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Strategies and Partnerships for Advancing the Women, Peace and Security Agenda between Mauritania and Italy

Strategies and Partnerships for Advancing the Women, Peace and Security Agenda between Mauritania and Italy

Implemented by UNICRI in collaboration with the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation

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1.
Project overview

This report constitutes the final output of the project **"Strategies and partnerships for advancing the Women, Peace and Security Agenda between Mauritania and Italy"** implemented between 2024 and 2025 by the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI), with the support of, and in collaboration with, the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation. The objective of the project was to foster synergies between Italy and Mauritania in the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda.

The Islamic Republic of Mauritania was selected as the primary focus of this project for three main reasons:

1. **UNICRI's experience in Mauritania**: UNICRI has established longstanding relationships with national stakeholders and developed extensive knowledge of the region through years of cooperation in peace and security, as well as research on preventing violent extremism, including the integration of a gender perspective.

2. **Italy's engagement with Mauritania**: Italy has built a strong partnership with Mauritania, as evidenced by increasing diplomatic cooperation with Mauritanian state actors, and presence on the ground.

3. **Shared commitment to the Women, Peace and Security Agenda**: Both Mauritania and Italy are actively committed to the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda. Each country has adopted a National Action Plan to implement United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, reflecting their dedication to peacebuilding, gender equality, and security.

The WPS Agenda provides a crucial framework for addressing the specific ways in which women and girls are affected by conflict and crises, including violent extremism, climate change, and other intersecting challenges. It promotes their meaningful participation in maintaining peace and security, conflict prevention, and post-conflict recovery efforts. The framework holds potential as a source of stability by strengthening women's roles in prevention, mediation and negotiation during periods of tensions.

This agenda intersects with the Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) one, with both being deeply interconnected in the Sahel context and in Mauritania, where, as of 2024, over 60% of the population is under the age of 25 (UNFPA, 2024), and women constitute slightly more than half of the population, making the coordinated and complementary implementation of both strategies essential for achieving sustainable peace and development.

Given Italy's commitment to both WPS and YPS, and its cooperation with Mauritania, particularly in the humanitarian, development, and peace nexus, these agendas provide concrete frameworks for strengthening bilateral collaboration.

PROJECT PHASES

This report presents the results of the project, which was implemented through a series of key phases, that led to the identification of entry points and recommendations to foster synergies between Italy and Mauritania in the implementation of the WPS Agenda:

1. **Desk review:** An analysis of the context, existing actors, bilateral relations, and existing commitments to the Women, Peace and Security Agenda.

2. **Mapping and Consultations**: Engagement with key national and regional stakeholders to identify ongoing initiatives, challenges, and opportunities for synergy.

3. **Final Event**: The concluding event took place on 20 May 2025 at the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, in Rome. It provided a platform for meaningful dialogue on the implementation of the respective National Action Plans on WPS and on key priority areas for future cooperation. The Mauritanian delegation included high-level representatives from key national and regional institutions, underscoring the significance of the initiative and the shared commitment of both countries to advancing the Agenda.

The report consolidates the main findings, lessons learned, and strategic recommendations that emerged from these phases.

2.

Context: The Sahel

The Sahel is a vast and diverse region, which has often been in the spotlight in the past years due to its precarious security situation, becoming the epicenter of terrorism, accounting for over half of all global terrorism deaths in 2024.[1] Despite localized improvements and some stable countries, such as Mauritania, the overall security situation remains fragile. The region has seen large changes in its conflict dynamics, with a sharp increase in terrorist activity and an expanded array of armed state and non-state actors: national armies, state aligned paramilitaries and self-defense groups, separatist rebels, violent extremist groups. This trend is not uniform however, some Sahelian states such as Mauritania, experience little-to-no terrorism.[2]

Many converging social, economic, political and security challenges undermine the development of the conditions necessary for stability. Weak governance, ethnic tensions, ecological degradation,[3] the effects of climate change and severe food crisis, have further exacerbated the humanitarian crisis. Human rights violations, including the restrictions to the freedoms of expression and of assembly, limited civic and political space, and the humanitarian situation remain concerning. On social, human, and economic development, the countries of the Sahel continue to rank at the bottom of the human development index. The region has the highest birth rate in the world, widespread forced marriages, and significant gender gaps. Women and girls are disproportionately affected by weak justice systems, gender-based violence, limited access to education, and low literacy rates.[4]

Despite these challenges, the Sahel is home to a vibrant civil society that works to promote social cohesion, stability, security, equality, and socio-economic development. This report highlights the efforts of several civil society organizations that are contributing to these goals.

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1   Global Terrorism Index 2025, Institute for Economics & Peace, March 2025. Available at: https://www.economicsand-peace.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Global-Terrorism-Index-2025.pdf.

2   Ibid.

3   Ibid.

4   NATO, The Sahel and the Gender Perspective, 2024, available at: https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2024/6/pdf/Deep-Dive-Sahel-and-Gender-Perspective.pdf

2.1 MAURITANIA

As previously noted, Mauritania presents a unique situation compared to its neighbouring countries in the Sahel. While it is not currently experiencing direct armed conflict, it is surrounded by regions marked by instability. Although violent extremist groups were active in the country, no terrorist attacks have been recorded since 2011.[5] In 2024, there were sporadic cross-border incursions from Mali into Mauritanian territory in the context of counter-terrorism operations. On 7 April 2024, a Malian anti-terrorist raid into Mauritanian territory wounded three Mauritanian civilians.[6]

Mauritania's security landscape cannot be considered in isolation from the broader regional context, particularly in relation to its borders. The frontier with Mali is among the most turbulent areas on the continent and spans over 2,236 kilometres. The total number of Malian refugees in Mauritania is estimated to be around 262,000 people according to recent data from 2024. This population includes more than 110,000 refugees living in Mbera camp, located in the Hodh Chargui region, as well as about 132,000 refugees in 70 host villages in the same region. In addition, about 20,000 Malian refugees and asylum-seekers are registered in urban areas such as Nouakchott and Nouadhibou.

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5 On 5 March 2023, four members of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb escaped from Central Prison in Nouakchott where they were detained, killing two members of the National Guards and injuring two others. A few days later, on 11 March, the government announced that three escaped terrorists have been killed and one was detained by security forces. From Preliminary Analysis, Mauritania: Terrorists Prison Attack and Jailbreak, ACSRT, (2023); and Mauritania Says Three Fugitives Killed After Prison Break, Reuters (2023). Available at https://caert.org.dz/incident-reports/Mauritania%20Terrorists%20Prison%20Attack%20and%20Jailbreak.pdf; and https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/mauritania-saysthree-fugitives-killed-after-prison-break-2023-03-12/

6 Distr.: General. 1 July 2024. Original: English. 24-10890 (E) 080724. *2410890*. Activities of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel.

In addition to the security concerns linked to violent extremism, armed conflict, and political instability in the region, Mauritania also faces internal challenges. These include poverty, inequality, migration, and the impacts of climate change. The country experiences various forms of conflicts:

◆ **Social conflicts,** rooted in inequality;

◆ **Professional conflicts,** arising from union demands, or hierarchical tensions;

◆ **Gender-based conflicts,** driven by discrimination against women, gender-based violence, and barriers to women's rights and participation.

Not all conflicts manifest in violence. Their intensity may vary, but their impact on social cohesion and stability remains significant. What is essential is the capacity to detect, understand, and address these conflicts, through inclusive, sustainable, and context-sensitive prevention mechanisms.[7]

In this context, Mauritania is committed to implementing the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda and has adopted a National Action Plan to implement United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325. While the NAP has been developed, it is not yet fully operational.[8] A national action plan on Youth, Peace, and Security is not in place yet, however, women and young people are regarded as essential agents of peace. These groups often find themselves at the heart of social tensions but are also best positioned to understand them. Their close ties to local communities allow them to convey messages of peace.

Institutional framework for gender equality

International Commitments

* The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)

* The Maputo Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa

* The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 5 on gender equality

* The National Action Plan for the implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325

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7 This section is inspired by Mme Elwen Salem's presentation during the event in Rome, 2025.

