



# One Year On: Norway and the Women, Peace and Security Agenda in the UN Security Council

January 2022 marked the halfway point in Norway's two-year membership in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). Given that the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda has been a cornerstone of Norway's Security Council campaign, its presidency and its political focus during its term, this prompts the question: Has Norway delivered on its goal to strengthen the WPS agenda? In this policy brief, we critically summarize Norway's work on WPS in the UNSC during this first year and discuss Norway's efforts to effectively address this topic. In doing so, we examine what it means to work with WPS in the Security Council, and what small states can do to affect the political course of the Council.

## Brief Points

- Norway's first 12 months in the Security Council were marked by an increasingly demanding geopolitical situation dominating most Council discussion, creating an exceptionally challenging environment for work on WPS.
- Norway's diplomats developed alternative ways of operating, employing close to every technique in the diplomatic toolbox to ensure that WPS remained on the Security Council agenda.
- Coalition-building, leveraging its Security Council Presidency, and actively engaging with civil society have been some of Norway's primary working methods in the Council this past year, and have contributed to a renewed focus on the WPS agenda.
- Norway's major achievements include: the integration of WPS language in resolution texts and mandate renewals, as well as a marked increase in the number of women briefing the Security Council.

Nora Kristine Stai

*Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO)*

Torunn L. Tryggstad

*Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO)*

## Introduction

January 2022 marked the halfway point in Norway's two-year term as an elected member of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). As Norway was entering the last phase of its Security Council membership in December 2021, the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) published a summary outlining the country's achievements in the Council so far. Norway's accomplishments, according to the MFA, include substantial work on the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda. This focus is in line with the aims of Norway's campaign for an elected seat in the UNSC for 2021–2022, which established “women's rights and participation at all levels of society, including through persistent efforts for women, peace and security” as a core goal for Norway's elected period. Norway's work on WPS culminated during Norway's Security Council Presidency in January 2022, during which time WPS was cited as a top priority for the country's presidency and was the subject of one of Norway's signature events.

Has, then, Norway delivered on its promise to strengthen the WPS agenda in the Council? Given the focus on this topic, and the opportunities the presidency provides, examining the successes and failures of Norway's efforts to promote the WPS agenda in the Security Council is of high scholarly relevance and provides an important starting point for assessing Norway's work on WPS at large. This policy brief will examine the extent to which Norway, as an elected member of the Security Council, can affect Council politics and what strengthening the WPS agenda entails.

## Norway and the WPS Agenda

Since the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on October 31, 2000, Norway has been active in the global efforts to increase women's participation in peace and security processes and has contributed substantially to engaging civil society in international peacebuilding efforts. In the years following the adoption of UNSCR 1325 – which provided the framework for the WPS agenda – Norway has promoted a gender perspective on global issues, implementing several National Action Plans and establishing a Special Representative on Women, Peace, and Security position in the MFA.

Given Norway's national image as a champion of gender equality, integrating the WPS agenda

into its Security Council campaign and establishing WPS as a core feature of Norway's work in the UN came naturally. The campaign outlined five different thematic focuses, establishing “women's rights and participation at all levels of society, including through persistent efforts for women, peace and security” as one of Norway's priority areas, if elected. Upon being elected to the Council in June 2020, Norway picked up the baton from Sweden, which served in the Security Council for the period 2017–2018. During its period in the Council, Sweden promoted a feminist foreign policy, with a focus on making WPS “core council business.” These efforts were continued by Norway, and when the country began its membership in the Council, the Norwegian MFA identified the inclusion of women as one of four main pillars of Norway's work.

## Small State Diplomacy in the Security Council

The WPS agenda is undoubtedly an integral part of Norway's focus in the Security Council. But what does the integration of WPS into core council business entail, and is Norway perceived as credible by the international community in its efforts to promote the WPS agenda? In order for Norway to succeed as a small state actor in the Security Council – and in the international system more generally – Norway must uphold an image of credibility. This becomes even more relevant for issues defined as Norway's core priorities. Norway's work on the WPS agenda serves as an important test for Norway's national image in the international system and Norway's reputation as a champion of gender equality.

