

Engaging the Private Sector to Advance the Women, Peace and Security Agenda

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Introduction

In coordination with Our Secure Future (OSF), Women In International Security (WIIS) conducted a project to evaluate the role the private sector can play in advancing the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, guided by the assertion that active engagement with WPS principles is a strategic, operational, and organizational asset for private sector business actors.

Through interviews and a survey questionnaire, WIIS collected insights into respondents' familiarity with WPS, views on what an effective business case might be for engaging with WPS, and ideas on how to build partnerships to encourage deeper involvement and commitment to WPS principles from private sector firms, in addition to attitudes towards diversity in the workforce and barriers and risks to corporate engagement.

The research findings underscore the value that the WPS agenda adds to the private sector and highlights how it can deliver concrete benefits to companies by contributing to: **economic stability, market and investment security, risk mitigation, workforce resilience, greater productivity, reputational support, and market credibility.**

Key Findings

- 1. Awareness & Familiarity:** There is a clear disconnect between awareness of WPS principles that support core business strategies and their practical application.
- 2. An Under-Utilized Tool:** The WPS agenda remains an underutilized tool and framework for corporate governance, risk management, and strategic decision-making.
- 3. Barriers:** Structural barriers and cultural biases remain primary obstacles to private sector engagement with the WPS agenda. Leadership is key to countering these barriers.
- 4. Incentives:** Corporate WPS standards or certifications, among other incentives, can be more effective in enhancing corporate credibility and reputation than value-based appeals alone.
- 5. Partnerships:** With its convening power, the private sector should engage directly with diverse groups to break down silos and redefine multi-stakeholder partnerships that merge WPS principles with business objectives and outcomes.

Methodology

This research project aimed to deepen knowledge of the nexus between gender, peace, and security and business, unlocking the private sector's potential to be a recognized and accountable partner in advancing women, peace, and security. Delineating why and how private sector actors should integrate the WPS agenda into their policies, practices, and partnerships, the research asked one key question: ***What is the rationale for businesses to invest in the WPS agenda?***

WIIS first conducted a **scoping study** to map the private sector's knowledge on WPS and develop evidence-based assumptions around the utility of WPS to the private sector.



To test the assumptions and insights drawn from the scoping review, **select interviews were organized around four business verticals: legal, cyber/tech, finance/consulting, and defense.**



Based on these interviews, a short survey questionnaire was then developed and conducted to determine how WPS is perceived and applied in private sector contexts, supplementing the qualitative data collected from the interviews.



The findings were then analyzed and synthesized into a practical findings report.

Methodologically, the study and analysis are based on **21 survey questionnaire respondents** and **10 in-depth key information interviews (KIIs)**, the latter of each lasting between 1 and 1.5 hours. All but two of these interviewees were currently active in the private sector, and those two respondents still had past experience working in or engaging with the private sector. All 31 respondents had some awareness of the WPS agenda, with variations in depth of their knowledge and which “pillars”¹ of the WPS agenda they knew best.

The sample, while too small to constitute a scientific survey, is highly suggestive of a group of professional women (outside of the government) whose work is grounded in one or more issues of the WPS agenda.

The interview and survey questions were structured to gather information on:

- The respondent's degree of familiarity with the WPS agenda;
- What a business case for WPS would entail;
- The entry points, barriers, and incentives involved in making the business case; and
- How building partnerships could be a valuable component to expanding the private sector's commitment to WPS.

There is close complementarity between the interviews and the survey questionnaire data, both of which were conducted in the same period – and the data from both the interviews and survey findings closely align to the thematic lines of questioning above.

The following qualitative analysis is based on KIIs conducted in November and December 2025. A summary of the survey results (“Survey Questionnaire Findings”) follows the next section (“Research Analysis on Private Sector Engagement with WPS”), and a detailed breakdown can be found in the Appendix.

1 The four pillars of the WPS agenda are: 1) Participation; 2) Protection; 3) Prevention; and 4) Relief & Recovery.

Research Analysis on Private Sector Engagement with WPS

Personal Familiarity with WPS

All interviewees expressed how valuable WPS is to them personally and to their profession, though the extent of their familiarity with the WPS agenda varied. Seven of the ten interviewees were “very familiar” with WPS. Other participants were “familiar” with the WPS agenda through their M.A. studies but had no other work-related connections to it.

Half of the participants stated that they had professional experience with WPS, either directly engaged (e.g., as a gender advisor on an EU mission, via cyber/tech work on disinformation and women’s protection, or as a senior official at a sustainable finance company). Others were engaged more indirectly through volunteer work, membership in industry associations that promote women’s leadership, or, in one case, as a director of a diversity and leadership program.

“WPS is undervalued at best, unknown at worst.”

