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WORKING PAPER

THE ROLE OF THE EU IN INCLUDING WOMEN IN PEACE PROCESSES:
WHY INCLUSION REMAINS A CHALLENGE

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I. Introduction: the role and challenges of inclusion of women in peace processes

The paper discusses the role of the European Union (EU) in including women in peace processes. Generally, the need to include women in peace processes is recognised in various EU policy documents; but such commitments often do not translate into actual presence of more women at negotiation tables and beyond[1]. The key finding of this policy paper is that there are several explanations for the continuing difficulties and challenges faced by the EU in its efforts to ensure better inclusion of women in peace processes. Those challenges ('reasons for exclusion') are categorised as: (1) elite-dominated hard power negotiation structures, (2) the cultural 'excuse', (3) 'psychological reasons' and the need to empower women, and (4) insufficient implementation of commitments made by the EU to include women under the existing policy and legal framework. The paper stresses the need to be aware of those reasons and to address them, in order to ensure the presence of women's voices in peace processes (to 'unmute' them).

In the following part II, the paper gives an overview of the EU's commitments and actions taken so far to ensure better inclusion of women in peace processes. In part III, the paper lays out the data collected in 10 semi-structured expert-interviews, conducted both in in-person and online throughout 2023. Interviewees were selected to represent various affiliations: EU institutions (European Commission, European External Action Service, European Parliament), EU-related think tanks, NGOs, civil society organisations, and academia. All interviewees were selected based on their extensive experience in EU affairs, peace and conflict studies, and their expertise on women and gender issues related to the field. Interviewees were asked a series of standardised and non-standardised questions, aiming to tackle the key challenges that the EU faces in trying to include women in peace processes in its neighbourhood and worldwide.

The questions included:

What is the role of women in peace processes? What are specific EU actions to ensure inclusion of women in peace processes?

Are there stated goals? Are they met? Why or why not?

What would meaningful participation look like?

What are the key challenges when aiming to increase female participation in peace processes?

What is the role of civil society and NGOs?

What is the role of international organisations more generally, and the EU specifically?

Open question: additional reasons why inclusion of women is still a challenge and what can the EU do.

Building on the research results, part IV of the paper provides conclusions as well as policy recommendations to ensure better inclusion of women in peace processes in the future.

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[1] The paper refers to inclusion from a descriptive (i.e. quantitative) perspective, in peace processes on track I, II, and III level.

II. The 'successes': EU documents and actions to increase participation of women in peace processes and beyond

One of the objectives of any peace process should be to represent the full voice of a conflict-affected society with the diversity of its population. The convincing argument has been made by international lawyers, that next to normative commitments in international policy documents, the requirement for a inclusivity of a peace process may be derived from certain principles of international law itself (Pajuste 2021). When it comes to the inclusion of women in peace processes, representation should be ensured on all levels, from the leadership to the grassroots. The topic is addressed on various international documents, with the crucial step of the adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 in 2000. The resolution has enshrined the essential role of women in securing and maintaining peace and has led many to argue further for a gender-sensitive and gender-inclusive perspective on peace and security (Guerrina and Wright 2016; Otto 2010; Miller, Pournik, and Swaine 2014; Anderlini 2022). Yet, despite two decades having passed since the adoption of the resolution, reality remains quite disenchanting. More specifically, data shows that worldwide, between 1992 and 2019, women constituted only '13 per cent of negotiators, 6 per cent of mediators, and 6 per cent of signatories in major peace processes worldwide' and 'about seven out of every ten peace processes did not include women mediators or women signatories' (Conciliation Resources 2015). In addition, between 1995 and 2019, 'the percentage of peace agreements with gender equality provisions increased from 14 to 22 per cent' (UN Press Release 2022).

The EU itself has subscribed to resolution 1325 through its member states within the framework of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) (European External Action Service 2022). The EU has also adopted various documents with commitments to include more women in peace mediation and peace processes. For instance, the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda forms an integral part of the EU Strategic Compass (European External Action Service 2022). The 2018 Council Conclusions on WPS (Council of the European Union 2018) and the EU Strategic Approach to WPS and its Action Plan (2019-2024) (Council of the European Union 2019) reaffirm those commitments, as do the most recent Council Conclusions from 2022 (Council of the European Union 2022). Furthermore, the EU Gender Action Plan III (2023), calling for a gender equal world.

Further to this, in 2009, the Concept on Strengthening EU Mediation and Dialogue Capacities (Council of the European Union 2009) stresses that resolution 1325 constitutes 'an important framework for EU mediation activities, which should at all stages of the process incorporate the principles contained therein' (Council of the European Union 2009, 8) and that the Union 'should contribute to promoting women's equal and full participation in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, peace negotiations, peace-building, peacekeeping, humanitarian response and in post-conflict reconstruction' (Council of the European Union 2009, 8).

