

WPHF 2024 CSO SURVEY FINDINGS ON WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY & HUMANITARIAN ACTION

Uncovering key priorities of women civil society leaders in conflict and crisis settings

April 2025



[There is] insufficient funding for programmes aimed at the long-term protection of women and girls, especially in protracted conflicts and humanitarian crises. While short-term assistance is often funded, programmes that provide sustainable access to justice, psychosocial support, rehabilitation, and addressing gender-based violence remain largely underfunded.

CSO partner from Ukraine

Background

Working across the peace-development-human rights nexus, local women's organizations are often best placed to foster transformative and sustainable changes to achieve peace and gender equality in conflict and crisis-affected contexts. They expand the reach and impact of humanitarian aid, accelerate economic recovery, prevent and mediate conflict, respond to the immediate needs of the 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.

More than two decades after the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security, which established women's right to full participation in peace and security decision-making, women's participation remains minimal, and financial resources for local women's rights organizations remains low.

In 2023, the United Nations Secretary General called on the international community and recommended to (i) raise USD \$300 million in new financing for women's organizations in crisis settings over the next three years, including through support to the United Nations Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund (WPHF); and to (ii) allocate a minimum of 15% of ODA to gender equality, including a minimum of 1% to women's organizations, especially grassroots groups mobilizing for peace¹. WPHF launched the Invest-in-Women Campaign² to address the call.

However, despite funding commitments and recommendations, 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 0.3 per cent,³ and total commitments remained at \$148 million in 2021, a decrease from the 2020

commitment of \$176 million.⁴ This is at further risk with announcements of cuts to ODA.

The lack of funding and support for local women's organizations is increasingly worrying in the context of escalating conflicts and crises such as Sudan, Afghanistan, Ukraine, Myanmar and Haiti, in addition to forgotten crises in many countries where funding remains scarce in the face of rising needs for women and girls.

There have also been repeated calls to make long-term, flexible and core funding available to local women's rights and women-led organizations as part of a strategy to build peace, stability and social cohesion.⁵ The United Nations Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund (WPHF), an instrument for the localization of the WPS agenda and Grand Bargain commitments, is responding to these calls by enhancing women's rights organizations' participation and leadership in the design of locally and women-led responses to conflict and crisis. In 2024 alone, WPHF raised over \$63.5 million, the highest annual amount since the Fund was launched in 2016. Since its establishment, the Fund has supported over 1,500 local women's civil society organizations in 46 crisis and conflict-affected countries, including support to 220 organizations with critical institutional funding to safeguard their existence, strengthen their capacities and adapt to evolving challenges⁶.

WPHF 2024 Global CSO Survey on WPS-HA

In 2024, WPHF launched its fifth global survey with local women's rights and women led organizations that 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 the extent and quality of support for local women's organizations working on women,

peace, security and humanitarian action (WPS-HA) issues in countries where WPHF is channeling funding, uncover priorities of women civil society leaders, and to effectively advocate with the international community for more flexible and quality funding for local women's rights organizations on the frontlines.

Made available in English, French, Arabic and Spanish, 224 representatives from local women's organizations from 31 countries participated in the survey, including from Africa (92), Arab States (33), Asia and the Pacific (44), Latin America and Caribbean (31), and Europe and Central Asia (24). Overall, 82% of organizations that participated identify as women's rights and/or led by women, 12% youth rights and/or led by youth and 6% as another type of civil society organizations such as disability focused, and human rights focused organizations. 43% of responding organizations this year stated that they work at the local (17%) and sub-national level (27%), whereas 55% work at the national level and 2% at the international level. Over half (53%) of respondents are also from organizations who have received funding through the UN system for the first time.

The anonymous survey specifically explores questions related to risks linked to lack of funding for women's rights and led CSOs, the challenges they face in securing flexible funding, as well as the challenging contexts in which local women's rights and led organizations working on WPS-HA often operate. This includes the impact of the security or political situation at the country level, the experience of retaliation or threats to their organizations, and the level of consultation or engagement of these organizations in advancing policy related to WPS-HA. CSO respondents were also asked about their key priorities in funding modalities for women's rights organization in the WPS-HA space.

Results of the survey should be read considering the following limitations: i) primarily quantitative methodology was used, limiting the descriptions of in-depth experiences from women's organizations; ii) the contexts in which the survey is conducted are ever-changing considering that new conflicts and tensions have arisen since its launch. Despite these limitations, this year's findings demonstrate 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 2024, close to half (46%) 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 WPS-HA, showing a significant decrease from 2023 (over 66%). However, this is

more alarming when including those who also felt a moderate levels of risk, with over 80% of women's organizations identifying themselves at risk due the lack of sustained funding.