Organizational Familiarity with WPS

Generally, the view was that private sector entities had very little familiarity with the WPS agenda. Only two interviewees reported that their organization was familiar with WPS. One of these respondents, a former EU gender advisor, noted that while the EU supports the WPS agenda, it approaches the agenda only operationally and not from a broader human rights or security perspective. Other views noted that the private sector could understand the logic behind supporting the WPS agenda, but would not have the knowledge to apply it. Familiarity with WPS inside an organization is informal at best and not especially deep. Other respondents, particularly those in tech companies, spoke of a dominant male culture in their company as “mostly white men,” in which WPS familiarity was very low.



Q: Should Your Sector Engage with the WPS Agenda?

A: All interviewees agreed that the private sector needs to engage more with the WPS agenda. Comments ranged from needing legal compliance on sexual gender-based violence (SGBV) and discrimination, to upholding democratic governance structures, and to building networks to support women in reaching more senior management positions.

Legal: For a legal expert, WPS is highly meaningful for the protection of the rule of law and its fair and equitable application.

Cyber/Tech: Participants working in the tech sector stated that WPS engagement can benefit efforts to counter misinformation/disinformation and deep fakes, as well as work in the open-source intelligence (OSINT) sector. A respondent in the cybersecurity field remarked that cyber defense is not meant to be considered gender-based, but there is certainly a need for an institutional framework in the tech sectors around trust and safety.

Finance/Consulting: A financial sector expert emphasized that the private sector should recognize that the path to advancing WPS contains three elements: risk, return, and impact. Risk, because companies need to recognize the stabilizing effect (risk reduction) of the WPS agenda in economies they work in; return, because the agenda can identify places where it is easier for the private sector/actor to play and thrive; and impact, empowering women in the workforce, in supply chains, and in producing products and services.

That the private sector as a whole lacks a strategy to engage with WPS was expressed by almost all interviewees. Sectors within the for-profit industry need to have a strategic approach to engaging with the WPS agenda if it is to be meaningful. Respondents, especially those with shareholder interests, raised a word of caution: there is little interest in WPS if it is not profitable for the company—a common theme in the interviews. “WPS,” said one participant, is seen as “a soft spot for marketing.”

A critical first step to building a path for private entities to engage with WPS, therefore, is to build knowledge and educate on the WPS agenda—this was a major subject amongst interviewees. As one participant put it: “WPS is undervalued at best, unknown at worst.” Members in professional associations, NGOs, and other organizations can serve as entry points for WPS engagement. For example, a member of a WIIS international affiliate reported that the last event sponsored by WIIS Iceland drew over 100 participants.

The private sector must also engage from a values and ethics perspective—its engagement must be “full scope,” with companies being held accountable if they fail to comply with laws and industry standards.

Building a Business Case for Private Sector Engagement with the WPS Agenda

Why do we need a business case for WPS integration into the private sector?

A business case is a management tool that provides a strong, clear reason why a project is beneficial. It serves to build consensus, ensuring that the necessary support and resources are obtained from decision-makers. It ensures that everyone knows what to expect and knows what their goals are.

For interviewees, it was clear that greater private sector engagement with the WPS agenda brings not only tangible advantages to the entity, but functions as a critical tool to fight gender-related problems in the private sector. Despite this, only one respondent (working in Iceland) confirmed that her organization implemented WPS programs.

For example, WPS enhances credibility in hybrid warfare and operational/OSINT domains, since “WPS objectives are largely tied to information operations” such as with online harassment, hate mail, and cyber-related gender-based violence—all in the human security space. For one cyber expert, “...it makes sense to be forward-leaning and mission-aligned along WPS objectives.”

In some cases, making a business case for including WPS components is difficult when fiscal spending is tight, and the benefits—fiscal and otherwise—are not evident to most private sector entities. This is especially difficult in the current political environment, which at present provides little incentive for private sector companies to consider WPS. A tech sector expert expressed the view that American companies could stay competitive in the U.S. if they shifted



As the interviews illustrated, many people work in companies that no longer adhere to traditional sectors such as “tech” or “media communications.” These new and emerging business sectors are well-placed to integrate WPS principles: OSINT, biotech, renewables, and even “conflict” sectors such as mining and natural resource extraction. Understanding what business case to present to a firm should be reflective of these new firm profiles.

Reasons cited for integrating WPS into a business case varied. An argument for doing so would be to emphasize the value it brings to attracting a larger client base and diversifying business, thus raising revenue. For one respondent, the business value would be to advance women’s leadership. Another respondent found that her tech/security firm, founded by ex-military men, recognized the value of a diverse staff, but found that there were few young women with enough experience to replace the men who were aging out. And those women in the field must constantly fight barriers to get recognition and carve out a space in the industry: “Men are still confused when women show up at the table.”