In 2020, the Council Conclusions on EU Peace Mediation reiterate the commitment to the WPS agenda and the specific priority to ensure 'women's full, equal and meaningful access to, and participation and leadership in, political decision-making and peace processes at all levels' (Council of the European Union 2020a, 3). The Council Concept on Peace Mediation stresses both inclusivity more generally as well as the 'promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment' (Council of the European Union 2020b, 8) as EU mediation principles. Crucially, the Concept states clearly that the EU will 'strive to include and enable the participation of more women as mediators, chief negotiators and political representatives', that it 'recognises the important work of national and regional women mediator networks', and sets a clear target of 'minimum 33 percent women participation in all EU actions related to peace processes' (Council of the European Union 2020b, 8).

The European External Action Service (EEAS) Peace Mediation Guidelines 2020 state the WPS agenda as a thematic priority. The guidelines acknowledge 'a positive correlation between women's participation in peace negotiations' and 'the quality and the sustainability of the agreements reached' and that 'it is important to challenge attitudes that exclude women from mediation and peacebuilding roles and to enhance women's participation at all stages of conflict prevention and resolution' (European External Action Service 2020, 15). Crucially, the Guidelines emphasise the importance of 'empowering women mediators' (European External Action Service 2020, 16), which is considered vital to achieve more inclusivity and better representation of women in peace processes and peace negotiations.

Finally, within the framework of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), the EEAS's Strategy and Action Plan to Enhance Women's Participation in Civilian CSDP Missions 2021-2024 (European External Action Service 2021) forms an important document. It follows up on the commitments set out in Council Conclusions in 2004, to increase women's participation in EU CSDP missions; as well as on the Civilian CSDP Compact (European External Action Service 2023), with its commitment to increase the representation of women in civilian CSDP missions. It stresses the problematic that 'the average percentage of mission personnel made up by women – currently 24 % – has not increased since 2017' (European External Action Service 2021, 3) and that clear targets (aim of reaching 40 % representation across all missions and staff categories by 2024 (European External Action Service 2021, 7), measures and monitoring of progress is crucial.

Thus, it can be acknowledged that EU efforts on the matter exist, at least in terms of commitments 'on paper'. However, the de facto inclusion of women in peace processes on the ground remains a challenge, and the attempts to include more women are currently threatened to face a stagnation (stressed by all interviewees).

In addition, the literature has not captured sufficiently the institutional dynamics of the EU as it seeks to translate the WPS agenda into reality, and only some scholars have examined mediation as the 'Cinderella' of the EU's peace and security institution because it has been ignored as a site for the implementation of the WPS agenda with important implications (see Haastrup 2018, 218). Overall, a gender-blind approach in peace diplomacy in theory and practice continues, with 'women and their experiences almost invisible, while privileging male bodies and experiences' (Haastrup 2018, 223). Studies also find that in regard to the makeup of the EU's mediation personnel or priorities, no 'increased recruitment of women or the inclusion of women's perspectives and experiences have not been observed' (Haastrup 2018, 229). Overall, the inclusion of the WPS agenda in the EU has been demonstrated to not be an easy exercise.

III. The 'challenges': Why inclusion of women in peace processes remains difficult

This policy paper attempts to visualise the role of the EU in including women in peace process, at all levels and on all sides. As an influential international player, in its role as a normative power (Manners 2002; Guerrina and Wright 2016), the EU occupies a considerably important position in various contexts of wars and conflicts. This power also includes the responsibility to ensure that the process is inclusive, by continually stressing the importance of the inclusion of women on all sides and by all parties. However, the number of women in peace processes remains unequal and disproportionately lower compared to male participation. The following section explores challenges and opportunities for the EU to ensure better inclusion of women in peace processes, by tackling the main reasons for the lack of inclusion thus far.

The interviews were transcribed and subsequently coded to systematise the main groups of reasons named by interviewees for the lack of inclusion (exclusion) of women. The results are summarised in Table I.

Table I. Results of the analysis.

