

ASIA PACIFIC CENTRE - RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT

OVERVIEW OF GENDER RESPONSIVE EARLY WARNING
SYSTEMS – PROGRESS AND GAPS



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A U S T R A L I A

Introduction

To mark the 20th anniversary of UN Security Council 1325 (2000), which formally established the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, the UN Secretary General's 2020 annual report on the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) focused entirely on women, the gendered aspects of atrocity crimes and the importance of strengthening linkages between R2P and WPS. The report emphasised the need to reconceptualise preventative strategies not only to address the specific needs of survivors of gender-based atrocity crimes but also to tackle the root causes of violence and discrimination against women.¹ It also found that any systematic approach to atrocity crime prevention requires strong gender-sensitive analysis, indicators and sex-disaggregated data. One of the report's key recommendations is for Member States, as well as regional and subregional organisations, to develop and include gender-specific indicators in national and regional early warning frameworks to improve monitoring of and early response to patterns of gender-based crimes, including sexual and gender-based violence.

This recommendation comes alongside a growing recognition among WPS, early warning and atrocity prevention experts and policy makers, of the need to strengthen gender perspectives in approaches to the prevention of atrocity crimes, conflict and violent extremism. A similar recommendation was included in the 2021 ASEAN study on the implementation of the WPS agenda² and within the civil society statement signed by over 140 organisations ahead of the June 2021, 7th review of the Global Strategy on Counter Terrorism.³

Ensuring adequate consideration of gender perspectives within early warning systems is critical to identify the differentiated threats facing women and girls, and equally important, to enhance the overall capacity of monitoring efforts to identify and respond to risk factors, including those relating to worsening gender inequality. Empirical research spanning over 20 years links the status of women and gender equality to a country's propensity for inter or intra-state violence as well as atrocity crimes. Similarly, there is emerging research outlining the role of gender equality and gender norms in preventing violent extremism and radicalisation. For instance, research undertaken in 2017-2018 in Bangladesh, Indonesia and the Philippines, found that hostile sexist attitudes toward women and support for violence against women are the factors most strongly associated with support for violent extremism.⁴ It is therefore crucial for early warning systems monitoring risks of conflict, atrocity crimes and violent extremism, to integrate gender-responsive indicators.

This paper seeks to inform upcoming work to develop recommendations for gender-responsive indicators of atrocity crimes. Drawing on several recent reports and research projects,⁵ this briefing paper provides an overview of efforts to date to strengthen the consideration of gender dimensions within global, regional, national and subnational early warning frameworks. Most of these efforts, while ad hoc, have focused on risk factors relating to conflict or violent extremism. Less attention has gone into developing gender-specific indicators of atrocity crimes: war crimes, crimes against humanity, ethnic cleansing and genocide.

The paper then outlines the key challenges and obstacles hindering efforts to date and the limitations of the most commonly used gender-specific indicators. It concludes with recommendations for next steps to ensure the integration of gender-responsive indicators⁶ which monitor a broad range of gendered behaviours that could signal regressing attitudes towards gender equality or an escalation of exclusionary or discriminatory practices. Given gender inequalities are exacerbated in the lead up to and during conflicts and crises and that increasing rates of gender-based violence or attempts to restrict women and girls' rights are potential warning signs of growing exclusionary or discriminatory practices, this paper suggests three broad categories of gender-responsive indicators which could be applied to preventative frameworks for conflict, atrocity crimes or violent extremism. Further research is encouraged to operationalise these three recommended categories of gender-responsive indicators within various monitoring and prevention frameworks and to specific contexts.

Efforts to date to include gender perspectives in early warning systems

Recommendations to integrate gender considerations into early warning systems date back to the 2001 UN Secretary General's comprehensive report on conflict prevention. The report stated that threats to all citizens, especially women, in conflict situations required the integration of gender analysis into early warning activities and the need for preventative measures to strengthen women's protection.⁷ The following year, SwissPeace and International Alert developed the first comprehensive framework on how to incorporate gendered indicators to provide more visibility to previously overlooked signs of instability.⁸ The framework identified 50 suggested gender-responsive early warning indicators addressing root and proximate causes, as well as intervening factors. It also emphasised that the need to 'engender' early warning systems was necessary to better highlight the differentiated risks faced by women, girls and marginalised

populations during conflict and the outbreak of violence, and more broadly, to enhance the overall effectiveness of early warning and response systems.⁹

Since then, various regional organisations, UN entities and International Financial Institutions have issued further recommendations or policy guidance notes to enhance the consideration of gender perspectives within early warning systems. These include the African Union, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), UN Women, the UN Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict and the World Bank.