Despite hostility to women in business sectors such as cyber/tech, there are good reasons to build a business case across private sector industries: reputational needs are one, but WPS can also create commercial, operational, and strategic advantages for markets.

their language and wording. Still, the general takeaway was that firms interested in WPS principles would have better opportunities abroad than in the U.S. and should look internationally to find them. Another respondent agreed, arguing that non-U.S. companies stand ready to collaborate with small U.S. companies that remain committed to WPS principles.

What is the business case for applying WPS principles to the private sector?

Interview respondents outlined several elements that would support a business case for applying WPS principles. Some are general points relevant to the private sector, such as preventing harassment, workplace recruitment and retention policies, parental leave, promotion policies that advance women to higher management and leadership positions, and mentoring programs.

For the **legal sector**, a business case could include developing training and mandatory continuing legal education on WPS. With more women attending law school than men, the legal field has advanced far in gender equality and now sees it as a norm in the field. Therefore, embedding WPS in the law school curriculum can extend the legal profession's knowledge base of WPS. Another suggestion was to take advantage of law firms' pro bono work by approaching firms with a strong business case for accepting pro bono cases focused on WPS-related topics, and to encourage law firms to reach out to NGOs and women's organizations in the process.

"The best business case would be to stop positioning women as victims, but as agents of change and knowledge-holders."

For one respondent in the **media sector**, a core need is to build public trust. With the fragmentation of the media landscape, the communications industry faces significant challenges in conveying accurate information while battling growing false narratives. Thus, any business case would have to identify strategies to break through mistrust and misinformation and rebuild a strong, positive relationship with the public. But how to present WPS in a simplified way? WPS is too large for firms to encompass programmatically, so clarity is necessary in defining specific needs, goals, and desires.

For the **media** and **tech/cyber sectors**, the suggestion was to intensify efforts to integrate WPS principles into public communication strategies, using technological tools that can reach larger audiences. The need for strong regulation in the AI space was repeatedly expressed. One interviewee gave a cautionary view about taking a strong public position on these issues, saying that promoting a safer, more equitable cyberspace that can reduce conflict can also be seen as "taking sides"—advocating WPS principles could look like political interference and, for businesses, may do more harm than good and thus must be sensitively framed.

A Business Case for WPS and Conflict Prevention

"WPS is part of a larger agenda of conflict prevention that is business- and market-driven."

There is a strong business case for linking WPS to conflict prevention: business interests want a stable commercial environment with low conflict, and investors want low risk. Additionally, since business impact can be either positive or negative, companies need to know whether their business practices increase instability or raise the risk to their company.

The WPS agenda intersects with these "business-conflict" issues. Take, for example, the treatment of women in the political and economic spheres. A study conducted in Peru found that companies that implemented corporate social responsibility (CSR) frameworks achieved better licensing and operational outcomes, resulting in higher revenue streams. The argument that speaks to the business case and incentives is as follows: you are active in a country's economy where risk is elevated. One of the major stabilizers is building gender equality in line with WPS principles that will protect your investments. WPS matters to business firms, because stability brings market and investment security.

Entry Points for the WPS Business Case

What might constitute effective entry points for the private sector to engage with WPS?

One sector-specific suggestion, as it relates to the **legal sector**, is to approach legal scholar communities and law schools with centers of practice, and contact law firms with a case for undertaking work in the WPS space. For example, the American Bar Association (ABA) would benefit from providing a course on the WPS agenda as an essential tool for the legal profession.

Broad entry points across private sector verticals include:

Entry Points for the WPS Business Case (continued)

1 Professional Certifications & Training

One key suggestion was to offer a professional certification or training program that firms would pay for. A respondent knowledgeable about business certifications provided details on three such categories: 1) *Market-driven certifications*: companies facing scandal for bad actions seek these certifications to mitigate the consequences; 2) *Non-state market-driven certifications*: trade certifications that guarantee a business is a “good guy” in their sector, which can help expand a company’s market share; 3) *Investor-driven certifications*: selling pro-social mutual funds (e.g., gender-oriented funds, conflict-sensitive funds) to consumers wishing to purchase products that align with their values.

2 CSR & ESG Frameworks

An issue raised in the interviews regarding building business cases was the role that CSR and environmental, social, and governance (ESG) frameworks might play in encouraging companies to embrace WPS. Such frameworks encourage businesses to operate according to principles and policies that make a positive impact on society and the environment. WPS-aligned action reduces reputational and compliance exposure, critical to any private company’s bottom line. However, the predominant view among interviewees is that, in the face of current political pressure, private sector businesses are reducing their commitment to CSR and ESG. Since CSR can be perceived as a liability, breaking down a WPS-

aligned initiative into more practical concepts, such as “corporate strategy,” “community engagement,” or “conflict prevention,” is more advantageous.

