

CSO ANNUAL SURVEY ON WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY AND HUMANITARIAN ACTION

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Women's Peace & Humanitarian Fund

A United Nations & Civil Society Partnership

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Background

Working across the peace-development-human rights nexus, local women's organizations are often best placed to foster transformative and sustainable change to achieve peace and gender equality in complex environments. They expand the reach and impact of humanitarian aid, accelerate economic recovery, prevent and mediate conflict, respond to the immediate needs of most marginalized people and advance gender equality, which results in more sustainable and inclusive peace. They play critical roles as first responders and peacebuilders in fragile settings. Despite this, their work is consistently underfunded and often goes unrecognized.

Two decades after the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace, and security, aimed at ensuring women's right to full participation in peace and security decision-making, women's participation is minimal, and financial resources remain low.

In October 2020, the UN Secretary General called for "the donor community's support for universal compliance with the target of allocating a minimum of 15% of official development assistance to conflict-affected countries to advancing gender equality, including multiplying by five direct assistance to women's organizations.

Despite latest funding commitments and recommendations made by the United Nations Secretary General the share of bilateral aid supporting feminist, women-led and women's rights organizations and movements in fragile or conflict-affected countries still remains at only around 0.4 per cent¹, and has in fact decreased from \$150 million (0.3 per cent of bilateral aid) in 2020, compared with \$181 million in 2019².

The lack of funding and support to local women's organizations is even more worrying in a context of escalating conflicts and crisis such as Afghanistan, Ukraine, Myanmar and Haiti.

Despite the obvious continued leadership role of women in

COVID-19 community response strategies and the recognized negative impact of the pandemic on women's livelihoods and fundamental human rights, evidence suggests that the COVID-19 humanitarian response was neither localized nor women-led and less than half of policy measures adopted to respond to the pandemic were considered gender-sensitive³. Two years later, women's rights organizations are still impacted by the pandemic and their ability to maneuver within the women peace, security and humanitarian action (WPS-HA) space.

WPHF 2022 Global CSO Survey

In January 2023, The United Nations Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund (WPHF) launched its third global survey with local women's rights and women led organizations who have received programmatic or institutional funding from WPHF since its establishment in 2016. The objective of this survey was to take stock of the space and support for local women's organizations in peace, security and humanitarian action in countries where WPHF is channeling funding.

Made available in English, French, Arabic and Spanish, **282 representatives from local women's organizations from 31 countries** participated in the survey, including from Africa (107), Arab States (61), Asia and the Pacific (56), Latin America and Caribbean (40), and Europe and Central Asia (18). Overall, 89% of organizations who participated identify as women's rights and/or led by women, 4% youth rights and/or led by youth and 8% as other type of civil society organizations such as disability focused, humanitarian and/or indigenous rights organizations. 18% of responding organizations this year were also headed by someone who is forcibly displaced (refugee, IDP, returnee, or asylum seeker).

The anonymous survey specifically explores questions related to risks related to lack of funding for women's rights and led CSOs, challenges in securing flexible funding, as well as the context for local women's rights and led



organizations working in WPS-HA, including the impact of the security or political situation in their country, experience of retaliation or threats to their organization, and level of consultation or engagement of these organizations in policy in WPS-HA. CSOs were also asked about key priorities for funding for women's rights organization in the WPS-HA space.

Results of the survey should be read considering the following limitations: i) only quantitative methodology was used, limiting the descriptions of in-depth experiences from women's organizations; ii) the contexts in which the survey is conducted is ever changing considering that new conflicts and tensions have arisen since its launch; and iii) women's organizations in Ukraine (Europe and Central Asia) participated in the survey for the first time and thus comparison from the previous year are not inclusive of this region.

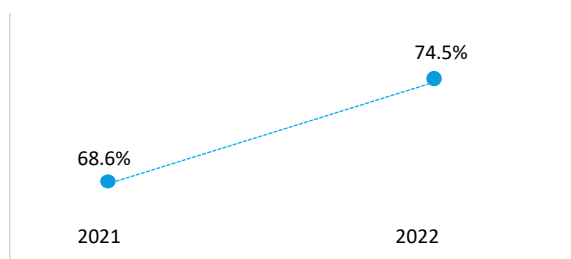
Despite these limitations, this year's survey demonstrates the continued need and urgency to support women's rights organizations in conflict and crisis settings and the importance of ensuring that the experiences and priorities of local women's organizations are prioritized.