However, despite the growing empirical research linking gender equality to conflict and atrocity prevention and to countering violent extremism,¹⁰ as well as increasing recognition of the need to incorporate gender-responsive indicators within early warning and monitoring frameworks, efforts to operationalise these findings have been largely ad hoc and inconsistent.¹¹ In fact, research published in 2006, 2009, 2012, 2015 and 2021 assessing the degree to which gender dimensions are considered within early warning systems, all concluded that gender perspectives are largely missing.¹² Where they are included, their approaches are inconsistent and tend to apply narrow definitions of gender equality and gendered rights violations. For example, a 2015 study found that existing frameworks for predicting mass atrocities and genocide do not incorporate gendered indicators in their analysis, despite international legal definitions for genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity including gender-specific crimes such as mass rape, forced sterilisation and forced abortion.¹³ Nor do they consider whether gender-based human rights violations could affect a country's predisposition towards genocide and mass atrocities. The authors stipulated that the widespread use of sexual torture, rape and slavery against ethnic and political groups prior to the onset of conflicts in Mali, Syria and Central African Republic may have been overlooked by existing early warning systems because they omit gender inequality indicators.¹⁴ The authors suggested that among the reasons for the 'gender silence' in early warning systems is the perception that collecting and monitoring gender related data will not lead to relevant analysis. They outlined the urgent need to address the systemic omission of gender inequality indicators within early warning systems and to improve the quality and quantity of gender sensitive data. A literature review published in 2021 cataloguing past efforts to develop and integrate gender indicators into early warning systems similarly found that these are infrequent, and further, studies on their effectiveness are not publicly available.¹⁵

In May 2021, the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) released a global framework to advance efforts to strengthen gender-responsive early warning systems. Its research identified two primary factors which limit the effective integration of gender perspectives within early warning systems: 1) the unavailability of sub-national gender data and the challenges inherent in collecting it; and 2) the narrow scope of gender indicators (when used) which fail to monitor a broad range of gender-based human rights violations that could point to rising insecurity or risks of violence and conflict within a community or region.¹⁶ The global framework outlines a five step process to facilitate the integration of gender-specific indicators within existing early warning systems and recommends the prioritisation of the development of sub-national gender indicators which can monitor changing gendered behaviours.

Since 2002, gender experts and researchers have been highlighting the importance of overcoming these challenges and inconsistent approaches to gendering early warning systems. There are three overarching and ongoing risks of not including gender perspectives within early warning systems and response frameworks:

- 1) Early warning systems which do not monitor broad gender-based human rights violations risk overlooking micro-level events stemming from negative gender norms which could lead to earlier warnings of conflict, atrocity crimes or violent extremism;
- 2) Policies and responses may be formulated in ways which further fuel negative gender stereotypes or norms and which fail to identify and address the differentiated needs of women, men, girls and boys, especially those of women and girls most vulnerable to conflict, gender-based atrocity crimes or violent extremism; and
- 3) Local women and women's organisations working on peacebuilding, prevention and social cohesion risk being excluded from the development and monitoring of community-level early warning systems which undermines their equal right to participate in prevention policy making and discounts their vital perspectives, knowledge and solutions.

Encouragingly in the last couple of years, an increasing number of countries have now committed to developing gender-responsive conflict and or violent extremism indicators as part of early warning monitoring efforts, via their WPS National Action Plans. However, most of these commitments do not extend to developing gendered indicators of atrocity crimes. Within the Asia-Pacific region, countries which have made such commitments include Australia, Bangladesh, the Philippines and Timor-Leste. In fact, Timor-Leste is among the only countries to have incorporated the monitoring of sexual and gender-based violence as part of its conflict and atrocity prevention early warning systems. This work is conducted primarily by Timorese NGO, Belun. Yet, while the organisation has been internationally commended for its

pioneering work on gender-responsive early warning systems, it is impacted by significant funding shortfalls. It is now currently undertaking monitoring efforts in only two Timorese municipalities, whereas it had previously been able to work across 13.¹⁷