8 Consultation

National Commitments

* The 2012 Constitution guaranteeing equality (Articles 1 and 10)

* Law 2020-021 criminalizing female genital mutilation

* Law 2017-025 on combating gender-based violence

* The Personal Status Code, currently under revision to align with international commitments

* Ordinance No. 2006-029 of August 22, 2006 and the new organic law No. 2012-034 of April 11, 2012 on the promotion of women's access to electoral mandates and elective functions. This ordinance introduces a quota for the representation of women in municipal councils and parliamentary assemblies.

* **The National Strategy for the Institutionalization of Gender (SNIG 2015-2025)** was established to promote gender equality and the integration of gender mainstreaming into public policies and to promote women's empowerment. It aims to guarantee the full involvement of the different actors concerned, and promotes results-oriented actions to ensure the performance, efficiency and effectiveness of the planned activities. The Strategy is based on a national and international framework on sustainable development and the fight against discrimination against women and girls. It demands the systematic integration of gender equality in policies, laws and programmes, budgets, structures and institutional culture and the implementation of specific measures and positive actions intended for women to correct distortions that generate these gaps. The strategy resulted in the creation of several bodies and mechanisms: (i) **the Interministerial Committee for the Institutionalization of Gender,** chaired by the Prime Minister and composed of relevant Ministers, which is responsible for coordinating efforts and ensuring the integration of the gender approach into their policies and programmes; (ii) **the Gender Monitoring Group** that brings together all departmental gender focal points and sector-based gender units established in the various ministries (iii) **the gender sectoral cells** which are responsible for ensuring the integration of the gender equality in the design and implementation of sectoral policies. However, these mechanisms are not operational. Gender cells have not been set up in all ministries and those that exist are struggling to function.

* **The Strategy for Accelerated Growth and Shared Prosperity (SCAPP) 2016-2030** encourages the active participation of women and girls in all aspects of economic, social and political life, particularly in sectors where they are underrepresented. As part of the SCAPP action plan, the government has selected conflict prevention and management as a priority for intervention. According to the National Human Rights Commission, the SCAPP plays a crucial role in implementing the National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security. It contributes to this objective through:

- ▶ Promoting gender equity and equality: The SCAPP encourages the integration of women into various economic and political sectors, thereby strengthening their ability to participate in decisions related to peace and security.

- ▶ Training and education: By focusing on the education and training of women and girls, the SCAPP helps equip them to play a meaningful role in conflict management and violence prevention.

- ▶ Capacity Building: It includes initiatives to strengthen the capacities of women's organizations and community groups, enabling them to actively engage in peace dialogues and policy implementation.

- ▶ Support for Local Initiatives: SCAPP promotes support for local projects that foster women's participation in conflict-affected contexts, contributing to resilience and sustainable peace.

- ▶ Intersectoral Collaboration: By fostering collaboration between different stakeholders, including government departments, NGOs, and international organizations, SCAPP contributes to a coherent and integrated approach to implementing Resolution 1325 on WPS.

* **The National Observatory on the Rights of Women and Girls (ONDFF),** established by decree 2020/140 in November 2020, is a consultative body for the prevention and protection of the rights of women and girls. Its missions consist of monitoring, evaluating and formulating proposals aimed at promoting the rights of women and girls in public policies in Mauritania.

* **The National Strategy to Combat Violence against Women and Girls,** developed for the first time in 2019 and adopted in 2020, this strategy aims to promote a holistic and multisectoral approach in the fight against Gender-Based Violence (GBV), by strengthening prevention and care strategies.

* **The Regional Mechanism for the Protection of Women and Girls,** adopted in January 2022, is a mechanism whose mission is to identify the different forms of violence against women and girls and the care of victims.

* **The Programme « Mon ambition pour la Patrie » of the President of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania,** which reflects the President's vision to promote economic and social development that is equitable and more inclusive and promotes the empowerment of women for active participation in development.

* The creation of the **TAAZOUR Agency,** a mechanism for solidarity and the fight against exclusion.

3.

Italy's engagement in the Sahel and Mauritania

The Sahel region represents a strategically significant crossroads for Italy, with strong interests in enhancing security, combating illicit trafficking (human beings, drugs, weapons), and supporting political stabilization. Italy follows a common approach in the Sahel states, focusing on investment in human capital, youth empowerment, collaboration with security forces, and coordination within multilateral frameworks. In the region, Italy collaborates with the African Union, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and acts as part of multilateral fora such as the G7 and in collaboration with the EU.

In recent years, Italy has progressively strengthened its institutional presence by opening new embassies in Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, Guinea, and, more recently, Mauritania. This process demonstrates Italy's growing attention to the region, despite the numerous coups that have occurred since 2020. Italy has acknowledged the political changes and challenges,

adapting its diplomatic relations accordingly. Its strategy prioritizes engagement with de facto authorities while maintaining an active presence in the area through development cooperation projects, capacity-building initiatives, and training programmes aimed at enhancing governance and supporting the most vulnerable segments of the population. These strategic partnerships focus on security, development, humanitarian aid, and investments aimed at improving the economic and social conditions of the countries. The goal is to address the root causes of instability, counter regional threats, reduce trafficking and strengthen local security and intelligence capabilities in the fight against terrorism.

Mauritania is considered a stronghold against instability due to its solid constitutional and democratic framework. In 2024, the country assumed the presidency of the African Union, further strengthening its strategic role. Italy has included Mauritania among the partner countries of the Mattei Plan, the flagship initiative of the Italian government to reset relations with the African continent, leveraging its development and cooperation opportunities with potential synergies through the Global Gateway, the EU-Africa Investment Package, and the G7 Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment. Collaboration in the security sector remains crucial, as Mauritania is a NATO partner. Thanks to its political stability, Mauritania is a partner for investment opportunities not only in governance and capacity building but also in strategic sectors such as renewable energy, hydrogen, and agriculture.

Through three regional offices (Dakar, Niamey, and Ouagadougou), the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (AICS) is active in several Sahel countries, namely Mali, Gambia, Senegal, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea-Conakry, Mauritania, Niger, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, and Chad. In 2024, Mauritania was included among the priority countries for Italian development cooperation. The territorial competence for Mauritania lies with AICS's office in Dakar.

3.1 ITALY'S WORK ON WOMEN, PEACE, AND SECURITY (WPS) IN MAURITANIA AND IN THE REGION

"It is up to all stakeholders: public authorities, civil society, citizens and technical partners such as Italy, to maintain and amplify this momentum in order to guarantee Mauritanian women and girls a dignified, free and secure future."

(Rassoul EL KHAL, Deputy Commissioner for Human Rights, Humanitarian Action and Relations with Civil Society)

Italy's interventions on gender equality and Women, Peace, and Security in the region, are mostly carried out within the framework of Italian development cooperation in the Sahel.

In 2025, a call for proposals was launched by AICS to fund humanitarian aid projects for civil society organisations, in the Hodh Ech Chargui region, located in the border areas with Mali. The call listed three areas of intervention, including protection, which invited CSOs to present actions to strengthen the protection of refugees, returnees, and host communities from a

social cohesion perspective. These actions aim to support local reception and assistance capacities, in particular for women, and to promote the participation of women and social leaders in conflict prevention and management. These projects are fully in line with the humanitarian-development-peace nexus approach, integrating the immediate response to humanitarian needs with sustainable development interventions and peacebuilding actions. The prospective projects also aim to promote women's empowerment, their access to basic services and resources, and their leadership, to contribute to social cohesion within the communities concerned.

This initiative builds on Italy's experience in other countries such as Senegal and Mali, where, in collaboration with UN Women and local actors, it implements a project on the border area between the two countries aimed at strengthening the resilience, protection and participation of women and girls, to consolidate peace and eliminate gender-based violence. Italy's development cooperation approach to gender equality and WPS focuses on both protection and the valorisation of women's roles, providing access to training on conflict resolution and mediation to enhance women's contributions to social cohesion. This dual approach, which goes beyond identifying women solely as victims and survivors, creates opportunities to elevate their roles in society. It is proving to be an effective and sustainable strategy, doing justice to the multiple roles played by women.

Other key partners in the region, besides UN Women, include UNFPA, specifically on projects related to the protection of women, access to basic services, and addressing gender-based violence and sexual violence, as well as the OHCHR, with a view to supporting and strengthening, de jure and de facto, the protection of child victims of human rights violations in the Sahel sub-region.