Key Findings

Risks to the work and existence of local women's organizations

In 2022, 74.5% of local women's organizations across WPHF targeted regions felt that their organization was at either a high or very high risk for continuity due to the lack of programmatic or institutional funding for local women's organizations working on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) and/or humanitarian action. This represents a 6 percentage point increase from 2021 where 69% of organizations reported high or very high impact of risk. This is more alarming when including those that felt a moderate levels of risk, with 96% of women's organizations thereby at risk due the lack of sustained funding.

Figure 1: CSOs ability to carry out mandate for gender equality impacted by security and/or political situation



More than 38% of organizations also note that risks threatening the continuity of their operations or ability to implement programming have increased or remained constant over the past 12 months, as a result of the global pandemic, increased violence and conflict and volatile contexts, representing a 5 percentage point increase of organizations who responded to the same question a year earlier in 2021. The risks were most notable in Asia and Pacific (including countries such as Myanmar and Afghanistan) and Europe and Central Asia (Ukraine) with an average of 43% of CSOs reporting the risk had continued or increased in the past year.

In the past year, CSO continued to be impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic with 82% reporting their organizations and work are still impacted by the global pandemic. This trend has been relatively consistent over the past three years (77% in 2021 and 89% in 2021 where local women's organizations felt the existence of their institutions was threatened by the current pandemic and the subsequent redirection of urgently needed financing away from local organizations and WPS.

Threats and retaliation faced by local women's organizations in WPS-HA

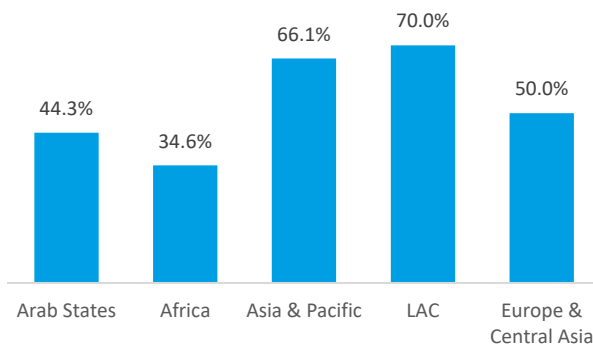
Local women's organizations operate in complex crisis and fragile contexts, where the activities of their organizations, security of their staff and rights of their communities are often at dire risk. They continue to serve their communities despite these risks and even targeted threats or retaliation as a result of their advocacy and work in WPS-HA.

In 2022, the Security Council called for specific measures to protect women's rights activists and their organizations and held its first-ever formal meeting focusing on reprisals against women participating in peace and security processes. These measures include long-term support for civil society actors so that they can strengthen their own safety measures, or emergency help for protection or relocation when most at risk⁴.

The security and/or political situation in targeted WPHF countries continued to impact local women's organizations. Overall, almost half (49%) of organizations reported that the context in which they work negatively impacted their ability to effectively carry out their mandate in WPS-HA.

This was most pronounced in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) region with 70% of organizations noting this, followed by those in Asia and Pacific with 66% and Europe and Central Asia with 50% respectively.

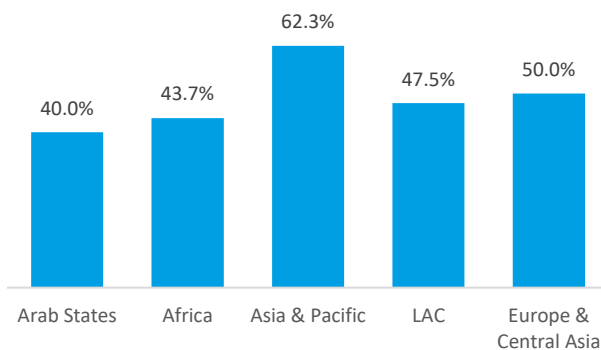
Figure 2: CSOs ability to carry out mandate for gender equality impacted by security and/or political situation



Moreover, just under half of all organizations (47%) reported that their organization and staff have received threats as a result of their work in WPS-HA in the last 12 months. This trend is consistent with 2021 data, whereby 46% of women's organizations reported the same, demonstrating the continued risk that local women's organizations face in engaging in WPS-HA work in their contexts. It is also evident in the growing number of requests by women human rights defenders (WHRDs) for psychosocial support through WPHF's new window on WHRDs which was launched in 2022.