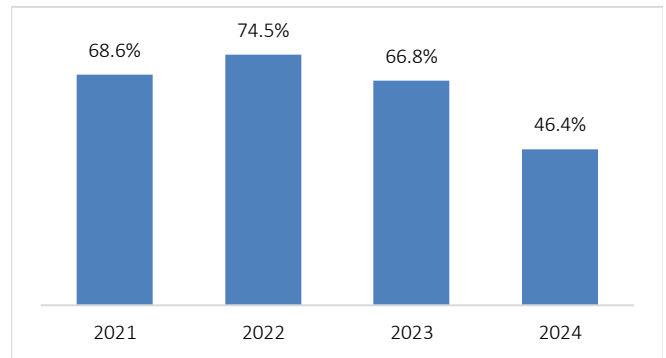


Figure 1: Percentage of CSOs that report high or very high levels of risk to their organizations as a result of lack of programmatic or institutional funding (2024)

Nearly half of the organizations surveyed (46%) also note that risks threatening the continuity of their operations or ability to implement programming have persisted and remained constant over the past 12 months, as a result of increased violence and conflict and volatile contexts, lack of long-term funding, and funding that does not prioritize vulnerable groups such as those who are forcibly displaced, living with disabilities or from LGBTIQ+ communities.

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

Local women's organizations operate in complex crises 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, including targeted threats or retaliation because of their advocacy and work in WPS-HA.

In 2022, the UN 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 risk.⁷ Two years later, the report of the Secretary General highlights that one of the key factors which continues to hinder progress is the escalating backlash against women's rights and gender equality and that women human rights defenders and civil society organizations on the frontlines are often under attack themselves.⁸

The security and/or political situation, in countries where WPHF is active, continued to impact local women's organizations, particularly in Afghanistan, Ukraine, Ethiopia, Palestine and Haiti. Overall, 65% of organizations reported that the security or political context in which they work negatively impacted their ability to effectively carry out their

mandate in WPS-HA and gender equality. This was most pronounced among organizations in LAC and Asia and Pacific with 63% and 62% respectively, followed by those in Europe and Central Asia with 54%, the Arab States with 48%, and 37% in Africa.

Moreover, just under half of all organizations (46%) reported that their organization and staff have directly received threats as a result of their work in WPS-HA in the last 12 months. This trend is generally consistent over the past three years (43% in 2023, 47% in 2022, and 45% in 2021), demonstrating the continued risk that local women’s organizations face in engaging in WPS-HA work in their contexts.

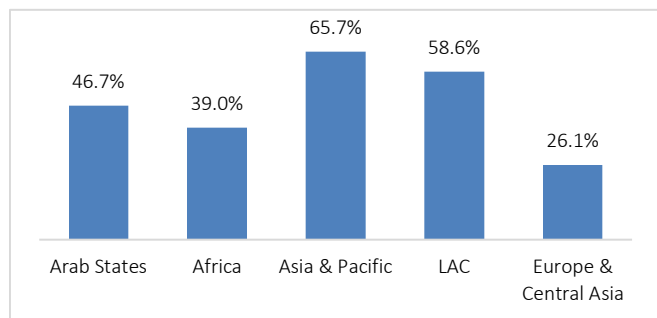


Figure 2: Percentage of CSOs that report that their organization and staff have received threats as a result of their work in WPS-HA (2024)

In 2024, CSOs from Myanmar, Yemen, Liberia and Papua New Guinea reported the highest rates of threats as a result of their work, with over 83% of CSOs reporting direct threats. This was followed by Afghanistan, Sudan, Haiti, Bangladesh, D.R.C, Palestine, and South Sudan where over 50% of organizations in these countries reported facing threats. It is also evident in the growing number of requests by women human rights defenders (WHRDs) for relocation, medical care, and psychosocial support through WPHF’s Window for WHRDs, which was launched in 2022. In 2024 alone, the Window for WHRDs received over 1,450 requests for urgent protection support due to their activism and to ensure the safety of their dependents.

As continued escalation of crisis and war continues in these regions, women’s organizations need more flexible funding and political support to safely operate. In response, WPHF has launched several emergency track calls during the year for proposals to ensure rapid and flexible funding of these organizations, including funding for safety, well-being and psychosocial support initiatives for staff and women working on the frontlines of crisis and conflict settings. Moreover, the funding Window for WHRDs is another mechanism to ensure individual WHRDs receive the critical support they need to ensure their protection and well-being with 775 WHRDs and their 2,344 dependents supported since 2022.