4.

Mapping and consultations

The mapping provides the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation with strategic support to strengthen its support in the area of Women, Peace, and Security, particularly in sectors relevant to Italy's work in the region. It offers a comprehensive, though not exhaustive, list of key institutions engaged in WPS, alongside examples of good practices that are currently implemented and operational.

To inform the mapping, stakeholder consultations were conducted, through key informant interviews and questionnaires. The consultations included:

◆ Representatives from the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation and of the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation;

◆ Representatives from national institutions of Mauritania: the Commissariat for Human Rights, Humanitarian Action, and Relations with Civil Society, the Ministry of Youth Empowerment, Employment, Sports and Civic Service, and the National branch for the fight against radicalization and violent extremism of the G5 Sahel (Cellrad);

◆ The United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS);

◆ The European Delegation to Mauritania;

◆ The Plateforme des Femmes du Sahel;

◆ Seventeen completed questionnaires received from Mauritanian Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs).

The complete list of actors consulted is provided in Annex I.

5.

State and non-State actors in Mauritania

As outlined, the region presents a series of complexities that have prompted multi-stakeholders' efforts. In Mauritania, several actors are actively engaged in implementing the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda to boost stability and peace. These include the Government of Mauritania, through its Ministries, agencies and institutional mechanisms, regional and international organizations, and civil society organizations.[9]

5.1 STATE ACTORS

At the national level, the Ministry of Social Affairs, Children, and the Family (MASEF) plays the central role in promoting women's rights and the Women, Peace and Security agenda. MASEF collaborates with other key Ministries, including the Ministry of Economy and Finance, the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of Interior and Decentralization, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, the Ministry of Islamic Affairs and Original Education, the Ministry of National Education, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Employment, and the Ministry of Justice. Relevant ministries are part of the Committee in charge of the implementation of the National Action Plan for the implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security.

During the consultations, some civil society organizations highlighted the role of the Parliament and legislative committees in promoting women's rights and advancing the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda. In particular, the parliamentary committee on gender, defence, and international relations.

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9   This report does not cover bilateral work carried out by states through their embassies and institutes.

Ministry of Social Affairs, Children, and the Family: some key departments for cooperation and partnerships

The Department for the Promotion of Family, Women's Rights, and Gender is responsible for:

* Contributing to the implementation of the provisions of national and international legal texts relating to family and women's rights.

* Defining and implementing measures to facilitate the integration of a gender perspective into development policies and programmes.

* Engaging women in decision-making spheres.

* Coordinating, implementing, and monitoring the resolutions and recommendations of national and international conferences relating to women.

* Contributing to the preparation of reports on the follow-up to national and international conventions and conferences relating to women's rights and gender equality.

The Cooperation Department is responsible for:

* Establishing relationships with various international and bilateral cooperation agencies, with a view to obtaining funding for projects in the Ministry's areas of action.

* Identifying and designing development projects funded by international cooperation agencies.

* Contributing to the identification of development projects for the Ministry's target groups and carried out by other technical departments.

The Department of Studies, Cooperation and Monitoring is responsible for:

* Establishing collaborative relationships with all multilateral and bilateral international cooperation agencies to mobilize funding.

Collaborations among the Ministry of Social Affairs, Children, and the Family, civil society organizations, and international partners are in place to support the implementation of the WPS Agenda. In early 2025, the Association Mauritanienne pour la Santé de la Mère et de l'Enfant (AMSME) organized a workshop to develop a national advocacy plan on WPS. This initiative was part of the project "Strengthening the Capacity of Women's Organizations and Creating a Strong Women's Movement for Peace in the Sahel," led by MASEF and funded by UN Women and the Government of the Netherlands. The workshop convened women leaders, human rights defenders, and experts in gender, peace, and security, to identify concrete actions aligned with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325.[10]

The Ministry of Youth Empowerment is a crucial actor and promotes youth civic engagement through structured programmes. It developed the National Youth Strategy 2024-2030, which aims to strengthen youth participation in socioeconomic development and peace-building. It recognized the role of the youth and young women in community initiatives, such as peace clubs, local mediation, and anti-extremism awareness programmes.

National human rights institutions also play a key role in monitoring compliance with human rights, gender, and security commitments. The National Human Rights Commission acts as a mediator and ensures respect for human rights. It organizes awareness-raising workshops on human rights and conducts campaigns to promote peace and social justice. **The Commissariat for Human Rights, Humanitarian Action, and Relations with Civil Society (CDHAHRSC),** which was consulted to inform this report, coordinates the implementation of the **National Strategy for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights (2024–2028).** A key strategic objective of this strategy focuses on the promotion of women's rights. The Commission is also partially involved in the implementation of the National Action Plan on WPS. In recent years, it has participated in awareness-raising workshops on the NAP, in collaboration with the United Nations System Coordination, and contributed to the **Open Day on Gender, Women, Youth, Peace, and Security,** organized by the Ministry of Social Affairs, Children, and the Family.

The Cellule Nationale de Lutte Contre l'Extrémisme Violent (CELLRAD) coordinates national efforts to prevent and counter violent extremism. As part of its mandate, CELLRAD is responsible for promoting alternative narratives to extremist ideologies. In collaboration with UNODC, it leads the ***Mourchidates*** initiative, a network of women religious leaders. This project aims to train these leaders to play a pivotal role in preventing violent extremism through community dialogue and awareness-raising activities.

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10 Association Mauritanienne pour la Santé de la Mère et de l'Enfant (AMSME), Atelier national de plaidoyer pour les droits des femmes, la paix et la sécurité, Facebook video, 2025, available at: https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=3911228389192372

National actors have undertaken several efforts to integrate a gender perspective into security policies and strengthen the role of women in building a peaceful society. Consultations indicate that these initiatives span the following key areas:

I. Prevention (Training, awareness-raising on human rights, security, mediation and prevention of violent extremism)

◆ Capacity-building programmes have been developed to educate women and youth on their rights, conflict resolution, and mediation, enhancing their ability capacity to engage in peace initiatives.

◆ Public awareness campaigns led by government institutions (Ministry of Justice, MASEF, CDHAHRSC), along with religious leaders, NGOs, and networks such as the Mourchidates, to prevent conflict and violent extremism.

◆ Specialized training for magistrates and security forces on gender-sensitive approaches to enhance their responsiveness to gender-related issues in security contexts.

II. Participation:

◆ Establishment of safe and inclusive dialogue spaces and platforms for women to engage in discussions on peace and security issues, fostering their active participation in identifying and implementing solutions to local conflicts.

◆ Adoption of legislative measures to encourage and enhance the representation and participation of women in political and decision-making processes, including the implementation of gender quotas on electoral lists.

III. Protection:

◆ Strengthening mechanisms to assist women survivors of gender-based violence, particularly in crisis-affected areas. These include, among others, access to healthcare services, legal assistance, and shelters.

IV. Economic and social empowerment:

◆ Establish support funds targeted to women, with a specific focus on rural women, aiming to enhance their economic independence and improve access to healthcare and education.

◆ Strengthening partnerships with NGOs to implement community-based projects that promote women's empowerment.

Mauritania benefits from several initiatives supported by international partners aimed at preventing conflict and strengthening social cohesion, including:

* **SEMAH Project**: Launched in 2021 with support from the European Union, the SEMAH project focuses on preventing violent extremism, defusing community-level conflicts, and promoting intercultural dialogue. A particular emphasis is placed on the inclusion of youth and women in peacebuilding efforts through targeted training and engagement in intercultural exchange platforms.

* **MDG-F Program**: This joint United Nations programme seeks to address conflict and intercommunity tensions by promoting national unity and the rule of law. It enhances social cohesion through participatory local development processes and the improvement of basic public services.

* **Initiatives by GIZ, UNDP, and IOM**: These organizations support projects aimed at strengthening community resilience, enhancing local governance, and improving access to essential services.

5.2 CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS

Many civil society organizations (CSOs) in Mauritania contribute to the implementation of the WPS agenda. CSOs, especially those critical for the implementation of WPS-related initiatives, comprise:

* Women's groups and women's rights associations at both local and national levels.

* Youth associations.

* Women's networks and coalitions advocating for gender equality and women's participation in peace and security processes.