Regionally, organizations in Asia and Pacific, particularly Afghanistan and Myanmar, faced the highest rates of threats and retaliation with 62% of these organizations reporting some level of threat to their organization and personnel. Organizations in Europe and Central Asia, notably in Ukraine, also had higher rates with 50% of women's organizations noting they had received threats in the last 12 months, followed by those in the LAC region with 47%. As continued escalation of crisis and war continue in these regions, women's organizations need additional protective mechanisms in order to safely operate.

Figure 3: CSOs/Staff that have face threats as a result of their work in WPS-HA, by region



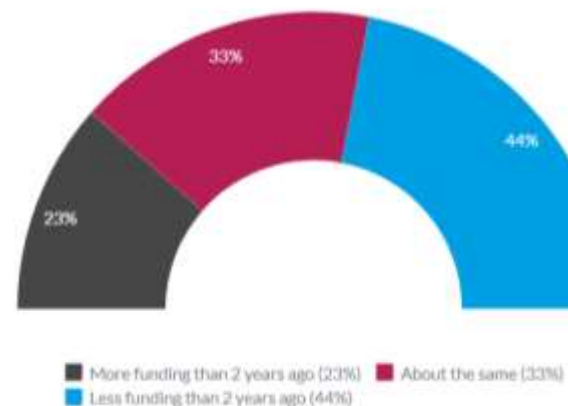
In response, WPHF has launched several emergency track calls for proposals to ensure rapid and flexible funding of these organizations and has seen an increase of project designs which include well-being and psychosocial support initiatives for staff and those women working on the frontlines of crisis and conflict settings. Moreover, the new Window on WHRDs is another mechanism to ensure individual WHRDs receive the critical support they need to ensure their protection and well-being with 84 WHRDs and their 221 dependents supported in 2022 alone.

Funding Environment for women's rights organizations in WPS-HA

The majority of women's organizations who participated in the survey highlighted that the largest proportion of their funding comes from two main sources – the United Nations or International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs) with 49% and 38% respectively. A small minority (4%) also note that they have been successful in mobilizing funds through private or public foundations, and 5% note they rely on private donations or donations through the private sector.

The yearly operating budget of local women's organizations who participated in the survey varies depending on their size and geographical reach. Smaller grassroots organizations report an average operating size between \$100 USD to \$3 million for larger national level organizations reporting this. However, the median operating budget is small amongst these organizations with only \$150,000 USD annually. A large number of organizations (44%) also reported that the amount of funding available to them in the past two years has decreased, while another 33% noted that it has stayed relatively the same.

Figure 4: Available funding for WPS-HA in last two years



Securing Resources for WPS and Humanitarian Action

Overall, the lack of access to multi-year programmatic or institutional funding⁵ is a key concern for local women's organizations in fragile and crisis contexts, with an alarming 75% of local women's organizations noting this as a core challenge. 32% of organizations also highlight that more broadly, there is insufficient funding available specifically for WPS-HA work and overall half (51%) of organizations stress that the lack of multi-year programmatic or institutional funding compromises their ability to carry out their mandates effectively.

Barriers to accessing funding and the lack of flexibility in the donor environment for grassroots organizations working in crisis and fragile contexts is also of concern. 39% of women's organizations note that funding is not flexible enough for smaller organizations, nor considers the realities and constraints of working in crisis and fragile contexts, application processes are cumbersome or too demanding, and the amount of time required to secure funding is lengthy. 23% of women's organizations also feel that funding is not prioritized at the grassroots level where many are working to improve the situation of WPS-HA in their communities. It is likely this experience is more widespread for local CSOs than is known, and complex application processes and procedures also act as a deterrent for engaged and qualified local women's organizations from securing needed funding.