Momentum is also building in Indonesia, as well as in ASEAN, to develop gender-responsive early warning and response frameworks. During digital consultations in 2020 on the implementation of Indonesia’s National Action Plan for the Protection and Empowerment of Women and Children in Social Conflict (RAN P3AKS), Indonesian WPS civil society called for comprehensive data and analysis on the root causes of conflict and violent extremism and for the development of early warning indicators in conflict-prone regions.¹⁸ A 2021 ASEAN endorsed study on the implementation of WPS in the region recommended that gender be mainstreamed as a cross-cutting issue across all peace and security policies, including ASEAN frameworks which monitor risk and early warnings of conflict, terrorism or natural disasters.¹⁹

Commonly used gender-specific indicators

Recent projects undertaken for IFES as well as for the World Bank and other regional organisations have stressed that when gender-specific indicators are integrated into early warning systems, they predominantly focus on long-term structural indicators such as the number of women in parliament or relate specifically to monitoring narrow aspects of gender-based violence. This likely relates to a lack of available subnational gender data and to limited gender expertise among early warning analysts, which leads to equating gender perspectives solely with sexual and gender-based violence. As highlighted by IFES, structural indicators including women in parliament are important to monitor as part of longer-term prevention efforts but they do not shed light on how community attitudes towards gender equality and violence against women may be changing over the course of a year or how they might be contributing to community insecurity, violence or radicalisation. In addition, focusing solely on gender-based violence overlooks other gender factors which could point to growing discriminatory or exclusionary practices. It is also necessary for gender indicators to monitor changes in behaviour among men and boys as well as the gendered targeting of ethnic and religious minorities.

Noting that not all early warning systems make their indicators or analysis publicly available, the table below highlights the most commonly identified gender-specific indicators currently being used by regional, national and subnational early warning systems. Information on how these feed into overall monitoring efforts and responses is largely unavailable.

Table 1: Commonly used gender-specific indicators

Indicator Category/ Pillar	Indicator
Security	Sexual and Gender Based Violence <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase of sexual violence reported or evident • Increase in physical violence • Increase in human trafficking
Governance/ Democracy/ Political	Number of Women in Parliament Laws in place promoting gender equality and addressing SGBV
Economic	Participation of women and men in the labour force
Health	Number of women living with HIV Women’s life expectancy/ mortality rate
Social/ Cultural	Ratios of boys/ girls; men/ men to primary, secondary and tertiary-level education
Electoral Violence	Verbal/ physical attacks directed at women during election periods

Further, recent analysis concluded that most indicators relating to health, human rights, politics, security and society do not integrate any gender elements within them, not do they systematically include the collection of sex-disaggregated data.

Expanding gender-specific indicators

Based on the cumulative research linking gender equality to prevention, the global framework for gender indicators issued by IFES advises that any attempts to restrict or rescind women's political, social, economic, and legal rights should be seen as potential precursors to conflict, atrocity crimes or extremism, as should any public narrative aimed at cementing narrowly-defined gender roles for women, girls, men and boys. This is in line with the World Bank Group's Strategy for Fragility, Conflict and Violence which emphasises the need to move beyond a sole focus on women's protection from sexual and gender-based violence. The strategy calls for the closing of gender gaps in education, economic opportunities, access to labour market and social protection, as well as the need to enhance women's participation in all decision-making processes, as part of efforts to make societies more resistant to violence and conflict.²⁰ The need to expand the most commonly used gender-specific indicators also reflects the warning issued by the UN Secretary General in 2019 that sudden and extreme restrictions on women's rights are among the earliest signs of the spread of violent extremism.²¹

Listed below are examples of new or modified gender-specific indicators suggested by IFES,²² as well as by UN Women and WANEP.²³ These have been put forward as examples of indicators which could better track changes in attitudes towards gender equality and the enforcement of traditional gender roles.

