the WPS agenda into policy. These issues have not only affected institutions and policy at state level, but the same deficits² are observed within the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP).³ The focus of policy and Action Plans thus far have largely incorporated issues pertaining to participation and civil society engagement, leaving core security functions⁴ mainly unaddressed at a policy level, and excluding feminist-led approaches to security and defence in policymaking. Overall, there seems to be no binding gender strategy nor a clear gender-mainstreaming instrument for security in Cyprus. This is further observed in UNFICYP interactions with the two communities.

Key Points:

- In line with the WPS NAP of RoC, the participation pillar under the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) framework is adequately addressed, especially involving/including young female peace advocates at a bicomunal level in Cyprus.
- There is an absence of infrastructural capability mechanisms at state level due to the persisting issue of the Cyprus problem and recognition, leaving no space for the systematic implementation of the WPS agenda.
- At the moment, there is no comprehensive approach or communication between the UN operation in the country (UNFICYP) and the two communities vis-à-vis women in security and defence, apart from a preliminary dialogue initiated by UNFICYP’s civil affairs unit and some recommendations put forward by the Gender Advisory Team (GAT).⁵ Dialogue on hard security and defence via a gender lens is still largely absent.
- Participation in the peace process is stronger in informal/unofficial capacities (for instance, online and in-person discussions, the Technical Committee on Gender, and intercultural community-building activities); in an official capacity at the negotiating table (such as with the state or the relevant Ministry), there is reduced participation of women.
- UNFICYP is the only mission to have had women taking up major positions across all sectors (military, police and civilian); gender mainstreaming in the military and the police still leaves room for improvement.

The Elephant in the Room: The missing link of security

The Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda is an international normative and policy framework, based on UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) and nine subsequent Security Council Resolutions. The four pillars of the WPS agenda consist of: (i) Participation and Empowerment, (ii) Protection, (iii) Prevention, and (iv) Relief and Recovery.⁶ While participation focuses on increasing the number of women across all sectors and levels, from decision-making to peace negotiations and peacekeeping, the protection pillar calls for saving women and girls from the disproportionate effect of war and armed conflict, especially gender-based violence and abuse.

Under the prevention pillar, UNSCR1325 aims at preventing the latter by supporting women's agency and women's rights, while the relief and recovery pillar focuses on promoting gender perspective in responding to conflict and humanitarian intervention.⁷ The importance of adopting a universal agenda on integrating a gender perspective into talks on peace and security has been strongly advocated by women grassroots peace activists for years.⁸ Incorporating a gender perspective also addresses the impact of war on women and the importance of women's full and equal participation in conflict resolution, peacebuilding, peacekeeping, humanitarian response, and in post-conflict reconstruction. Due to this development, UNFICYP has turned its attention to supporting civil society organisations in implementing WPS-related objectives.⁹

In response to UN Security Council Resolution 2587 of 2021, renewing the mandate of UNFICYP, the Technical Committee on Gender Equality in Cyprus launched a joint Action Plan on 13 April 2022 and presented it to the leaders of the two communities.¹⁰ The Technical Committee, established in 2015, is a bicomunal body of experts made up of both Greek- and Turkish-Cypriots who specialise in areas related to gender equality and women's empowerment. The two-page document details the need for effective participation of women in the peace talks.

The Republic of Cyprus (RoC) had previously engaged with the issue of gender equality across institutions and society, as seen in the two National Action Plans on Gender Equality for Cyprus of the Ministry of Justice and Public Order, the first one for 2014-2017 and the second one for 2018-2021.¹¹ However, no comprehensive plan incorporating the WPS framework was discussed until 2021, when the Gender Commissioner's Office under the President's Office launched the first Women, Peace and Security National Action Plan (WPS NAP) for 2021-2025. This subsequently mandated the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) to review the NAP.

Even so, and while the intentions of integrating the WPS agenda are noble, the absence of core security issues within the WPS NAP is prominent. Arguably, there has been substantial progress since the introduction of gender-related activities and strong advocacy networks for women in society, in business, in politics, and elsewhere. Nonetheless, the role of women in peace and security can neither be about enhanced participation alone, nor engaging solely civil society. The elephant in the room is the absence of a comprehensive security-led agenda vis-à-vis WPS. While core local perspectives are mediated by civil society-led initiatives engaging women in their participation in peace activities, the hard security aspect is largely left unaddressed in these initiatives.