This is consistent with recent research carried out by International Rescue Committee (IRC) which cited the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in that, 'women's rights organizations struggle to meet many of the application criteria and requirements necessary to secure country-based pooled fund resources. These include fund sizes that are too large for many [women's rights and led organizations], the inability for funding applications to be made in local languages, and requirements for [organizations] to have written policies in place specific to partnering with the UN⁶.

Moreover, 79% of local women's organizations working on WPS-HA issues emphasized that there is a need to balance between programmatic and institutional funding in order to effectively deliver in this space. In 2020, WPHF established institutional or core funding as a new stream for local women's organizations to sustain themselves and build their institutional capacities – funding which is often not available to smaller entities. To date, over 95 women's organizations have received institutional support through WPHF. The survey revealed however that 63% of

organizations still feel that their institutions are at risk due to the lack of available institutional/core funding in the donor landscape, an increase of 6% from the year before (57%), and another 32% feel this risk has continued to threaten their sustainability in the past 12 months.

Barriers and Challenges for effective implementation of WPS and Humanitarian Action

Once funding is secured or they have successfully been selected for funding, women's rights organizations highlight several barriers and challenges impeding their effective engagement and start implementation. More than half of all organizations (56%) report that once selected, the final approval processes are lengthy and cumbersome. This includes 29% who state there are excessive demands from donors on the need for documentation and narrative and financial reporting, deterring them away from the most important work. Interestingly, in the Arab States region, governmental or banking authorizations are also a key barrier with 5% of organizations noting this as impacting their ability to implement their projects once selected.

Some organizations (9%) also flag that support to them during the implementation phase is limited and this area would be welcomed. This accompaniment is also important to occur prior to implementation - during the design phase of projects. Since mid-2022, under its Rapid Response Window for Women's Participation in Peace Processes and the Implementation of Peace Agreements (RRW), prospective applicants are contacted directly if concept notes are approved to work with WPHF and its NGO partners to talk through their designs and receive technical support before they launch their projects. To date, more than 60% of organizations have received such support resulting in stronger and more relevant interventions.

The critical role of women's rights organizations in WPS-HA

Despite the challenges persistently faced by local women's rights organizations working in conflict and crisis settings, some positive transformations are occurring. In the last two years, more than half of all organizations have consistently been consulted or invited to engage on policy or action plans in WPS-HA at local, regional or national levels. 65% of local women's organizations stated that they were sometimes, often or frequently consulted to engaged on WPS-HA issues, indicative of women's rights organizations becoming more influential and consolidating their position as important agents of change.

Regionally, women's organizations in Africa and Arab States had the highest rates with 74% and 71% respectively, while only half (50%) of organizations in LAC reported that they were either consulted or invited to engage on policy or action plans for WPS-HA.

Priorities of local women's organizations

Participating organizations were asked about their priorities in WPS-HA given their intimate knowledge of their communities and contexts. They highlighted that the protection of women and girls in conflict and crisis settings continues to be a core area needed with 29% citing this as their main priority. Another 24% note that peacebuilding and economic recovery is a main priority for their organizations, followed by creating an enabling environment for WPS, including through the monitoring of the implementation of National Action Plans in their countries (14%).

In terms of other specific thematic areas that could potentially be explored, women's rights organizations were asked to rank five thematic areas of i) the nexus between food security, gender equality and sustainable peace; ii) climate change mainstreaming in WPS-HA; iii) disability mainstreaming in WPS-HA; iv) youth and the youth, peace and security (YPS) agenda; and v) digitalization and the use of technology or innovative approaches in WPS-HA. More than half (51%) of organizations ranked food security, gender equality and peace as a priority area and need, followed by climate change in WPS-HA with 19%. As WPHF goes into a new strategic phase, these findings will be critical to ensure that funding is channeled based on the needs and priorities of local women's organizations on the frontlines.