They work closely with national stakeholders as well as with a diverse set of actors across civil society, including:

* Religious leaders (Ulema) and media organizations.

* Women themselves, particularly those in rural areas.

* Community leaders and local authorities.

Civil society organizations play a critical role in advancing the well-being of women and girls, promoting their participation, and contributing to the prevention of and resilience to social tensions and conflicts.

CSOs intervene in two primary ways: **directly,** through projects and initiatives explicitly aligned with the objectives of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda; and **indirectly,** by implementing programmes that focus on the empowerment of women and youth, and the improvement of their socioeconomic conditions, contributing to broader peacebuilding and development goals.

1. Direct projects on Women, Peace, and Security, including preventing violent extremism.

   ▸ Awareness-raising and training on international conventions and UN Security Council Resolution 1325.

   ▸ Promoting women's involvement in prevention, negotiation, mediation, and conflict resolution.

   ▸ Strengthening the capacity of civil society, particularly women's organizations and networks of women mediators.

   ▸ Conducting gender-sensitive political and conflict analysis to ensure meaningful participation of women in peacebuilding efforts and on women's engagement in social peacebuilding, negotiation, and combating violent extremism, leading to a comprehensive mapping of community organizations working in these areas.

   ▸ Raising awareness, particularly in rural areas, about women's participation and representation in local governance (municipalities and regions) and their role in preventing violent extremism.

   ▸ Conducting awareness campaigns targeting young girls (high school and university students), women, and teachers on extremism. Some focus on preventing violent extremism and social peacebuilding by training young people and creating spaces for dialogue between different social and ethnic groups. Women play a major role in leading these dialogues, particularly those related to social peace and women's rights.

2. Indirect projects through socio-economic empowerment, aimed at strengthening economic independence, enhancing social resilience, and encouraging the active participation of women and youth in local development, particularly in vulnerable areas.

   ▸ Several projects implemented with women and the youth focus on economic empowerment, socio-professional integration, access to education and training, and income-generating activities. Some initiatives specifically target young people and girls who dropped out of school, incorporating awareness sessions on the challenges of school dropout.

Others focus on environmental, health, and waste management issues and promote women's economic autonomy, training on managing small enterprises, and creation of economic interest groups.

▸ Several initiatives and campaigns against GBV and harmful practices, including early marriage, and female genital mutilation. These include the establishment of consultation centres for women victims of violence, which provide daily assistance, medical consultations, and psychological support from public health specialists, psychologists, and gynaecologists.

▸ Community awareness campaigns to promote positive youth development, support formal and non-formal youth education with a gender perspective, and encourage youth engagement in fostering a culture of peace, economic resilience, and social stability.

Specific initiatives:

Peace Clubs and Women's Dialogue Spaces
Creation of peace clubs composed of women from women's cooperatives. These platforms serve as spaces for dialogue, allowing women from targeted areas to engage in consultation and negotiation for conflict resolution.

Femmes Leadership Action
This initiative unites young girls and women from diverse socio-professional backgrounds to promote female entrepreneurship, women's rights, and the fight against gender-based violence. It focuses on the development of income-generating activities, advocacy, communication, and personal development. Other initiatives focus on ensuring that decision-makers integrate gender perspectives into policy design.

Citizen Journalism Initiative
This initiative trains young girls and women in citizen journalism, equipping them with skills to advocate for women's rights and combat violent extremism and radicalization by producing media content, including video clips in local languages.

Border management and refugee camp
Several programmes are implemented in the Hodh El Chargui region, and more specifically in the refugee camp of Mberra, to promote social cohesion, resilience, and PVE. Key activities include:

* Youth engagement initiatives promoting a culture of peace and peaceful coexistence.

* Strengthening community mechanisms to address gender-based violence through training and awareness-raising.

* Supporting the socio-economic integration of children and youth through formal and non-formal education, vocational training, and income-generating activities.

* Establishment of a network of peace mediators in the border regions.

5.3 INTERNATIONAL AND REGIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)

ECOWAS was established in 1975 by fifteen West African countries through the signing of the Treaty of Lagos, with the aim of promoting economic cooperation and integration among its Member States. Its mandate was expanded in the Revised Treaty of 1993 to also encompass the maintenance of peace, security, and stability in the region. Over the years, ECOWAS has developed legal frameworks that recognize the importance of safeguarding the role of women in governance, electoral processes, conflict prevention and resolution, and peacebuilding. These frameworks include the Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance (2001), the ECOWAS Gender Policy (2005), the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework (2008) and the Gender and Elections Strategic Framework (2016). In 2010 ECOWAS has adopted the Regional Action Plan for the implementation of UNSC Resolutions 1325 and 1820. It has a Women, Peace and Security Advisory committee to advance monitoring and reporting on the agenda.

ECOWAS also established the Gender Development Centre, to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women in West Africa. The Centre plays a key role in implementing ECOWAS's gender policies, particularly those related to the WPS, and it is among the founding members of the Working Group on Women, Youth, Peace, and Security in West Africa and the Sahel. ECOWAS also launched the **regional chapter of West African Network of Women in Conflict Prevention and Mediation,** part of the continental FemWise-Africa.[11] It provides a platform for strategic advocacy, capacity building, and networking with a view to implementing the commitments for women's inclusion in conflict prevention and peace-making process in the region.

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11 FemWise-Africa aims to strengthen the role of women in conflict prevention and mediation efforts in the context of the African Peace and Security Architecture. In August 2023 the AU Panel of the Wise adopted a decentralisation framework for FemWise-Africa, paving the way for the creation of regional and national chapters.

The Gender Dimension of the Lomé Declaration

The Joint Workshop led by ECOWAS, ECCAS (Economic Community of Central African States) and RESPFECO (Peace and Security Network for Women in the ECOWAS Region) to frame the implementation of the Gender Dimension of the Lomé Declaration on Peace and Security Stability, and the Fight Against Terrorism and Violent Extremism, adopted by the African Union (AU) in 2016.[12]

Mission of the African Union High Representative for Mali and the Sahel (MISAHEL)

MISAHEL, established in 2013, serves as the African Union's mechanism for addressing peace, security, and governance challenges in Mali and the broader Sahel region. Through coordination with regional and international partners, its mandate is centred around key areas, including:

◆ Political engagement and mediation among national stakeholders and regional actors to resolve political crises and support inclusive governance structures. **Peace and security initiatives** include supporting the implementation of peace agreements, enhancing the capacities of security institutions, and promoting coordination among regional security frameworks.

◆ **Institutional support** for the development of robust governance systems.

◆ Advocating for the protection of human rights, with a particular emphasis on the inclusion of women, youth, and marginalized groups in peacebuilding and decision-making processes.

MISAHEL works on the Women, Peace and Security agenda to address challenges faced by women in conflict-affected regions in Mali and the Sahel, and it advances the implementation of the African Union's Gender, Peace and Security Programme.

The United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS)

The United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel has been the main UN entity consulted as part of this project, due to its mandate in the region and its active role in advancing the WPS Agenda. Established in 2002, UNOWAS has the responsibility for preventive diplomacy, political mediation and facilitation efforts across West Africa and the Sahel. It works to prevent conflict, election- and transition-related tensions, sustain peace, and consolidate peacebuilding efforts and political stability. UNOWAS works closely with regional and subregional entities, including the African Union, the Economic Community of West African States, the former Group of Five for the Sahel, the Mano River Union, the Lake Chad Basin Commission, the Accra Initiative, the Gulf of Guinea Commission as well as other regional partners to

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12 African Union, Women, Peace and Security Agenda in Africa: Report on the Implementation 2020, https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/42544-doc-WPS_AGENDA_IN_AFRICA_REPORT_2020_ENGLISH_VERSION.pdf

support regional solutions to shared threats to peace and security. While this report will not examine each of them, it is important to recognize that they form a key part of the broader regional engagement landscape.

