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## Building Brazil's National Action Plan: lessons learned and opportunities

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*Brazil's process of drafting its first [National Action Plan](#) on Women, Peace and Security was marked by the political crisis that started during the government of its first female president, Dilma Rousseff, and culminated in her impeachment, followed by a progressively conservative move and, finally, the election of a rightist strongman candidate, Jair Bolsonaro. In the midst of this process, the building of*

*the NAP offers some important learned lessons and opportunities according to [Renata Giannini](#) and [Pérola Pereira](#), two of its main negotiators and writers.*

Analysis and studies based on practical experience in building NAPs such as the [UN Women Global Study on 1325](#) provide fundamental elements to elaborate high-impact NAPs, such as: an inclusive design process; an established coordination system for implementation; identified and allocated implementation resources; and a results-based monitoring and evaluation plan.

In Brazil's NAP process, it could be stated that none of these elements has been fully accomplished. Nor could the WPS agenda in Brazil be described as the focus of strong and sustained political will. In fact, leadership and interest of mid-level public servants at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), the Ministry of Defence (MoD) and other bodies have been fundamental to the process, but when it comes to the ministries and higher authorities, it could be said that Brazil has a NAP *in spite of* strong political will *against* the agenda.

Also, while the country has seen a dramatic ideological change in government towards conservatism during the past five years, opposers of gender equality and traditional sectors in Brazil have been trying to associate the WPS agenda and the NAP with either leftist or global-Marxist ideologies. However, thanks to MFA's leadership throughout the consensus-building phase, the perception that prevailed was that the plan was not associated with a specific leftist government, the agendas of neighbouring countries, or any ideological current or hidden interest. Rather, it was associated with the recommendations of the UN Security Council, with a consistent

international agenda and with an irreversible domestic process in which women are gaining more and more space and autonomy.

While a focus on the consensus was fundamental to enable Brazil to debut among the countries with a NAP and to keep being a part of it, strong content on pressing issues affecting Brazilian women is still necessary. Not only to be legitimate, but to address the burden of violence they are subjected to on a day to day basis and to recognise their role in building peace in a country highly affected by organised crime. In the meantime, as the country takes a conservative – often extremist – turn, all efforts to implement the current NAP should be highlighted and complemented, particularly in a political context that threatens the voices of women's rights activists and their very existence.

There is still room for the WPS agenda in the official speeches of high authorities, mainly when its mention comes with no political cost and can be capitalised upon internationally. But the agenda is far from being prioritised domestically, and the absence of domestic issues in the NAP, which is ultimately an outward-looking plan, has ultimately created a gap between its content and women's movements demands in Brazil. It does not respond to their needs.



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### **The Origins of Brazil's National Action Plan**

There were domestic and international conditions that enabled Brazil's National Action Plan to be drafted. Internationally, the normative advances of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda at the United Nations, and particularly in peacekeeping operations, were key to exercising pressure on Brazil's efforts to implement the

agenda.

Internationally, Brazil's diplomatic discourse has a longstanding tradition of reinforcing its role in the international peace and security architecture. As a result, with the development of a strong normative framework in regard to the WPS agenda, pressure towards its implementation also increased. If Brazil was to demonstrate its commitment to the UN system and values through international peacekeeping, it would also have to respond to the increasing demands to implement the WPS agenda.

When it comes to the domestic realm three main factors can be highlighted. First, there was an important push from key civil society organisations, partnering with government branches to bring light to the WPS agenda. Secondly, increasing advances towards gender equality in the defence, security and foreign service sectors were observed, including the possibility of women joining military branches that were up to then strictly forbidden to them. And finally, the personal leadership of mid-level professionals in key ministries increased the government's willingness to pursue a NAP, before the political crisis hit executive branch.

### **The drafting process**

Some innovative content and processes were included throughout the NAP drafting process, namely: active participation of civil society in the drafting of the NAP text; a gendered approach to Brazil's strategy to receive refugees; and the creation of an inter-ministerial working group. As a conservative tone gained traction in Brazilian politics – a major outcome from the 2018 presidential elections – the NAP's

duration was renewed for yet another four years in March 2019, despite the difficult context.

The country's political crisis that resulted in the impeachment of the then-President, Dilma Rousseff in August 2016 led to major changes throughout all ministries. Not only were leaderships substituted, but some ministries ceased to exist. In that context, there were significant setbacks regarding the human rights agenda in general, with little concern for gender representation in government.