UNFICYP Interactions

UNFICYP representatives recognise that, on the whole, the Mission mandate is not necessarily implementable in line with all four pillars of the WPS agenda (participation, prevention, protection, and relief and recovery). UNFICYP first began introducing a dedicated gender architecture in 2017, and as one of the oldest ongoing UN Missions, UNFICYP remains committed to boosting women's engagement in the

peace process and, even more widely, on matters concerning gender equality throughout the whole island. These efforts are supported by the Gender Unit of the Departments of Peacekeeping Operations and Field Support.¹² The Gender Advisor position in UNFICYP, situated within the Office of the Special Representative, is a strategic one, providing oversight into all aspects of the Mission.

Furthermore, within its mandates, UNFICYP in the last five years has worked on tasks ranging from engaging with women in the peace process to supporting civil society organisations that focus on women and youth, while also looking at gender parity across the Mission's components. Military troops are trained in WPS-sensitive issues before deployment in their national force, and then subsequently trained by the UN on gender-responsive peacekeeping pre-deployment.

However the military component faces additional challenges regarding implementation of the WPS agenda; this is due to the nature of the military command and control structure, as well as the limitations of the mandate. While on a strategic level – according to UNSCRs – the implementation of the agenda is the task of all WPS components, the lack of operationalization and the nature of the guidelines on WPS are not tangible enough to be carried out in certain tasks and activities on the ground. Strategic advice on gender and peace, like in other fields within peacekeeping missions, requires comprehensive planning and assessment, for example, utilising a tool known as Comprehensive Planning and Performance Assessment System (CPAS).¹³ A large part of the mandate overall is to engage the two communities in Cyprus on specific issues via the Technical Committees.

Within UNFICYP leadership, women hold major positions,¹⁴ while in both the police and military components, the representation of female uniformed personnel is exemplary. Nevertheless, this opportunity has not been exploited completely when it comes to operationalizing the agenda, as UNFICYP has focused on engaging with civil society in terms of gender mainstreaming. As a result, hard security and defence issues are left largely unaddressed. Despite efforts, the over-focus on interactions with civil society organisations has failed to transfer a holistic approach of the WPS framework to the actual security and defence institutions, such as the police and the armed forces. This prompts scepticism among officials towards UNFICYP.

Evidently, the limitation is highlighted in the way in which the roles of UNFICYP and the UN Good Offices in Cyprus are formulated. While the UNFICYP mandate specifies limited direct involvement of UN bodies, agencies, or the Mission itself with policymakers at an institutional level, this is not often pursued nor initiated directly by government actors. Most importantly, the mandate retains a principle of neutrality, despite a sizeable one-third of its finances voluntary contributed by RoC and the Hellenic Republic.¹⁵ This peculiarity brings forth questions as to why there is no discussion on institutional interaction with UNFICYP over WPS, on the one hand, while raising questions and concerns from the Turkish-Cypriot side over UNFICYP's neutrality on the other hand.

Interaction with civil society organisations is an important strategy for international organisations operating in Cyprus, in order to push for positive social transformation at both grassroots but also Track 2.5 and Track 3 Diplomacy. Often, there is a particular focus on engaging youth. Nonetheless, this involvement is not always well received by government institutions, often because such organisations are independent, and are neither controlled nor checked by governmental authorities in terms of their mandate and its compatibility with government policies and priorities. The gap in directly engaging with policymakers and decision-makers on the issue of gender and security is noteworthy, particularly when certain civil society organisations, due to their activist nature, are not always viewed as equal partners or advisors by practitioners in government.

Institutional Gender Set-up

Of 14 Commissioners in the RoC, one holds the office of the Commissioner for Gender Equality, created in 2014.¹⁶ This office profoundly shapes the way discussions on gender equality are formulated. The Commissioner is also seen by civil society organisations as their direct contact point for engaging in talks on gender equality with the government, as well as for launching critical and constructive campaigns to highlight policy deficits in this field.