The Women, Peace, and Security Agenda is a key area of focus for UNOWAS. Together with UN Women, it hosts the secretariat of the Women, Youth, Peace and Security Working Group in West Africa and the Sahel (WGWPS-WAS). The group is a multi-stakeholder platform, established in 2009 to facilitate the implementation of UNSCR 1325. With the adoption of Security Council Resolution 2250 (2015), the Working Group's mandate was extended to include the Youth, Peace and Security agenda.[13] From 16 to 18 October 2024, UNOWAS hosted the 15th annual meeting of the Working Group in Freetown, where participants discussed challenges and validated national and regional workplans for 2025. On International Day of Rural Women and the regional open day celebrated in Freetown, the Special Representative consulted with women and youth leaders from West Africa and the Sahel to share best practices and lessons learned in view of the twenty-fifth anniversary of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000).[14] UNOWAS also reported that women members of the Parliament of Mauritania are actively participating in the Working Group. Other activities implemented by UNOWAS include promoting gender mainstreaming in the context of regional peacebuilding and holding capacity-building workshops for women leaders and representatives of women's networks from across the region.

UNOWAS addresses all pillars of the WPS Agenda, while also recognizing the importance of emerging issues such as climate change and its interconnection with the agenda. Challenges identified by UNOWAS in the implementation of the WPS agenda in Mauritania include lack of funding, deep-rooted patriarchal norms, and limited women's participation in decision-making processes.

UN Integrated Strategy for the Sahel (UNISS)
In 2013, the UN Integrated Strategy for the Sahel was created to tackle the crisis in the Sahel. UNISS supports UN and African Union goals for the region[15] through operationalization of the UN Support Plan (UNSP) 2018-2030, which fosters coherence and coordination among UN entities in the region. The Support Plan is built around six priority areas, the 6hth being "Empowering women and youth for peace and development in the Sahel".

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13 United Nations Security Council, Resolution 2250 (2015), on Youth, Peace and Security, **S/RES/2250 (9 December 2015)**, https://undocs.org/S/RES/2250(2015).

14 United Nations, Activities of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel: Report of the Secretary-General, **S/2024/871 (2024)**, https://undocs.org/S/2024/871

15 The Support Plan targets 10 countries namely Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal and The Gambia.

A UN integrated approach: Voices from the Sahel

The report *Voices from the Sahel: Conversations, Visions and Solutions* captures the voices of the youth from the Sahel, shared during consultations and dialogue organized by the UN system with women and youth over a four-week period in 2021. The consultation provided a platform for young women and men in the Sahel to engage in the UN's decision-making and implementation processes. The report aims to guide the work of the UN system in the region. Building on the success of the first edition, a **second edition was launched in 2024** and concluded in October 2024 and it gathered experiences, insights, and reflections on the ideal vision and future of the Sahel, as well as sustainable solutions to the current development challenges. The report and the initiative are co-created by the entire UN-system in the Sahel. The second edition focused on amplifying the voices of youth, shifting more attention to young women. It aimed to better understand their needs, ensure their voices are heard, and identify key areas where the UN in the Sahel can provide more effective and transformative support for a peaceful, stable region. The consultations focused on four key thematic areas:

1. Leveraging Digital Technology for Development;

2. Promoting Education for Women;

3. Entrepreneurial solutions for social and economic challenges;

4. Enhancing women's political participation.

The discussions were moderated and guided by several UN agencies, reflecting an "integrated approach": UNOWAS, ECA, UNESCO, UN Women, UNDP, IFAD, UNFPA, UNHCR, and UNICEF.

The final report of the 2024 consultation is yet to be published. The 2021 version is available at UNISS SparkBlue Report (2021). In August 2024, UNDP launched the #IAMSahel campaign, to amplify young people's voices.

Delegation of the European Union to Mauritania

The Delegation of the EU to Mauritania was created in 1973 and its work is guided by four lines of action:

- Represent the European Union by promoting and defending its values and interests.

- Support the stability, security, and sustainable and inclusive development of Mauritania in order to contribute to the improvement of the living conditions of its population.

- Promote political, economic, and cultural relations between the EU and Mauritania.

- Ensure coherence and effectiveness of EU external action in coordination with Member States.

To achieve its objectives, the Delegation works in close partnership with the government, national and local authorities, civil society, and other stakeholders. It maintains regular political dialogue and economic diplomacy activities by supporting structural reforms of public policies to improve governance, services, and the business climate to reduce vulnerability and promote the creation of decent and sustainable jobs. The key priority areas of the work of the Delegation in Mauritania are:

- Security, Development, Migration.

- Private investments through the Global Gateway.

- Green Hydrogen, Blue and Green Economy, Climate Change.

- Health, Education, Infrastructure, Rural Development.

- Human Development, Human Rights, Democracy, Good Governance.

Gender equality and the implementation of the EU Gender Action Plan III[16] are cross-cutting priorities. In this area, the Delegation focuses on promoting women's autonomy and entrepreneurship, as well as combating violence against women and girls. Although the Delegation does not implement specific actions on women, peace, and security, in 2023 it participated in the evaluation of the state of implementation of UNSCR 1325. The main recommendations emphasized the need to boost the implementation of the WPS Agenda, and view Resolution 1325 as a response to the real and ongoing crises faced by women in situations of armed conflict. The evaluation also highlighted the importance of maintaining and consolidating peace by addressing the long-term impacts of armed violence on women and children.

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16 EU Gender Action Plan III: An Ambitious Agenda for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in EU External Action 2021–2025.

Examples of successful initiatives implemented by the EU Delegation

* The Combating Gender-Based Violence: "Alach cà?" campaign programme ("Why that?", in Hassanya) was implemented between 2018 and 2024. It involved several Mauritanian ministries (Education, Health, Family, Youth and Sports, Islamic Affairs) and it highlighted the harmful practices and consequences of violence as well as led to the establishment of Specialized Units for the Care of Women Victims of Violence. The Alach communication campaign contributed to capacity building for governmental and non-governmental institutions. Appropriate responses to gender issues received increased attention and communication, in accordance with the African Union's Agenda 2063 and ECOWAS's Vision 2020.

* The "Promotion of Entrepreneurship and Empowerment of Women in the Trarza and Guidimakha Regions" was implemented between 2022 and 2024. Its objective was to contribute to the socio-economic strengthening of women and young people (24 women's micro-enterprises strengthened and increased the skills of nearly 3,000 beneficiaries). The project enabled the development of new initial and solidarity financial systems. In addition, community leaders, local authorities, and representatives of state institutions such as MASEF and delegations in charge of agriculture, youth, and livestock, received training on the National Gender Institutionalization Strategy.

* Support the Forum of the National Observatory for the Rights of Women and Girls, in March 2025, on "Female Skills for the Promotion of Women's Rights"; Reflection Meeting organised by the Ministry of Social, Economic and Family Affairs (MASEF) on violence against women and girls.

* In 2023, contribution to the design by the "G5 Sahel Gender Platform" of the Plan of Actions for the further implementation of UN Resolution 1325.

* Establishment of the 2025 "Groupe de Réflexion des Points Focaux Genre des Partenaires Techniques et Financiers". The benefit is a better exchange, dialogue, complementarity and benefit of our actions.

* An active member of the "Fonds Mondial pour l'Engagement de Communauté et la Resilience (GCERF)" since 2022 which works to areas including gender dimension.

The International Coalition for the Sahel

The International Coalition for the Sahel is a regional mission comprising France, Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger. In 2025, the International Coalition for the Sahel continues to operate, remaining an active platform for regional and international cooperation. On 13 February 2025, the Coalition convened its 12th Contact Group of Senior Officials meeting in Brussels, gathering representatives from 42 partner states and organizations, with 13 African countries participating.[17] In 2022 it has adopted the **Roadmap of the Coalition for the Sahel**[18] that recognizes regional and international cooperation as crucial to address the root causes of instability in the region. The Coalition has committed to implementing the roadmap with a focus on the promotion of inclusive and open societies; the protection of civilian populations; compliance with international humanitarian law and human rights; as well as enhanced cooperation to address regional and cross-border issues. The **Roadmap** incorporates the **WPS agenda** in several key areas across its pillars, emphasizing the importance of women's participation and gender equality throughout the region's stabilization and development efforts. Key references to the WPS agenda include:

- ◆ **Pillar 1 - Capacity building of national defence and security forces:**

  - ▸ Strengthening the operational capacities of defence and internal security forces while ensuring meaningful participation of women in governance reforms and human resource management, as well as enhancing financial transparency and trust between the population and security forces.