It is true that those concrete changes in leadership, along with the conservative tone of the new government, affected the NAP. A direct consequence of these changes was the absence or very limited participation of representatives of these institutions, which severely affected the inclusion of themes related to domestic affairs, such as women in the police, or the impact of organised crime on women in Brazil, among others.

There are two main outcomes to be highlighted in the process. First, the creation of an official group within the MoD to evaluate the content of the plan, which contributed to fostering debates about the theme in a traditionally conservative sector. Topics related to gender equality and women, peace and security, previously largely unknown, were discussed in depth by the Defence sub-group throughout the drafting process.

The second was the launch of the NAP despite the significant change in the government, suggesting that Brazil's engagement with the agenda goes beyond the interest of governing parties. The formal leadership of the MFA, widely considered as a nationalist and non-

ideological governmental body, technically prepared and properly entitled to the task, was of paramount importance. While it has not always been possible to reach consensus on the goals, especially with regard to taboo themes such as sexual harassment legislation and women in the military, the discussions were unprecedented and planted seeds that may have an impact in the future.



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## The NAP's challenges: notable omissions and implications for domestic policy

A major characteristic of Brazil's NAP is that it is an outward-looking plan, and thus basically a foreign policy tool. While that was important in order to reach consensus among government representatives, the NAP did not respond to some of the most pressing needs in relation to the WPS agenda in the country. What is more, there are three fundamental issues that were purposely left out of the plan in order to achieve a consensus between defence and diplomatic sectors. These were:

- (1) civil society participation in the validation and implementation of the NAP;
- (2) a robust system of monitoring and evaluation, including key indicators to measure progress and an active working group to monitor implementation; and
- (3) strong content on key issues, including women's participation in the armed forces, harassment and sexual exploitation and abuse within military, police and foreign service institutions, trafficking of women, women's burden in violent urban contexts and the impact of armed violence (including small arms and ammunition) on women.

Although Brazil's NAP is outward-looking, there are pressing domestic issues that could be part of it. Brazil is currently among the most violent countries in the world. In fact, as mentioned above, it is [the](#)

first when it comes to absolute numbers of homicides. It is also one of the countries with the highest rates of femicides and the murder of women. Although very limited quality data is available on domestic and sexual violence, statistical estimates show that Brazilian women are taking the burden of the violence epidemic in the country, while the government lacks political will to implement effective policies on the matter. The violence problem in Brazil – as in other countries in the region – is not related to situations of formal wars, although it certainly has war-like effects on communities, particularly those where organised crime is settled and dictates the rules.

There was an expectation by civil society that, by the end of Brazil's NAP duration, an opportunity to include these issues would arise. However, a very conservative political wing is now in office. Not only is this opportunity lost, but also the advances accomplished so far are under jeopardy.

The extension of the plan's duration due March 2023 is, for that reason, a major accomplishment and an attempt to maintain the country's engagement with the WPS agenda, albeit only when it comes to its actions overseas.

*This blog is based on a Working Paper from the authors on Brazil's National Action Plan. You can read the paper in full [here](#).*

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## About the author



### Renata Avelar Giannini

Renata Avelar Giannini is a senior researcher at Igarapé Institute, and the coordinator of the Brazilian Women Peace and Security Network. She has carried out consultancies with the World Bank, United Nations Development Program and the Latin America Defense and security Network on issues ranging from border security, conflict related sexual violence and the gendered impact of infrastructure projects, among others. She is a gender specialist and has facilitated gender training to multiple defense, police and international organizations including the Brazilian Peacekeeping Training Center, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), the United Nations (UN) and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). In Brazil, she was a member of the working group tasked with the responsibility of drafting Brazil's National Action Plan (NAP) and consults with the government on the implementation of UN Security Council Res.1325. Her key areas of interest include public security, violence prevention and reduction strategies, violence against women and girls and the women, peace and security agenda.



Pérola de Abreu Pereira is an independent consultant and a member of the Women Waging Peace Network, currently working with the Igarapé Institute on a research about Brazilian women in UN peace operations. She was speechwriter and international advisor to the Brazilian Minister of Defence, from 2015 to 2018. She was also a leader of the interagency working group Bertha Lutz, responsible for drafting the first Brazilian National Action Plan (NAP) for the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda. As a researcher, Pereira focuses her work on WPS; UN peace operations; peacebuilding; and security in the South Atlantic. She holds a Bachelor (2010) and Master (2013) degree in International Relations, both from the University of Brasília.

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