At a ministerial level, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the RoC has had two gender advisors since February 2019. This is particularly important to note, since the MFA is the security coordinating entity of the RoC, i.e., this is the government agency responsible for coordinating security-led activities, such as liaising with Brussels on matters related to the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), and relaying information to the National Computer Security Incident Response Team (CSIRT). As such, the MFA also liaises with the Ministry of Defence (MoD), the Presidency, civil society organisations, academic bodies and researchers, as well as the security services. Introducing a Gender Advisor as a specialist foreign policy advisor to apply gender mainstreaming tools to foreign policy was a political decision supported by the RoC ministerial council and the parliament. The strategy has been to introduce a framework of action under five key pillars:

1. To increase the RoC's profile on gender-related issues at a multilateral level
2. To increase the RoC's profile on gender-related issues and gender equality-related discussions in bilateral relations
3. To reinforce the RoC's image and policy abroad on developmental, aid, and humanitarian issues
4. To integrate perspectives and encourage discussion with civil society and academic institutions and the MFA
5. To further enhance the MFAs position and integration within society and beyond

The Gender Advisor's role changed in January 2022: until this date the advisor's role was highly specialised and fully dedicated to duties related to advancing feminist perspectives in foreign policy. However, from February 2022 onwards, the new advisor is also a diplomat, thereby splitting up time between two different posts.

In addition to the MFA, it is worth noting that the Security and Defence Academy of the MoD has also played an important role in encouraging discussions on gender and security, by co-organising events and training sessions with other official bodies and organizations, such as the European Security and Defence College.¹⁷

The First WPS NAP in Cyprus

The MFA of the RoC, in consultation with its Gender Advisor and the Commissioner for Gender Equality, created its first action plan on the implementation of the WPS agenda in 2021, the 2021-2025 Women, Peace and Security National Action Plan (WPS NAP).¹⁸ The WPS NAP includes the policy priorities of the MFA and introduces four pillars inspired by the WPS framework.

However, there is no clear communication on advancing the security dimension of WPS, a fact acknowledged by advisors and diplomats.¹⁹ Nor was such a framework introduced by the MFA in formulating the document, meaning that unless the WPS NAP is revoked, which is highly unlikely, no security dimension will be introduced before 2025. In fact, little has been done to further enhance and integrate certain dimensions of the WPS framework into national policy. The action plan refers twice to the patriarchal practices in the generally "male dominated security sector" as a challenge to its implementation, while at the same time also

recognises that the MoD is the entity responsible for addressing issues of physical security and defence and upholding the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the RoC.

However, in a comprehensive document of 44 pages, it still seems that security as a concept is unaddressed and policy-relevant actions are lacking. In incorporating the WPS pillars, the NAP primarily focuses on participation and the context of security outside the WPS framework. For instance, the word 'security' in Greek appears 50 times, yet most often refers to either the UN Security Council or security in broader terms. Instead, it seems that most efforts to raise awareness and subsequently shape policy rely first on the (civilian) participation pillar, which is replicated in how UNFICYP relies on participation. However, there is no clear mention in the document of UNFICYP's role in pursuing the WPS agenda, other than providing humanitarian aid for enclaved population in the northern part of Cyprus.²⁰ Unless this clearly includes the Turkish-Cypriot community, the UN can neither engage nor create a role for itself.²¹ In the police and military components of the Mission, the mandates and tasks are very explicit, thus limiting opportunities for the implementation of the WPS pillars. Consequently, the NAP views UNFICYP's role as a coordinating entity between civil society and humanitarian issues at a bicomunal level.

While the RoC, being internationally recognised by everyone except Turkey, can introduce crucial aspects into its foreign policy in consultation with gender experts, in the *de-facto* state of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC),²² the conversation over gender and security is largely unaddressed, particularly due to its unrecognised status. Consequently, the exclusion of the Turkish-Cypriot community from the WPS framework at UN level was inevitable, an issue that often prompts the TRNC regime to reject UNFICYP and its usefulness throughout the island. However, there is insufficient data to indicate or otherwise conclude whether this notion is also expressed collectively by all Turkish-Cypriots or whether these are mere statements by the regime. For instance, the bi-annual renewal of the UNFICYP mandate is not officially endorsed by the TRNC regime, which has protested this in official announcements.²³

Moreover, the regime does not have an institutional, formal entity that discusses the incorporation of WPS with the RoC as part of the peace talks. Accordingly, there is limited transparency as to how women's and civil society organisations operate in the north and how the TRNC approaches the issue of women, peace, and security. At civil- society level, however, the TRNC leadership has welcomed the creation of networks such as the 'Northern Cyprus Women's Organisation Network' in 2021, aiming to address issues such as domestic and gender-based violence, socio-economic conditions, and gender equality.²⁴ In parallel, since the introduction of the gender unit in 2017, UNFICYP has been increasingly successful engaging with both Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot activist and civil society organizations aimed at initiating bottom-up reconciliation efforts on an individual level between women on the two sides of the Green line. At the same time, UNFICYP is committed to working within the Track 2 and 3 levels of diplomacy.