  - ▸ Encouraging civil society engagement, especially with women, youth, and vulnerable communities, for civil-military coordination with humanitarian actors, ensuring that their voices are considered in security and defence forces operations.

- ◆ **Pillar 2 - Deployment of the state, administrations, and basic services in a context of stabilization:**

  - ▸ Investing in conflict prevention, peacebuilding, and social cohesion initiatives at the community level, with the meaningful participation of women, youth, and local communities in mediation and inter-community dialogue.

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17 Coalition for the Sahel, *12th Meeting of the Coalition for the Sahel's Contact Group*, 13 February 2025, https://www.coalition-sahel.org/en/12th-meeting-of-the-coalition-for-the-sahels-contact-group/.

18 Coalition for the Sahel, Roadmap of the Coalition for the Sahel, July 2022, https://www.coalition-sahel.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/EN-11.07.2022-Sahel-Coalition-Roadmap-5.pdf.

▸ Strengthening judicial systems to be more inclusive and responsive, addressing the needs of all, particularly women and girls, and supporting joint investigation teams to ensure justice for human rights violations.

▸ Tackling impunity, with specific attention to gender-based violence, ensuring access to justice and the protection of victims.

◆ **Pillar 3 - Development Actions:**

▸ Increase efforts in favour of gender equality and the defence of women's rights in the G5 Sahel countries, notably through the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security agenda.

▸ Intensify support for greater socio-economic inclusion and increased participation of women and youth in political life. Allocate more resources to education, vocational training, employment, and social protection for women and young people and adapt interventions in these sectors in crisis areas.

▸ Supporting the mobilization and development of the Sahelian private sector, with a special focus on women and youth, agricultural value chains, business climate, access to finance, risk sharing, capacity building and innovation.

▸ Political and Crosscutting Priorities: Supporting national dialogue, mediation, and conflict resolution initiatives, with a view to demobilizing and reintegrating members of non-State armed groups, including local self-defence groups and militias. These efforts must be in line with the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security agenda.

▸ Civil Society, Human Rights, and Humanitarian Action: Strengthening the protection of vulnerable populations, reducing discrimination based on gender, age, or disability, and increasing their participation in public life.

Alliance Sahel

Alliance Sahel, created in 2017, is a platform for coordinating development cooperation in the Sahel, bringing together the actions of 27 international partners.[19] The coordination is facilitated by regular dialogue on strategic, sectoral, and thematic issues, fostering a common understanding of the issues and challenges affecting the region, sharing experience, best

19 Germany, the World Bank, the African Development Bank, the European Investment Bank, the West African Development Bank, Canada, Denmark, Spain, the United States, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, the United Nations, Norway, the United Kingdom, Sweden, and the European Union have joined the initiative as full members. The Sahel Alliance also has nine observer members: Japan, Belgium, Switzerland, Finland, the International Finance Corporation, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, Ireland and the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie.

practices, and analytical tools, and defining joint public policy messages. The Sahel Alliance is financing and coordinating over 1,000 projects with Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger to address current challenges, social, demographic, economic, and environment among others. The Alliance has adopted the **Alliance Sahel's Gender Road Map** in 2019 and in 2020 a **Declaration on the implementation of UN Resolution 1325** in the Sahel.[20]

5.4 OTHER INTERNATIONAL STAKEHOLDERS

(As identified by civil society organizations and national representatives)

Civil society organizations and institutional stakeholders collaborate with a wide range of actors, including international organizations, regional institutions, development partners, and local organizations. Key international partnerships and collaborations include:

*   **United Nations Agencies** including UN Women, UNDP, UNICRI, UNODC, UNICEF, the UN Peacebuilding Fund, WFP, IOM, UNHCR, and UNFPA.

*   **African Union Commission and Mission.**

*   **Embassies and Development Agencies** (those mentioned were France, the Netherlands, the United States, Canada, and the Principality of Monaco).

*   **The European Union.**

*   **International NGOs and organizations** including the Global Women's Fund, Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie, Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund, World Vision, INTERSOS, CCFD-Terre Solidaire, GRDR Migration-Citoyenneté-Développement, GOREE Institute, Samim (a regional initiative supporting civil society in Nouakchott, Casablanca, Tunis, and Amman), Ecodev, L'École du Développement, Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and CARE International.

*   **Think Tanks** such as the European Think Tank Group and the European Centre for Development Policy Management, which provide research and policy support on development and peacebuilding strategies.

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20 https://www.alliance-sahel.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Alliance-Sahel-Declaration-on-the-implementation-of-UNR1325-resolution-in-the-Sahel.EN.pdf

6.

Key Areas for Advancing Mauritania's WPS Efforts

When asked about the suggested key areas of intervention on Women, Peace and Security in Mauritania, the actors consulted identified three main areas:

1. **Education**: Educational programmes for girls are crucial in addressing economic and cultural barriers. Education initiatives have a powerful role also in promoting peace and social cohesion, and they raise awareness among youth and adults, including on women's rights and the importance of gender equality in maintaining peace. Additionally, education serves as a tool for PVE and radicalization.

2. **Combating violence against women and girls**: WPS programmes should focus on addressing preventing and responding to gender-based violence, ensuring the implementation of legal frameworks, as well as strengthening support services including shelters, helplines, and legal assistance for survivors.

3. **Promoting women's role in mediation and negotiation:** Women's participation in mediation, negotiation, and conflict resolution is vital for sustainable peace. Key activities to enhance their involvement include:

   ◆ Organizing training programmes for women mediators.

   ◆ Creating platforms for women to discuss conflict resolution strategies at the community level.

   ◆ Mandating a quota for women's representation in peace negotiations, at all levels.

   ◆ Integrating clauses on women's rights and gender equality into peace agreements.

Beyond these three main priorities, other key areas identified by respondents include:

   ◆ **Inclusive governance:** increasing female representation and participation in decision-making and leadership positions, political institutions, and security sectors.

◆ **Integrating a gender perspective into preventing violent extremism and radicalization efforts:** promoting social cohesion and PVE through women's economic empowerment.

◆ **Advocacy and engagement:** Enhancing communication strategies and involving media and religious leaders, such as *Ulemas,* in WPS efforts.

◆ **Women's economic empowerment:** Expanding access to financial resources, employment opportunities, and entrepreneurship to foster women's empowerment and economic stability.

In Mauritania, the Humanitarian–Development–Peace nexus is particularly significant, as all areas are deeply interconnected. When asked about key priorities for improving the well-being of women and girls, the most frequently mentioned priority was strengthening socio-economic development, an insight that aligns with prior analyses, reports, and field data (including findings from the UNICRI report Voices of Resilience[21]). Migration and human trafficking were also suggested as important areas, underlining the centrality of these issues in the national context. Climate change emerged in several responses, reflecting its growing importance as a crosscutting challenge.

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21 For more information, see Voices of Resilience: A Gender Needs Analysis on Preventing Violent Extremism in the Sahel, UNICRI, 2023.

6.1 WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY AND MIGRATION[22]

"In everyday language, the term 'migrant' means 'one who participates in migration, especially a worker from a less developed region, moving abroad to find work, or better-paid work (emigrant, immigrant).' The term 'migration' refers in particular to the 'movement of populations who move from one country to another to settle there (emigration, immigration, exodus, invasion)' and to the 'movement of populations from one place to another (migrant)."

(Source: consultation)

"They are vulnerable because they are simply women. These are stereotypes linked to the poor perception of migrant women in Mauritania, especially in the outlying neighbourhoods. They are often raped, tortured, and even exploited by citizens or their fellow citizens."

(Source: consultation)

"Supporting their potential as peacebuilders and mediators cannot only improve their personal situation but also strengthen peace and security at the community and national levels."

(Source: consultation)

Recognizing the interconnectedness of crises, and taking into account Italy's specific priorities in the region, the consultations also focused on exploring the linkages between WPS issues and the migration patterns of women, both within and beyond the country.