Securing Resources for WPS and Humanitarian Action

Findings also reveal that over 49% of CSOs have received less funding than two years ago to carry out their mandates, with the majority of organizations dependent on international

non-governmental organizations (INGOs) and UN agencies as their main source of funding. This trend is consistent in the last two years whereby 42% of CSOs noted the same. The lack of access to multi-year programmatic or institutional funding⁹ also remains a key concern for local women’s organizations in fragile and crisis contexts, with 61% of local women’s organizations noting this as a core challenge. 21% of organizations also highlight that more broadly, there is insufficient funding available specifically for WPS-HA work.

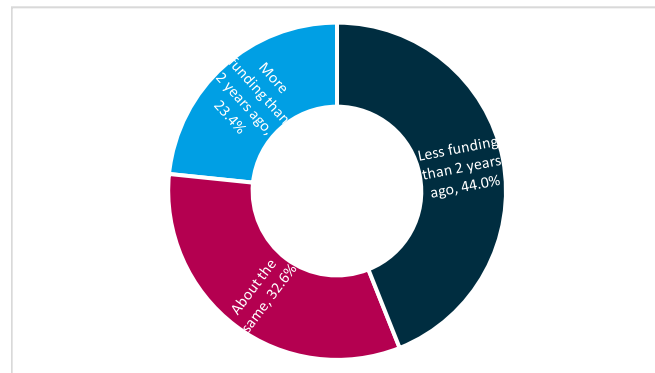


Figure 3: Percentage of CSOs and the level of funding received over the past two years

Barriers to accessing funding and the lack of flexibility in the donor environment for grassroots organizations working in crisis and fragile contexts continues to be a concern with almost one quarter of CSOs noting that funding is not prioritized for local and grassroots organizations in crisis and conflict settings. The lack of access to information about appropriate funding opportunities is also reported as a challenge in securing resources. Complex application processes and procedures continue to act as a deterrent for engaged and qualified local women’s organizations from securing needed funding and 17% of organizations also note that funding is not flexible enough for the contexts in which they work.

“Many donors tend to prioritize larger national or international organizations, overlooking local, women-led groups that possess a deeper understanding of and stronger connections to the communities they serve. As a result, grassroots initiatives, which are vital for fostering sustainable peace, advancing gender equality, and providing effective humanitarian assistance, often face limited funding. (CSO From Ethiopia)”

This is consistent with recent global research carried out, whereby the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) highlights 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 UN¹⁰. AWID, the global feminist movement, equally calls for making eligibility criteria and funding mechanisms fit for

purpose to fund organizations that have the greatest impact on women’s rights¹¹. The WPHF reviews on an annual basis its procedures for increased accessibility. Almost half of the women’s organizations supported are receiving UN funding for the first time, a number that demonstrates WPHF’s ability to effectively reach grassroots civil society organizations that serve the most marginalized communities.

An overwhelming 80% of CSOs surveyed called for the 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 strengthen their institutional capacities – funding which is often not available to smaller entities. To date, over 200 women’s organizations have received institutional support through WPHF. Despite this, this year’s survey results continued to reveal that just over half of CSOs still feel that their institutions are at risk due to the lack of available institutional/core funding, and another 28% feel this risk has continued to threaten their sustainability in the past 12 months. More alarming is the fact that **69% of CSOs highlight that if their external funding ended immediately, they would not be able to sustain themselves for more than six months**, with 33% having no other reserves or savings.

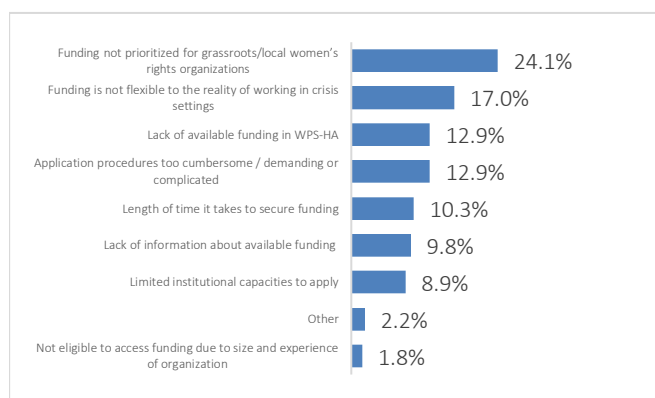


Figure 4: Percentage of CSOs and barriers and challenges in accessing funding

As a result of these challenges, local women’s rights organizations have had to adapt to shifting donor priorities. Overwhelmingly, the majority of organizations (71%) admit that they have changed their priorities, strategies or ways of working in order to be eligible for and/or increase the chances of receiving funding.