- Increases in sexist, homophobic or misogynistic hate speech and propaganda (including propaganda encouraging militarised masculinity or encouraging women of a specific religion/ ethnicity to bear more children)
- The targeting of women by state and non-state actors, both online and physically, especially women in public roles including women human rights defenders, journalists, teachers, government workers and politicians;
- The number of violent arrests by police or security force personnel disaggregated by sex and level of force used during arrest;
- Sudden changes in women's mobility and participation in common places;
- Changes in expectations and practices around dress codes for women and girls;
- Growing restrictions on civil society in particular women's organisations;
- Resistance to women participating in peacebuilding/ conflict prevention or resolution efforts;
- Sudden drop in girls attending school due to security threats/ attacks on girls schools
- Rapid attempts by women to acquire cash such as selling jewellery or other valuables;
- Changes in sex work/ survival sex (forced or voluntary);
- Changes to access in emergency health services; and
- Changes in access and request rates for health care, including sexual and reproductive health.

While some gender-responsive indicators of atrocity crime may overlap or complement the indicators listed above, it is also worthwhile to consider whether crimes against humanity, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and genocide, may have additional or particular gender indicators that should be monitored.

For example, these could include:

- The targeting of women and girls from ethnic or religious minorities;
- The arbitrary arrest or enforced disappearances of men aged between 18-40;
- Separating male and female family members; and
- Coercive reproductive control of women from religious and ethnic minority

It is critical that all gender-responsive indicators, whether they are monitoring for risk factors of conflict, atrocity crimes or violent extremism, be context specific; developed in consultation with diverse local women; informed by local gender analysis and once developed, establish data baselines to monitor changes. They should also include the ongoing participation of women in their monitoring and development of appropriate responses.

An upcoming report by the APPAP Gender Working Group on gender-based atrocity crime prevention in the Asia Pacific, recommends the development of three-broad categories of gender-responsive indicators.²⁴ These build on recent projects seeking to identify and strengthen current approaches to integrating gender dimensions within early warning and response frameworks and take into consideration the proposed new and modified indicators listed above. They seek to group into three overarching categories, the manifestations of gender-based violations and gender inequalities which WPS researchers are recommending be monitored as part of early warning systems of atrocity crimes, conflict or violent extremism. The three proposed categories of gender-responsive indicators are:

1. Changing attitudes to gender equality and the enforcement of harmful gender stereotypes, norms and roles for women and men (including through sexist, homophobic and misogynist hate speech and propaganda)
2. Gender-based violence in all of its forms including intimate partner violence, violence perpetrated by state officials- such as during arrests and protests, and non-state actors, online and in-person violence, and against women in public roles such as women activists, journalists and politicians
3. Increased restrictions on women's freedoms and movement including attempts by state and non-state actors to limit women's rights, pressure women to leave the workforce or have more children, changes to land, movement, education, or sudden changes to limit women's economic independence;

It is hoped that these three umbrella categories can serve as global indicators which can be monitored across different geographical areas, while providing sufficient flexibility for the development of context-specific and relevant indicators at regional, national and subnational levels. While these three broad categories hopefully provide a useful framework by which to develop gender-responsive indicators, these still require additional testing and piloting. By themselves they do not yet address the challenge relating to the lack of available gendered subnational data, which, as outlined above, is a key obstacle to the integration of gender perspectives within early warning systems.

Next Steps

Despite the inconsistent and narrow approaches to date in how gender perspectives are integrated into early warning systems, the recent commitments and renewed recommendations indicate growing momentum to address this significant gap in prevention efforts. However, for these to be successful they need to ensure a broader scope of gender-responsive indicators to encompass more comprehensive monitoring of gender-rights violations and changing attitudes towards gender equality than what is currently included in early warning systems. Strengthening the consideration of gender dimensions in early warning and response frameworks should be a central tenet of the WPS prevention pillar prioritising the following key areas:

Ensuring the meaningful and safe participation of women and women's organisations, especially those from minority and marginalised community groups who may be most at risk of violence, atrocity crimes and violent extremism, in the development of context specific indicators and data collection strategies monitoring the three broad categories of gender-responsive indicators outlined above;

- Strengthening the gender capacity and expertise within existing early warning systems to ensure enhanced gender-responsive analysis;
- Developing and cataloguing methodologies for gender-responsive early warning responses alongside relevant local and national authorities;
- Improving the collection, granularity and monitoring of gender responsive data, particularly at the subnational level;
- Undertaking pilots across different geographical contexts alongside local women's organisations working on community-based prevention and peacebuilding efforts; and
- Increasing knowledge sharing and publicly available evidence on how gender responsive approaches enhance the overall capacity of early warning effort and developing a cross-regional community of practice on gender-responsive early warning systems.

1. Endnotes

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