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Yet, a country's ability to push a particular issue in the Security Council is not just a matter of motivation. The structure of the Security Council is the main determinant of power and maneuverability in the Council, where veto power is ascribed to its permanent members, while elected members must rely on skillful diplomacy or international status to bring new issues to the table. Given the structural challenges inherent to the Council's mode of operations, the question



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of whether small states can make a difference in the Security Council has been explored by scholars and policymakers alike. While some argue that elected members are mere “lame ducks” within the greater context of the Council's *realpolitik*, others have noted the ways elected members can influence the direction of the Council, including through “coalition-building, actively using the presidency function, organizing special events, and assuming the pen-holder role in a specific country or thematic issue.”<sup>1</sup>

Beyond these fixed features of the Security Council, a country's ability to push a particular agenda is affected by the Council's changing composition from one year to the next. The Council is made up of ten elected members (known as the E10) serving a two-year period each. The makeup of the Security Council can, therefore, vary extensively at any given time, which often results in diverging political priorities for Council members. This challenge is compounded by the fluctuating priorities of the Council's permanent members (the P5), which consist of countries that have held seats in the Security Council since its inception and reserve the right to veto any resolution. The Council's composition therefore invariably constrains or enables opportunities to advance strategic interests. For a country like Norway, the Security Council can be composed of what is in diplomatic terms referred to as “like-minded countries,” or it can consist of states with conflicting political interests.

## Norway's First 12 Months

At the end of December 2021, the MFA published a document outlining Norway's accomplishments in the first year of its Security

Council membership.<sup>2</sup> The MFA outlined several achievements related to strengthening references to WPS and the protection of children in armed conflict in Council resolutions and statements. These references were notably present in the mandate renewal for both the Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) and the United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS). Norway made a concerted effort to ensure that these references were implementable. In the run-up to the MINUSMA mandate renewal, the Norwegian delegation to the UN co-sponsored a virtual dialogue with the Permanent Missions of the United Kingdom and France, in cooperation with the Norwegian Embassy in Bamako, on consolidating the language in the MINUSMA mandate with impact on the ground.

Despite these achievements, Norway's first 12 months in the Security Council were marked by an increasingly demanding geopolitical situation dominating most Council discussion. These developments made the introduction of WPS-related agenda items particularly challenging. According to a senior diplomat at Norway's Permanent Delegation to the UN, Norway's work on WPS in the Council had to be adapted in light of the Russian Federation's and China's

marked resistance to including new or progressive WPS language in country-specific mandates, with Russia claiming the October negotiations had brought to light that there was no longer consensus on the agenda in the Council.<sup>6</sup> This stemmed primarily from the UNSC voting down a "truly shocking WPS resolution"<sup>7</sup> from the Russian Federation in October 2020. While most countries had previously brought WPS to the Council's agenda to promote its integration into global politics, the Russian Federation's proposal "threatened to roll back protection of women's human rights [and the] prevention of conflict-related sexual violence."<sup>7</sup> The proposal of this resolution proved a major setback and created a challenging atmosphere for Norway.

This is not the first time in the Council's history, however, that introducing strong WPS language to UN mandates has proved difficult. Indeed, in 2019, the Russian Federation's Permanent Representative to the UN expressed his concern that the UNMISS mandate was "overloaded with text on gender issues and human rights."<sup>8</sup> Including strong actions on WPS has evidently proved challenging, with palpable resistance coming from the Russian Federation. This resistance culminated with the aforementioned proposal to adopt a resolution with the intent of scaling back work on WPS. This served

as a critical juncture for Norway, and the MFA's initial approach to strengthening the WPS agenda required re-strategizing.

As a result of what is described by the Norwegian MFA as an exceptionally challenging period in the Security Council, work on WPS was focused instead on defending existing language, implementing already-existing resolutions, and ensuring that these resolutions were in line with realities on the ground. Much work was also focused on providing women briefers access to the Security Council in order to rectify the existing gender-imbalance of Council briefers. Norway's efforts further included work on integrating WPS language into the MINUSMA mandate, adding an operational paragraph on sexual and gender-based violence in a Security Council resolution on the situation in the Central African Republic (S/RES/2605(2021)), and working closely with newly elected members to underscore the importance of the WPS agenda in everyday Council business.

### Putting Norway's Diplomats to the Test

Yet, can we ultimately describe Norway's efforts as successful, given the structural constraints of the Security Council? It is evident that while Council dynamics have been unfavorable to significant advancements on WPS, Norway has developed alternative ways of operating. An unresponsive Council has put Norway's diplomats to the test, which in turn has led Norway to employ a cornucopia of diplomatic working methods in advancing the WPS agenda.