“Many donors focus on short-term projects, but sustained peace efforts often require ongoing support for community-driven initiatives, conflict resolution training, and infrastructure development, which can be overlooked in favor of more immediate interventions”. (CSO from the Philippines)

Positively however, 69% of surveyed CSOs also highlight the fact that their WPHF grants, in addition to institutional and capacity strengthening opportunities provided have helped them to leverage new and additional resources since receiving their grant. One third of organizations attribute this

directly to institutional funding and opportunities to work on resource mobilization strategies, while other factors such as increased visibility, implementation experience and impact and network and partnership building are contributing factors. Based on 2024 annual reporting figures, active CSOs mobilized approximately 17 million USD from foundations, INGOs, other UN agencies, and the private sector speaking to the benefits of providing grassroots and emerging organizations the opportunities for funding from global funds such as WPHF.

Barriers and Challenges for effective implementation of WPS and Humanitarian Action

Once funding is secured or women’s rights organizations have successfully been selected for funding, several barriers and challenges continue to impede their effective engagement and implementation in the WPS-HA space. Just under one quarter of all organizations (32%) report that once selected, the final approval processes are lengthy and cumbersome. This includes 26% who state there are excessive demands from donors on the need for documentation and narrative and financial reporting, deterring them from the most important work. Rapid and timely processes for availability of funds, once CSOs have been successful in securing funding is also an area which funders need to improve – a challenge whereby over 32% of surveyed CSOs highlighted this to be a core challenge.

Another 17% of organizations note that more broadly in the donor landscape, funding is not prioritized for grassroots and local civil society organizations – a unique feature of the WPHF, which has to date supported over 89% organizations at the local and sub-national levels. Other challenges that CSOs highlight are the demands for government compliances and a lack of acceptance from local authorities. This resonates with the broader discussions amongst the international donor community around issues of trust for civil society organizations and the heavy and time-consuming due diligence processes they often face.

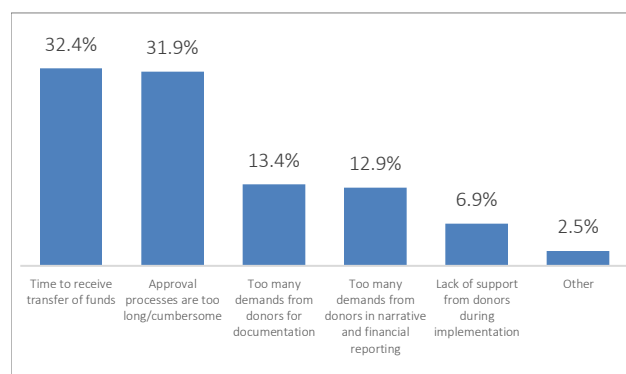


Figure 5: Percentage of CSOs and barriers and challenges once funding is secured

Some organizations (7%) also flag that support for their efforts during the implementation phase is limited and that more support in this area would be welcomed, including capacity strengthening opportunities. This accompanying

support is also important to occur prior to project implementation - during the project design phase. WPHF has aimed to address this through its Global Learning Hub (L-HUB) and country level capacity strengthening which provides capacity and exchange opportunities for all its CSO partners, either past or present. WPHF also provides technical support during the application processes, including information sessions and guidance documents. 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 INGO partners to discuss their project designs and receive technical support before they launch their projects. While this level of technical support can be burdensome on funders, the rewards and outputs of this are far more important and needed.

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 also occurring. In the last three years, more than sixty percent of all organizations have consistently been consulted or invited to engage on policy or action plans in WPS-HA by local authorities, NGOs and the donor community at local, regional or national levels. In 2024 specifically, 62% of local women's organizations stated that they were sometimes, often or frequently consulted to engage on WPS-HA issues, indicative of women's rights organizations increasing influence and consolidating their positions as critical agents of change.

Regionally, trends have shifted since 2023 with women's organizations in Arab States (74%) and Europe and Central Asia (71%) most predominantly consulted, rather than Africa (66%) in the previous year. This is followed by CSOs in Asia and the Pacific (62%) and a significant decrease in organizations in LAC (33%) from 56% the year before reporting 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 finally 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 and peacebuilding and economic recovery continues to be core areas needed with 28% and 23% respectively citing this as their main priority. Another 13% note that humanitarian action and response is a priority given the escalating crises over the last 12 months, including the provision of mental health and legal services.