Migration in Mauritania is mainly driven by poverty, marginalization, insecurity, and climate change. The intersection of Women, Peace, Security, and migration is complex, and shaped by multiple factors. Insecurity, whether due to conflict, gender-based violence, economic instability, or discrimination, plays a crucial role in the migration of women both within and beyond the country. Within Mauritania, women relocate due to threats to their property, mistreatment, ethnic inequality, and gender-based and sexual violence. According to perceptions collected during the consultations, coexistence is becoming increasingly challenging in major cities in Mauritania. Some civil society organizations have reported conflicts over employment opportunities and access to essential social services such as healthcare, water, and education. Internally, a rural exodus is common, as poverty and a lack of opportunities push women to migrate to urban centres or abroad. Other women leave the country seeking security for their children and to improve their social status. Mauritania is also a transit country for migrants from sub-Saharan Africa, including women, children, and young people. Climate change-related challenges, such as drought, flooding, and water scarcity, further drive women to relocate in search of safety, stability, and better educational opportunities.

According to the data collected and the consultations held, the multifaceted forms of insecurity that might lead women to migrate, directly or partially as a result of these challenges, are:

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22 The information provided in this Chapter have been collected from input provided by civil society organizations through questionnaires.

◆   **Violence**: Women are often exposed to physical, sexual, and economic violence.

◆   **Criminal networks:** Insecurity and the lack of protective frameworks expose women to trafficking. Criminal networks take advantage of conflict situations and women's poverty.

◆   **Economic and social discrimination**: The lack of economic opportunities and access to education push women to migrate to urban centers or abroad to improve their living conditions.

◆   **Climate change and food insecurity**: Desertification and resource scarcity affect livelihoods, particularly in rural areas, forcing many women to move to cities or migrate to other countries.

These challenges impact women and other minority groups due to a combination of factors. Women's pre-existing vulnerabilities are exacerbated in conflict zones or when they are forced to move. Violence, trafficking, sexual exploitation, abuse, and discrimination add to the already significant hardships faced by those on the move or accommodated in temporary shelters, refugee camps, or reception centres, both within their own country or abroad. These forms of discrimination include:

◆   **Lack of legal and administrative protection**: migration policies and legal frameworks can present significant barriers to the integration of migrant women, who may be excluded from accessing essential services such as healthcare, education, legal aid, and employment opportunities due to their migratory status. Until regularization is achieved, many women may remain outside the formal protection systems, which can increase their vulnerability to exploitation, trafficking, and gender-based violence.

◆   **Lack of economic opportunities, exploitation, discrimination, and precarity**: the lack of access to livelihoods exposes them to socio-economic isolation, forced labour, and exploitation.

◆   **Reduced mobility** and a **lack of access to resources** and **basic services** such as healthcare, including reproductive health, education, water, and protection worsen physical and mental well-being.

◆   **Precarious living conditions**: migrant women are often forced to live in inadequate housing, temporary shelters, or in overcrowded conditions that compromise their safety.

◆   **Exposure to violence**: migrant and displaced women are often more vulnerable to sexual violence, human trafficking, harassment, and early forced marriage, particularly in conflict zones.

◆   **Overall discrimination and marginalization** due to cultural, legal, and social barriers that limit their integration and autonomy. Often, migrant women face stigma and social prejudice due to their migrant status.

"Women migrate to foreign countries when they feel threatened by famine, war, epidemics, etc. In Mauritania, there is a camp for refugees from northern Mali. It is true that their children attend school. They benefit from distributions of food and commodities. Migrants from sub-Saharan African countries have formed associations and, as a result, feel more confident and resilient, supporting each other in their daily struggles."

(Source: consultation)

"We do not have information on women's role in strengthening security or as mediators, but we do have an example in Nouadhibou of a former migrant who decided to stay and created an association to help migrants, trying to dissuade them from going to sea. She helps them by feeding them, housing them, finding them work, and has even set up a small school."

(Source: consultation)

Despite the challenges, women's migration can lead to a transformation of gender roles. Women's participation in decision-making and in framing resilience strategies in times of crisis can increase, thus strengthening their role as key actors in promoting security and sustainable peace. In Mauritania, women play a crucial role in social cohesion, mediating community conflicts, and enhancing the protection of migrant and displaced women. Promoting their active participation in peace and security initiatives is essential to mitigate the factors that push them and members of the communities to migrate. Some key initiatives and strategies include:

- **Empowerment**: Support programmes to train women in vocational skills (crafts, agriculture, etc.) to contribute to their economic empowerment; provide employment opportunities in the regions of origin as well as in the regions where they have settled; involve women with a migratory background as community outreach workers, providing them with monthly incentives to promoting the values of justice, tolerance, solidarity, and dialogue.

- **Women as mediators:** Migrant women can serve as bridges between different communities, facilitating dialogue and mutual understanding and helping to resolve local conflicts. Through their knowledge of the regions and the nature of conflicts, they can facilitate dialogue and act as intermediaries, such as in refugee camps and border areas.

- **Women as peacebuilders:** As active members of their communities, women can contribute to local initiatives aimed at promoting peaceful coexistence and reducing intergroup tensions. They can conduct awareness-raising activities in refugee camps or border areas, working on social cohesion and the prevention of radicalization and violent extremism.

- **Women act as voices and advocates for change:** Organizing support and solidarity networks to foster cooperation within the community, strengthening collective resil-

ience in the face of insecurity. Migrant women can establish structures and associations, become leaders and advocates for women's rights, and raise awareness among decision-makers about security issues, informing about the risks of exploitation by extremist groups, and placing women's needs at the centre of security policies. Women can help raise awareness among their peers by strengthening a culture of peace, and by sharing essential information on security, human rights, and available remedies. In border areas, these initiatives are specifically important.

◆ **Multidimensional integration** (language, culture, discrimination): Training on language in host regions can facilitate integration and address the resistance or unwillingness of host communities to accept migrants. The lack of knowledge of the languages spoken in the host society can represent a major obstacle in the ability to express the experience of violence and in seeking support resources. Other crucial actions include programmes on awareness raising about the misperception of migrants, to break negative perceptions and enhance a dynamic process of interaction and integration.

◆ **Awareness raising and assistance to migrant women** in countries of origin, transit, and destination: Raising awareness and information-sharing activities can support women to make informed decisions about whether or not to migrate. Address human trafficking to find solutions through the involvement of civil society, training of security agents, and security and defence forces in border areas.

◆ **Multi-stakeholders' approach**: Involving all actors in communities, including women, men youth, Ulemas, community leaders, and teachers.

7.

Recommendations

Italy's engagement in the Sahel focuses on promoting interventions that address the interconnections between humanitarian action, development, and peace, with a particular focus on strengthening security, access to essential services, and creating concrete opportunities for young people.

The following set of recommendations is intended to support and strengthen Italy's engagement on the Women, Peace and Security agenda in Mauritania, while more broadly ensuring that a gender perspective is integrated across all sectors and actions in which Italy is involved, including through partnerships with national and regional authorities. The recommendations span from methodological approaches (gender mainstreaming and partnerships) in policy and programme development to the implementation of targeted initiatives in key areas identified as priorities during consultations.

1) Integrate a gender perspective in all policies, programmes, and projects related to security, humanitarian aid, and development

- Systematically integrate a gender perspective across all policies, programmes, and initiatives and across all sectors, from security and humanitarian aid to development and economic investments, to ensure that all actions implemented meaningfully address the distinct needs, priorities, and experiences of women and girls.

- Advocate for the inclusion of a gender perspective in key processes such as in the Mattei Plan, multilateral initiatives, and international conferences and fora focused on the Sahel and Mauritania.

- Inform each initiative, whether a policy dialogue, strategy, or programme, with a sound gender analysis that will lead to the identification of key gender issues and ensure effective, context-sensitive interventions. Understanding the context, including gender relations, roles, and specific needs, enhances the impact and sustainability of all actions.

2) Establish partnerships with key national actors, and civil society

◆ Develop strategic partnerships and provide technical assistance to key national actors in areas such as security, defence, policing, anti-corruption, and counter-terrorism. Ensure that a gender perspective is systematically integrated across all levels of these sectors.

◆ The group that convened in Rome during the final event of this project in May 2025 could serve as a consultative and closed working group. This platform could facilitate ongoing communication, dialogue, and collaboration on a wide range of issues, including security, the prevention of violent extremism (e.g., CELLRAD), human rights (e.g., the Commissariat for Human Rights, Humanitarian Action, and Relations with Civil Society), and youth and women's empowerment (e.g., the Ministry of Youth and the *Plateforme des Femmes du Sahel*).