Norway has notably engaged in significant coalition-building in an attempt to unite the Council's elected members. Norway has also made an effort to engage with incoming Council members, including ones which have a track-record of not being receptive to the WPS agenda. Much of this work involved behind-the-scenes diplomacy which included Norway signing a Statement of Shared Commitments with Niger, the United Arab Emirates, Albania, and Brazil, committing its signatories to make the WPS agenda a top priority during their respective presidencies. In line with this commitment, Norway used its Security Council Presidency in January 2022 actively, bringing WPS to the forefront of Council discussions. Notably, *Protecting Participation: Addressing violence targeting women in peace and security processes* served as one of the presidency's two thematic signature events,

### Methods of Influencing the UNSC as a Non-Permanent Member<sup>3</sup>

<b>Coalition-building</b>	Coalition-building involves multiple states in the Security Council acting as a single unit due to the convergence of interests on a particular issue. Coalitions of states can work together to put an issue on the agenda, for instance, or to pass a resolution.
<b>SC Presidency</b>	The Security Council Presidency rotates monthly in alphabetical order among the Council's members (both elected and permanent). <sup>4</sup> The Security Council Presidency provides an opportunity for countries to shape the month's agenda, preside over questions relating to policy, and call meetings of the Council.
<b>Signature events</b>	Signature events are events organized at the discretion of the Security Council President and can take the form of debates, open debates, or briefings. They are often focused on a particular thematic issue, allowing countries to advance issues of particular interest.
<b>Penholdership</b>	Having a penholder role in the Security Council refers to when members of the Council "[lead] the negotiation and drafting of resolutions on a particular Council agenda item," <sup>5</sup> allowing countries to take greater role in particular negotiations.
<b>Committee leadership</b>	Security Council members can influence the direction of the Council through committee leadership, such as leading the sanction committees, which oversee relevant sanction measures.

demonstrating the importance of the presidency in elected members' efforts to affect the direction of politics in the Security Council.

Finally, as with any issue in the Security Council, there is always a question of integrating implementable mandates. The term "Christmas tree mandates" has emerged in this context, referring to UN mandates – particularly in peacekeeping operations – which are not in line with realities on the ground, serving an "ornamental" rather than practical purpose. In 2018, UN Secretary-General António Guterres famously declared that "Christmas is over,"<sup>8</sup> demanding an end to the ever-increasing list of issues and actions that are added to UN mandates. With WPS being a frequent target of such accusations, a key challenge for Norway has been knowing when to integrate WPS language most effectively and under what conditions doing so is most in line with the practical realities on the ground. Norway has worked closely with civil society and other Council members to include implementable mandates in Council resolutions, as was seen with its sponsorship of the MINUSMA event. Aligning language on WPS with realities on the ground can therefore be regarded as a clear mark of achievement for Norway.

Norway has also engaged extensively with women's civil society organizations and has made a significant effort to invite women briefers to the Council. This was particularly evident during Norway's Security Council Presidency, with Ambassador and Permanent Representative Mona Juul kicking off the month with a Civil Society Dialogue on January 6. In the Ambassador's final remarks following the close of Norway's presidency, including civil society briefers, and particularly female briefers, was highlighted as having been a major priority for Norway. During its presidency, a 50:50 gender balance among Security Council briefers was nearly achieved, with Norway inviting 18 men and 17 women to brief the Council during this

period.<sup>9</sup> In drawing on its civil society network in this way, Norway has demonstrated the working methods that can be employed to meaningfully promote the WPS agenda, even when Council relations are not particularly favorable to such issues.

### Conclusion

It is evident that Norway has put the skills of its diplomats to the test, resorting to a plethora of creative working methods to put the WPS agenda back on the table. While Norway has been unable to shift significant ground on this issue, it has defended the WPS agenda adamantly at a time when such priorities could have easily fallen beneath the cracks. Norway has therefore demonstrated that small states can in fact influence the political direction of the Security Council. Despite 2022 proving to be an even more turbulent time in Security Council history, the sheer number of *Friends of 1325* in the Council serves as an ideal opportunity for Norway to continue its work to promote the WPS agenda. Time will tell whether Norway can capitalize on these structural dynamics and push for an increased focus on Women, Peace, and Security in the last months of its UNSC membership. ■

### Notes

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2. Government of Norway (2021) *Resultater av Norges arbeid i FNs sikkerhetsråd*. Available at: [www.regjeringen.no/no/tema/utenrikssaker/fn/norge\\_fnsr/id2876933](http://www.regjeringen.no/no/tema/utenrikssaker/fn/norge_fnsr/id2876933).
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### Further Reading

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Skjelsbæk, Inger & Torunn L. Tryggestad (2019) *Donor States Delivering on WPS: The Case of Norway*. In: Sara Davies & Jacqui True (eds) *The Oxford Handbook of Women, Peace, and Security*. Oxford: Oxford University Press: 516–527.

## THE AUTHORS

Nora Kristine Stai is Coordinator of the PRIO Centre on Gender, Peace and Security.

Torunn L. Tryggestad is Director of the PRIO Centre on Gender, Peace and Security and Senior Researcher at PRIO. She is a leading expert in Norway on Women, Peace and Security.

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