"Funding often fails to address the intersectionality of issues, such as how gender inequality intersects with poverty, conflict, and climate change." (CSO from Pakistan)

"Underfunding of long-term gender-responsive peacebuilding initiatives. While donors often focus on short-term humanitarian aid or emergency responses, there is a lack of sustained investment in programs that integrate gender equality and empower women in the long-term peacebuilding process, addressing the root causes of conflict and fostering lasting peace." (CSO from Uganda)

The Way Forward

Despite the gains made since UNSCR 1325 was adopted, now approaching its 25th anniversary, and the global calls for enhanced women's leadership and participation in WPS-HA, continued and dedicated financing is needed to support local women peacebuilders, humanitarians and women human rights defenders and their organizations' work to build peace, advance gender equality and respond to crisis. Not only does financing need to increase, but funding modalities from the international community and private sector actors need to continue to be flexible, timely 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 rights.¹²

Recommendations for Donors and Key Actors in the International Community:

- ▶ Accelerate 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. This includes prioritizing emerging organizations without previous funding experience with INGOs or the UN.
- ▶ Invest 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.
- ▶ Prioritize intersectional funding approaches that support CSOs in all their diversity, including those led by indigenous women, LGBTIQ+, women living with disabilities and forcibly displaced women, ensuring tailored resources for diverse needs and vulnerabilities.
- ▶ Recognize the value of and supporting the safety, security and well-being of CSO personnel and volunteers and encouraging integration of initiatives such as psychosocial support and mental health work which will ensure their well-being is prioritized. Coupled with this is the need to invest in leadership sustainability programmes for CSO leaders to support long-term resilience and avoid burnout among women leaders in crisis contexts.

- ▶ Mainstream key emerging priorities such as food security and climate security within the WPS-HA context and providing local women’s organizations with spaces to respond contextually to these priorities and based on their experiences.
- ▶ Provide spaces to local women’s organizations to consult and receive ongoing 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.
- ▶ Minimize the need for arduous documentation and processes for local women and youth grassroots organizations in applying for funds for WPS-HA, including diverse languages, streamlined templates, more support/guidance on project proposal writing and in implementation, while still ensuring a demand-driven and contextual process.
- ▶ Invest and support for women human rights defenders, activists, and civil society organizations facing increased threats and retaliation with emerging crisis and conflicts.

References

- ¹ United Nations Security Council (September 2023). Women and Peace and Security – Report of the Secretary General (S/2023/725)
- ² <https://wphfund.org/investinwomen/>
- ³ United Nations Security Council (September 2023). Women and Peace and Security – Report of the Secretary General (S/2023/725)
- ⁴ Ibid.
- ⁵ Ibid.
- ⁶ As of March 27, 2025
- ⁷ Report of the Secretary General, Women and Peace and Security, S/2022/740 (October 2022), <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/S-2022-740.pdf>
- ⁸ Report of the Secretary General, Women and Peace and Security, S/2024/671
- ⁹ 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
- ¹⁰ International Rescue Committee (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
- ¹¹ AWID (2020), Where is the Money for Feminist Organizations? Available at: https://www.awid.org/sites/default/files/2022-01/AWID_Research_WITM_Brief_ENG.pdf
- ¹² See 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.

WPHF IN ACTION

OUR VISION TO ENHANCE SUPPORT FOR WOMEN ON THE FRONT LINES

The United Nations Women’s Peace and Humanitarian Fund (WPHF) is a multi-partner trust fund mobilizing urgently needed finance for local women’s organizations and women human rights defenders (WHRDs) working on the frontlines to respond to crisis and build lasting peace. Since its launch in 2016, WPHF has funded over 1,550 local women’s organizations across 44 countries, and supported over 870 WHRDs and women peacebuilders in 25 countries. Guided by a range of civil society, government, and UN actors, WPHF supports women and their local organizations in fragile settings around the work across six outcome areas through three key funding mechanisms.

1

Regular Funding Cycle

provides institutional and programmatic funding to local civil society organizations to support their work on women, peace and security and humanitarian action

2

Rapid Response Window for Women and Peace Processes

addresses short-term strategic interventions aiming at ensuring or strengthening women’s meaningful participation in track 1 and track 2 peace processes and the implementation of peace agreements

3

Funding Window for Women Human Rights Defenders

supports the advocacy and the protection of women peacebuilders, humanitarian responders and human rights activists from crisis countries

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A United Nations & Civil Society Partnership

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RESPOND TO CRISIS
BUILD PEACE



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