◆ Promote civic participation and community engagement, by strengthening the role of civil society, promoting initiatives such as calls for proposals, enabling local organizations to implement community-based actions and respond effectively to local needs. It is important to collaborate closely with national actors, local NGOs and community groups familiar with social and cultural dynamics to ensure that interventions are well-targeted and effective

◆ Ensure a multi-stakeholder's approach in WPS efforts and communication strategies, engaging key actors such as media and religious leaders and *Ulemas.*

3) Leverage women's role in mediation and negotiation processes and promote inclusive governance

◆ Recognize and support women as actors in peacebuilding, mediation, negotiation and all peace and security processes at community, national, and regional levels.

◆ Promote initiatives that foster women's leadership and meaningful participation in decision-making bodies, including peace dialogues, political institutions and security structures. Collaborate with state and non-state actors to advance the Women, Peace and Security agenda, leveraging on what exists and works.

◆ Support and amplify the work of existing women's groups and regional coalitions, such as the *Plateforme des Femmes du Sahel,* that are already advocating for full implementation of the agenda.

4) Enhance education, including on peacebuilding and social cohesion

◆ Promote peace education, for instance by supporting the creation of youth and school peace clubs. These spaces could encourage sports and cultural initiatives focused on social cohesion. Empower youth, especially girls, to use their creativity in identifying and anticipating local challenges, and proposing context-specific solutions.

◆ Strengthen girls' and women's access to education, including vocational and professional training, by promoting school attendance and educational attainment at all levels. Promote girls and women equal opportunities to learn, boosting their empowerment and participation in building inclusive and resilient communities.

5) Integrating a gender perspective into all actions on preventing violent extremism and terrorism efforts

◆ Design PVE interventions and strategies based on a gender analysis.

◆ Support women-led organisations, especially in remote and challenging areas, to implement PVE initiatives.

◆ Involve women religious leaders and religious women's associations to develop alternative discourses to violence.

◆ Invest in women's peacebuilding initiatives, which may provide protection to local communities by offering service provision and prevention mechanisms while challenging the narrative and messages of violent extremist organisations.

◆ Develop initiatives aimed at preventing, managing, or resolving conflicts around access and use of natural resources, including in border areas. Promote of intercommunity dialogue and collaboration between different community groups, such as herders and farmers.

◆ Increase focus on rural areas, where women often face further vulnerability due to stronger societal barriers and deeply rooted social norms.

6) Support for improved access to services, socio-economic opportunities, and justice

◆ Strengthen services for survivors of gender-based violence, including improving reporting mechanisms. This should also include implementing specific programmes to protect women from violence, human trafficking, and other forms of exploitation, with strengthened reporting and assistance mechanisms.

◆ Support access to health services, including reproductive health, and promote health education programmes for women and young people, taking into account local cultural contexts and barriers to healthcare access. Strengthen maternal and mental
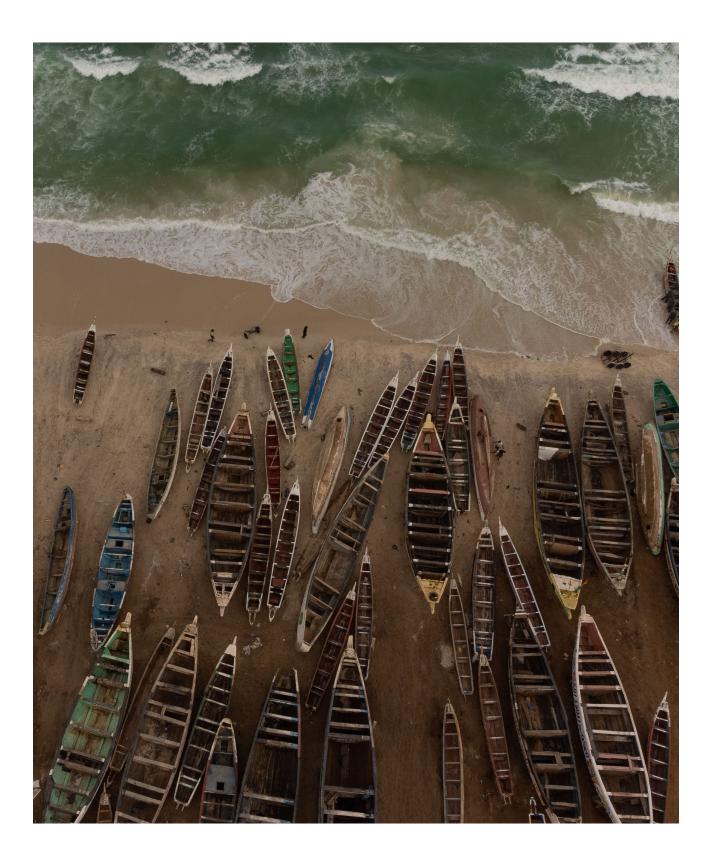
health services, with a focus on psychological support for women and youth. Invest in infrastructure and healthcare personnel.

◆ Employment and socio-economic measures:

▸ Enhance women's employability and entrepreneurship. Assist small and medium-sized enterprises and support women's and youth entrepreneurship by improving access to credit, microfinance, and support funds.

▸ Establish vocational training centres offering programmes designed to meet the specific needs of girls and youth, including technical skills, digital literacy, language training, and entrepreneurship, and in emerging and promising sectors such as sustainable agriculture and information technology.

▸ Promote economic activities rooted in sustainable natural resource management and climate adaptation.

◆ Promote culture and identity:

▸ Encourage artistic and cultural projects that celebrate local identity and heritage, particularly involving young people and women.

▸ Organize cultural exchanges to raise awareness among communities about the richness and cultural diversity of the Sahel.

7) Strengthening the link between Women, Peace and Security and migration:

◆ Deepen the analysis of the gender dimensions of both internal and cross-border migration in Mauritania and the broader Sahel region.

◆ Implementing **programmes tailored to the protection of migrant women** and to the advancement of their economic empowerment. These can contribute to their security, reducing the risk of forced migration.

◆ Establish and **support local, regional, and international networks** that enable migrant women to share experiences, foster solidarity and mutual support.

◆ Provide and expand **access to training and education programmes** aimed at empowering migrant women, enhancing their skills, and supporting their social and economic integration.

◆ Invest in **capacity building for women-led NGOs** working on peace and security, particularly those operating in areas with high migrant populations.

◆ Promote the collection, analysis, dissemination, and sharing of **good practices** on the specific needs and experiences of migrant women.

Annex I:
List of Consultations

This list includes the stakeholders consulted during the consultation process:

1) Key Informant Interviews with representatives of

◆ General Directorate for Globalization and Global Affairs, Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation

◆ The Italian Agency for Development Cooperation, headquarters and Dakar Office

◆ The United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel

◆ La Plateforme des Femmes du Sahel

2) Survey Respondents

◆ Mauritania National Commission for Human Rights, Humanitarian Action, and Relations with Civil Society

◆ The Ministry of Youth Empowerment, Employment, Sports and Civic Service of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania

◆ National branch for the fight against radicalization and violent extremism of the G5 Sahel (Cellrad)

◆ Civil Society Organizations

1. L'œil sur l'enfant et la femme

2. Association des Jeunes

3. Ensemble pour un avenir meilleur

4. Association de Lutte Contre la Dépendance

5. La Ligue Associative pour l'Appui au Développement

6. Organisation pour une Mauritanie Verte et Democratique

7. Le Réseau de Lutte Contre la Torture et les Traitements Inhumains et dégradants

8. Alliance Citoyenne

9. Association les lueurs de l'espoir

10. Actions pour les Droits Humains et la Paix au Sahel

11. Ensemble pour la Solidarité et le Développement

12. TAGHADOUM pour le bien etre social

13. Assistance aux Femmes et Enfants en Difficulté

14. Association pour la défence des droits de la femme mauritanienne

15. Organisation Mauritanienne Pour la Défense des Droits au Violences Faites aux Femmes et Aux Filles et Leurs Santé

16. ELVETEYATE

17. Association Mauritanienne pour la Santé de la Mère et de l'Enfant

◆ Delegation of the European Union to Mauritania