Scholars, peacebuilders and governments increasingly understand that gender is critical to analyzing violent conflicts and transforming them into sustainable peace. The public focus on gender issues in peacebuilding has been growing since 2000, when the U.N. Security Council adopted Resolution 1325. The measure urged countries to craft national action plans to protect women and girls during conflict and ensure women have a greater voice in decision-making on security issues.

Women have played prominent roles in political movements and transitions aimed at healing or preventing violent conflicts—from Afghanistan’s parliament to Colombia’s peace process to Egyptians’ demonstrations in Cairo’s Tahrir Square. Women’s increased visibility in preventing violence dramatizes the need for men and women to work together to solve this growing threat.

Gender in peacebuilding is not simply a male-female issue, but a set of concerns that must be addressed with flexible socio-cultural, political and economic approaches. Increasingly, governments and international civil society recognize the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and other gender-minority communities, and the frequency with which they are targeted in violent conflicts.

The U.S. Institute of Peace emphasizes the need for women and men to work together in solving gender issues in violent conflicts. For years, USIP has included a “gender lens”—an analysis of the gender-related questions—in any peacebuilding work it undertakes. This is part of the Institute’s overall practice of including all groups of a society in solutions to violent conflict. In 2011, the U.S. government’s National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security adopted the same approach. USIP serves as the secretariat for the U.S. Civil Society Working Group, which advises the government on implementing the plan. USIP’s work on gender issues has pursued four main themes:

**Women Preventing Extremist Violence**: USIP began this project in Nigeria and Kenya in 2013 by convening and supporting grassroots women’s groups working to detect and counter early stages of radicalization in their communities. The project creates dialogues and cooperation between these groups and local police forces, which often have had mistrustful relations with civil society.

**Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict**: Since 2012, the Missing Peace Initiative, co-founded by USIP, has convened scholars, policymakers, military professionals, civil society leaders, and government officials in annual symposia. The discussions advance agendas for research and improve peacebuilding fieldwork to halt wartime sexual violence. The 2015 Missing Peace symposium, in Kampala, Uganda, gathered more than 70 leaders from six African countries to share and improve their techniques for documenting and prosecuting sexual violence amid conflict.

**Unlearning Violence**: The Unlearning Violence project challenges the notion that men are inherently violent, showing instead that gender identities are learned, highly malleable, and particularly affected by war, violent extremism, and disasters. Through dialogue, men and women work together to challenge harmful gender norms that can lead to violence against women, men, girls, and boys. In 2014-2015, the project held training programs—in Rwanda, Uganda, and Northern Ireland—to teach South Sudanese practitioners in dialogue facilitation, understanding trauma with a gender perspective, and restorative justice.
Men, Peace, and Security: This USIP initiative expands the scope of gender analysis to explicitly include male perspectives and masculinity issues related to violence and conflict. Since an inaugural symposium in 2013, the Institute has partnered with non-government organizations that teach young men non-violent notions of masculinity in post-conflict societies and train them to combat gender-based violence.

In Afghanistan, USIP is beginning a pilot project of dialogues and training to help Afghan men define and promote a peaceful, positive narrative of masculinity to roll back the more violent notions that have become a norm through decades of warfare.

USIP PUBLICATIONS

USIP's staff and experts publish in-depth reports, as well as short, timely policy briefs, that distill expert research, lessons learned, and problem-solving solutions on gender in peacebuilding. Recent publications include:

Women Preventing Violent Extremism: Charting a New Course (March 2015): This ‘thought for action kit’ is a collection of essays and exercises to help guide activists and peacebuilding practitioners for their roles in preventing violent extremist ideologies.

Conflict and Extremist-Related Sexual Violence (July 2015): This Peace Brief, by a group of young scholars, reports the findings of recent research and suggests paths for future study on sexual violence in war.

Wartime Sexual Violence: Misconceptions, Implications and Ways Forward (February 2013): This Special Report identifies widespread misconceptions about sexual violence in wartime: that it is particularly a problem in Africa, or of ethnic wars, that it always is done by men or by combatants, or mainly by rebel groups rather than state armies. Policies to prevent sexual violence should recognize these as fallacies, it says.

Women Under ISIS Rule: From Brutality to Recruitment (July 2015): In testimony to the U.S. House of Representatives’ Foreign Affairs Committee, USIP’s senior gender advisor, Kathleen Kuehnast, underscored the damage caused by gender violence. She urged that U.S. policy counter in particular the recruitment and brainwashing, by ISIS and other groups, of boys under the age of 14, a tactic that effectively turns them into weapons of war.

USIP EVENTS

USIP hosts events that bring together thought leaders, scholars, experts, policymakers, and elected officials to discuss peacebuilding efforts around the world and analyze current affairs. Recent events on gender and peacebuilding include:

Women and Countering Violent Extremism (July 2015): To prepare for major international conferences in 2015, USIP gathered U.S. government officials with experts from civil society, the United Nations, and academia to discuss ways that women can be included more fully in global efforts to counter violent extremism. The event gathered the best thinking from the spheres of counter-terrorism and of peacebuilding.

Ending Sexual Violence in Conflict (May 2015): USIP hosted a diverse group of young scholars to present and discuss their cutting-edge research to prevent sexual violence during and after violent conflicts.

Colombia: Religious Women Prepare Reconciliation (July 2015): Part of the USIP series of Colombia Peace Forums, the event gathered Colombian women ecumenical leaders to discuss their work with U.S. policymakers and analysts. This event was part of a broader USIP effort that strengthens Colombian women’s roles in civil society and their inclusion in the country’s peace process between the government and the FARC rebels.

LGBTI Rights: Global Activism, U.S. Diplomacy (May 2015): USIP gathered campaigners for gender minority rights from South Africa, Ireland, Fiji, and Grenada, along with U.S. Special Envoy Randy Berry, to discuss the state of this movement globally and its future.