	Characteristics	Observations
1. Peace processes as a male-dominated domain in political elites	Peace processes process depending on the position that is held in government. Increased securitisation of different contexts and regions. Emphasis on hard-power national security issues.	Increasing awareness for human security and diverse topics connected to the peace process. Important civil society organisations (Track II and III) which engage in the processes actively.
2. Culture	Conservative male-dominated societies, often strong influence of gender norms.	Culture as an excuse for exclusion, culture is a complex concept and it is also subject to change.
3. Psychological dimension: Empowerment and Youth, Peace and Security Agenda (YPS)	YPS needs to be linked to WPS. Especially young women should be more empowered and need to see the benefits and importance of being involved in the process.	All interviewees (100%) considered this a crucial matter.
4. Non-imposition	Lack of imposition of and accountability for commitments made on paper.	Need for more consistency from the EU and the international community; including the important aspect of having an increased budget. EU as 'normative power' must exercise much more pressure.

The reasons for lack of inclusion stated by interviewees are thus varied and can be divided into the following categories: a male-dominated field, 'culture', psychological reasons, and the lack of effective implementation.

The most obvious reason appears to be that peace processes and peace mediation are a male-dominated field in their own right. Interviewees identified this reason as going back to the fact that there are often the low number of women in leadership positions in general, making it impossible to include them as actors in the peace process. When peace processes are led by political elites, where women are underrepresented, this automatically leads to lack of women at high level negotiation tables. Hence, interviewees suggested that a stronger involvement of civil society representatives and NGOs might lead to a better presence of women in peace processes.

The cultural explanation, the one of male-dominated cultures, is frequently invoked by certain stakeholders. However, all interviewees confirmed that culture is a concept that is difficult to define. Stating it as a causal factor for exclusion of women from peace processes thus seems vague and incomplete. In line with feminist scholarship (ICAN 2018), interviewees all agreed that 'it is cultural', has proved insufficiently convincing, as women are excluded from peace processes in many different contexts and cultures (ICAN 2018). 'Culture' should therefore not be used as an excuse to exclude women.

The third, more complex dimension of lack of inclusion, according to interviewees, is the psychological dimension. Women are often seen, both by others and by themselves, as 'not tough enough' for the difficult field of peace and conflict resolution. This psychological dimension is more difficult to grasp, but it exists and must be addressed. In this area, it would be crucial to strengthen the autonomy and confidence of women so that they can participate in leadership roles and peace negotiations. This applies in particular also to younger women, and becomes a point of linkage between the WPS and YPS agendas.

The final significant factor that was found is that despite the many commitments to inclusion of women 'on paper' in various documents, the reality shows no strict implementation of such commitments made. For instance, no quota is ever imposed. The leading players rarely insist on the presence of women at the negotiating table, and the pressure that could be exercised is currently insufficient.

IV.   Conclusion and policy recommendations

With these reasons for continuous lack of inclusion of women in mind, it remains to look to the future and try to effectively increase women's participation in peace negotiations and beyond. Based on the research results, the four main recommendations of the present paper are:

(1) First, it should be ensured that women are included in the process, regardless of their position in political life. The EU has made a clear commitment to quotas for women, and these targets must be met and even extended. There are many highly qualified women, and the European institutions should make a conscious effort to meet the requirements to ensure a fair representation; there should be a conscious acknowledgement of the fact that peace processes are still elite-dominated, and that such structures could lead to an automatic exclusion of women.

(2) Secondly, there is a need to stop making excuses as to why women are excluded from peace processes and peace mediation in various contexts. A simple justification such as a 'male-dominated culture' cannot and should not be taken seriously. It may be true that there are preconditions that assign certain societal roles to one gender or the other. But this has nothing to do with the opportunity to have equal representation of the various groups in a society in a peace process.

(3) Thirdly, more should be done to empower and encourage women to participate in peace processes and peace mediation, to apply for leadership roles, particularly in what appear to be 'tough', difficult, and complex contexts. Other suggestions include investing in training and education on unconscious bias for senior civil servants, for ambassadors, for senior management, for those who decide on future jobs.

(4) Finally, there is the need to put an end to 'verbal' acknowledgements of the need for more women and take concrete steps to impose the inclusion of women in peace processes and implement the commitments made. It is time to take concrete and targeted measures to reach a de facto higher number of women. The EU could exert more pressure in various processes to get more women on the table. In addition, the EU should be held accountable for its own commitments, including by civil society. Where quotas are not met, institutions should be more severely criticised for the realities and low numbers of women in peace processes.

In conclusion, it can be said that as far as the inclusion of women in peace processes is concerned, there is certainly a long way to go. At present, not enough women are included. Understanding the reasons why women are still not included (why they are excluded) from peace processes, as this paper has attempted to do, is a crucial step in a direction that is both desirable and important. As interviewees put it, we do not need more normative commitments but concrete actions to ensure an adequate representation of women in peace processes and beyond. The EU should play a leading role in this endeavour.

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