Policy Implications

There are two major issues to note at the time of writing when it comes to implementation of the WPS NAP: (a) the absence of a strategic orientation and a clear policy that incorporates the security dimension within WPS, and (b) the absence of a communication bridge between UNFICYP and government institutions on the issue of gender and security. While of course UNFICYP has historically hosted both community leaders in various settings to discuss the peace talks, there has been minimal interaction on the issue of gender and security. Instead, most engagement lies within civil society organisations, as already indicated.

Additionally, leaving security questions from a gender perspective unaddressed within official frameworks and action plans may equally affect how society understands and conceptualises security. Whether deliberate or accidental, this prevents civil society from operating as a coherent security actor, who might otherwise be in a position to understand security needs, perceptions, and policy gaps that can be filled in with expert aide. Expert aide as such is derived from security policy practitioners, academics, and technocrats dealing with the day-to-day practical implications of 'hard' security, defence, and national security policy. Moreover, failing to conceptualise security in this way also leads to possibly misstating security needs, thus reinforcing narratives and impacting policy in ways that might be harmful to the peace talks and

the overall security architecture, and effectively denies civil society the status of being seen as an equal or trusted advising entity that can positively contribute to policymaking in general. This means there is a serious deficit in how civil society understands its role and needs when trying to answer gender and 'hard' security-related questions.

All in all, there are prospects for further integration of the WPS framework in the peace process, particularly since the limitations in current approaches have been recognised by policymakers and technocrats alike. Civil society organisations, while attempting to positively shape the broader peace discourse, also require expertise in directly addressing the security dimension of WPS. Without such input, gendered security itself will remain an underdeveloped area.