Way Forward

Despite the gains made since UNSCR 1325 and the global calls for enhanced women's leadership and participation in WPS-HA, more funding is needed to support local women peacebuilders, humanitarians and women human rights defenders and their organizations' work to build peace, gender equality and respond to crisis. Not only does financing need to increase, but funding modalities from the international community and private sector need to continue to be flexible and aligned with the realities of grassroots organizations working on the frontlines in crisis and conflict settings.

It is essential to sustain local women's organizations' leadership, work and impact to avoid rolling back vital

progress made on inclusive peace and the realization of women's rights⁷.

Recommendations:

- ▶ Continued flexible and quality funding to support local women's rights organizations working in crisis and conflict settings, including multi-year institutional/core funding and programmatic funding which extends beyond 24 months.
- ▶ Mainstreaming key emerging priorities such as food security and climate change within the WPS-HA context and providing local women's organizations with spaces to respond contextually to these priorities
- ▶ Recognizing the value of and supporting the safety, security and well-being of CSO personnel and volunteers and encouraging integration of initiatives which will ensure their well-being is prioritized
- ▶ Investment in strengthening the institutional capacity of local women's organizations working in conflict and crisis settings to increase their access to funding, improve their financial and risk management, enhance their agility to adapt, and support the overall continuation and sustainability of their work to impact WPS-HA.
- ▶ Investment and support for women human rights defenders and civil society organizations facing increased threats and retaliation with emerging crisis and conflicts
- ▶ Providing spaces to local women's organizations to consult and receive technical support from funders during the design phase to ensure more impactful interventions, and to have opportunities to build their internal capacity in resource mobilization with other donors.
- ▶ Minimizing the need for arduous documentation and processes for local women and youth grassroots organizations in applying for funds for WPS-HA, including diverse languages, more support/guidance on project proposal writing and in implementation, while still ensuring a demand-driven and contextual process.

References

¹ United Nations Security Council (September 2021). Women and Peace and Security – Report of the Secretary General (S/2021/827)

¹ United Nations Security Council (October 2022). Women and Peace and Security – Report of the Secretary General (S/2022/740)
<https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/S-2022-740.pdf>

¹ United Nations Security Council (September 2021). Women and Peace and Security – Report of the Secretary General (S/2021/827)

⁴ United Nations Security Council (October 2022). Women and Peace and Security – Report of the Secretary General (S/2022/740)

⁵ Institutional funding refers to resources provided to an organization to sustain themselves through a crisis and build its institutional capacity. This is also referred to as core funding

⁶ IRC (2022), <https://www.rescue.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/Why%20Wait%20-%20Full%20Report%20-%20English.pdf> as cited from OCHA. County-Based Pooled Funds 2021 In Review. https://www.unocha.org/sites/unocha/files/CBPF_2021_inReview_masterlayout_20220607.pdf

⁷See also reports by AWID and Mama Cash (November 2020). Moving More Money to the Drivers of Change: How Bilateral and Multilateral Funders can Resource Feminist Movements.

For additional information on the WPHF funding mechanisms, please visit:

- ▶ WPHF's Regular Funding Cycle: <https://wphfund.org/calls-for-proposals/>
- ▶ WPHF's Rapid Response Window: <https://wphfund.org/rrw/>
- ▶ WPHF's Funding Window for Women Human Rights Defenders: <https://wphfund.org/whrds/>



About WPHF

The United Nations Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund (WPHF) is a global partnership designed to accelerate action and support for women's participation, leadership, and empowerment in humanitarian response and peace and security settings. WPHF is a flexible and rapid financing mechanism supporting quality interventions designed to enhance the capacity of women to prevent conflict, respond to crises and emergencies, and seize key peacebuilding opportunities.

Since its launch in 2016, WPHF has established itself as a highly relevant and credible multi-partner trust fund, channeling urgently needed funds to local and grassroots civil-society organizations working on women, peace and security and humanitarian action around the world. To date, WPHF has funded over 930 local women's organizations working to support women to be a force for crisis response and lasting peace in 41 countries. In addition, WPHF has supported the participation and the protection of over 100 women human rights defenders and women peacebuilders in 17 countries.

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