Endnotes

- ¹ This refers to the de facto Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC). Following the 1963 intercommunal clashes, the subsequent 1974 Turkish invasion, and the proclamation of the TRNC state in 1983, the RoC as the internationally recognised government has prioritised policy on the resolution of the Cyprus problem and has rejected the existence of a TRNC state, often labelling it in official documentation as a "pseudo-state", a "puppet regime", or a "de facto breakaway regime".
- ² Deficits as such are observed within UNFICYP because of the Mission's very strict and exclusive mandate that does not actually allow them to be involved extensively. This is explored later on in this brief.
- ³ The authors would like to thank all staff (military, diplomatic, advisors, and other state and UN officials) for their testimonies and providing a clearer picture of the situation on gender mainstreaming in the RoC foreign policy.
- ⁴ Such security functions include the processes through which violent clashes and criminal activity between the communities are avoided and prevented (hard security).
- ⁵ Olga Demetriou, Umut Bozkurt, and Yiouli Taki (2012), *Women's Peace: Recommendations of the Gender Advisory Team (GAT) on the peace negotiations in Cyprus*, PRIO Cyprus Centre Policy Brief, 1, Nicosia: PRIO Cyprus Centre.
- ⁶ United Nations She Stands For Peace (n.d.), "The Four Pillars of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325", <https://www.un.org/shestandsforpeace/content/four-pillars-united-nations-security-council-resolution-1325>
- ⁷ Ibid.
- ⁸ Ten relevant resolutions have been adopted thus far by the United Nations Security Council. See the WPS programme by the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, PeaceWomen (n.d.), <https://www.peacewomen.org/security-council/WPS-in-SC-Council>
- ⁹ Sophia Papastavrou (2021), *Women's Organizations for Peace Moving Beyond the Rhetoric of the Cyprus Problem*, Cham: Palgrave Pivot, p. 77.
- ¹⁰ UN Cyprus Talks (2022), "Statement by the United Nations Spokesperson in Cyprus" 13 April 2022, <https://uncyprustalks.unmissions.org/statement-united-nations-spokesperson-cyprus-13-april-2022>
- ¹¹ Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (2021), "Questionnaire of the Working Group on the Issue of Human Rights and Transnational Corporations and Other Business Enterprises", <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Business/Gender/Cyprus.pdf>
- ¹² UNFICYP (n.d.), <https://unficyp.unmissions.org/gender-and-peacekeeping>
- ¹³ United Nations Peacekeeping (2020), "CPAS: The Comprehensive Planning and Performance Assessment System", <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/cpas>
- ¹⁴ Such posts currently include the Mission's Military Commander, Major General Ingrid Gjerde, the Gender Advisor, Lauren Jane Mcalister, and the Senior Police Advisor, Assistant Police Commissioner Satu Koivu. At the same time, the Former Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General and Head of UNFICYP was also a woman in 2010-2016, while the 2016-2021 Head (also a woman) was also Deputy to the Secretary-General's Special Advisor. See UNFICYP (n.d.), "Leadership", <https://unficyp.unmissions.org/leadership>
- ¹⁵ See Alexandra Novosseloff (2021), *Assessing the Effectiveness of the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) and the Office of the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Cyprus (OSASG)* (Report), Oslo: Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, p. 17.
- ¹⁶ All Commissioner posts fall directly under the Presidency of the Republic of Cyprus and retain different roles. For instance, the Commissioner for Gender Equality is responsible for enhancing the role and participation of women across society and across all fields, while also protecting women's rights and advocating for equality. See the European Institute for Gender Equality (2019), "Cyprus", <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/countries/cyprus>
- ¹⁷ Goalkeeper-Schoolmaster of the EEAS (2022), "Integration of a Gender Perspective in CSDP", <https://goalkeeper.eeas.europa.eu/course/details.do?id=848>
- ¹⁸ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Cyprus (2021), *Women, Peace and Security National Action Plan*, Nicosia: RoC MFA and Gender Equality Commissioner, Republic of Cyprus [in Greek], <https://mfa.gov.cy/Cyprus%20National%20Action%20Plan%201325.pdf>
- ¹⁹ In conversation with the authors.
- ²⁰ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Cyprus (2021), *Women, Peace and Security National Action Plan*, Nicosia: RoC MFA and Gender Equality Commissioner, Republic of Cyprus [in Greek], <https://mfa.gov.cy/Cyprus%20National%20Action%20Plan%201325.pdf>
- ²¹ Hubert Faustman (2017) "The Struggle for Recognition and Political Rights of the Small Ethnic and Religious Minorities at the End of British Colonial Rule in Cyprus", in Anastasia Yiangou and Antigone Heraclidou (eds.) *Cyprus from Colonialism to the Present: Visions and Realities: Essays in Honour of Robert Holland*. London: Routledge, Publications of the Centre for Hellenic Studies, King's College London, pp. 88-111.
- ²² The authors would like to clarify their stance on the absence of inverted commas/quotations when referring to the *de facto* state of TRNC. The lack of inverted commas in research, scholarly, policy-brief, or other unofficial writing does not, in our view, constitute an official or unofficial recognition nor would it elevate a *de facto* state's status to *de jure*. Similarly, we do not imply of any direct nor indirect recognition, agreement, or otherwise approve of the TRNC regime and its policies. The authors possess no such capacity in any legal context to do so and it is not our intention to do so either.
- ²³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs – Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (2022), "Regarding the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2646 (2022)", <https://mfa.gov.ct.tr/regarding-the-united-nations-security-council-resolution-2646-2022/>. See also Nick Theodoulou (2022), "North Says It Will 'Take Measures' in Response to UNFICYP Mandate Renewal", <https://cyprus-mail.com/2022/07/30/north-says-it-will-take-measures-in-response-to-unficyp-mandate-renewal/>
- ²⁴ Presidency of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (2021), "Northern Cyprus Women's Organisations Network is Established", <https://kktcb.org/en/northern-cyprus-womens-organisations-network-is-established-9114>

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THE PROJECT

This project aims to discuss potential deficits in the areas of security and defence in peacekeeping missions and operations in cases of protracted conflict, by advancing a gender and feminist perspective. The first part of the project includes a policy brief that focuses on conceptualising and reporting on the present policy situation in Cyprus on the issue of the UN peacekeeping mission (UNFICYP), as well as the realities reflected on a policy level in the fields of security, defence, and foreign policy. The second part of the project is a detailed report that considers the protracted conflict cases of Cyprus and Kosovo, providing a comparative examination of the two cases in an effort to examine the policy gaps and to highlight the differences between 'older' and 'newer' missions from a gender and security perspective.

PRIO

The Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) is a non-profit peace research institute (established in 1959) whose overarching purpose is to conduct research on the conditions for peaceful relations between states, groups and people. The institute is independent, international and interdisciplinary, and explores issues related to all facets of peace and conflict.