3 Supply Chain Governance

An important entry point mentioned in interviews was supply chain governance. There are regulations that focus on supply chains and address transparency and human rights. The recommendation: align the focus on identifying points to sectors where WPS can play a role, for example, with private sector entities working in the energy, water, food, or transportation sectors. Look to where the private sector is relevant. In markets in emerging economies, partnerships can be built and incentives given to ensure retention, pay, and rights for women working in supply chains.

This point led to a related observation by a financial expert regarding the four WPS pillars. In her view, the tendency has been to focus on the protection pillar, but reframing WPS in terms of participation will help the private sector. Women’s leadership is key, and highly-placed women both inside organizations and acting outside with external partners can be critical enablers of WPS engagement. The relief and recovery pillar however, was seen as an area in which private sector interests are not strong; they lack the expertise and knowledge, thus making it harder for companies to compete in that space.

Any business case should use case studies to demonstrate the effectiveness of incorporating WPS principles. To build incentives for private firms to work with WPS principles, it is necessary to understand the relationship between economic security, stability, and WPS. For example, one participant who worked on a consulting project in Jordan was tasked with finding economic solutions to help Syrian women refugees in the country. The argument presented to the Jordanian government was that building a financial instrument for refugees makes good business sense: it strengthens Jordan’s economy, adds to its gross domestic product (GDP), and increases stability, peace, and security. The firm was able to shift the narrative that “refugees were taking away our jobs” while providing economic benefits to the Jordanian government. Promoting women and giving them ownership and agency, in short, is good business and adds value to an economy.



Strategic Sustainability for the Private Sector

Without question, all interviewees emphasized the ongoing need for more women's leadership, with some declaring that the best business case is to advance women's leadership in their sector. Though separate from conversations around WPS, all acknowledged the negative consequences of the attacks on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) and the deleterious effect it will have for women's advancement in the private sector.

For one interviewee in the legal sector, diversity of perspectives is crucial not only for the firm and its clients but also in countering one's own limited perspectives and biases. Not having a diverse workforce creates blind spots and reduces the quality of legal advice given to clients. "Not all clients are white men," one interviewee noted, so firms "better have diverse representation so your clients feel comfortable." If a firm wants to expand its client base and business, it must have all the talent at the table.

On the other hand, the interviewee working at a med-tech company stated that her for-profit company has not attracted many women for several reasons: it's all about the bottom line in a male-dominated engineering culture. This environment is not attractive to many women, and some female employees contributed to its persistence by embracing the culture.

For those working in global companies, diversity is critical, since virtually every country and business needs a diverse workforce that speaks different languages, for example, when interacting with potential clients. One interviewee pointed out the need to be sensitive to what WPS means across different global regions and to allow people in those regions to define what gender equality means to them. Cases in point: In Europe, the focus might be on increasing women's representation on corporate boards, while in Asia, the focus is on ensuring women in the workforce have equal rights—and that women engaged in work in supply chains receive a fair wage.

One interviewee reported on a study in her organization showing that teams lacking diversity experienced a much higher turnover rate of 30% in their first year. The two most important variables that team members shared were their social background and the university they attended. When the organization focused on skills in building teams, breaking up the uniformity in background and university, none of the teams experienced any turnover. For management, the lesson was: "Don't use school as a skill."

Barriers & Incentives for the WPS Business Case

"There is a clear disconnect between awareness of WPS principles and their practical application to core business strategy."

Interview respondents identified traditional structural barriers as the most important obstacle to advancing WPS principles in the private sector. A major barrier for one interviewee was the lack of opportunities for promotion to higher management. Fighting deeply entrenched male cultures in private sector businesses where women remain a minority—technology and cyber firms, financial institutions, engineering consulting firms—continues to challenge the capacity of business leaders to consider the value-added impacts of WPS.

But another participant identified limited awareness of WPS as the most important barrier, and she viewed building awareness as the first step in engaging the private sector—and thus the need for a concerted awareness campaign to demonstrate its value to private sector actors. Discussions often focus on the negative effects of not implementing WPS rather than the positive impacts of WPS. Casting WPS as a business essential can change this by emphasizing the positive impacts of integrating WPS into corporate practices and strategies.

Other barriers cited were the lack of regulation and that WPS is “nice to have” until profitability and fiscal spending become tight. It is important that WPS be positioned as a business essential and financially profitable. However, not every corporation is persuaded that it has a role to play in WPS-related spaces, such as conflict prevention. This means business firms need concrete evidence to the contrary, both quantitative and anecdotal. Mining companies that found implementation of CSR more profitable (cited earlier) are one such example. The task is to make connections to case studies that may not be self-evident to business leaders (e.g., the relationship between stability and bride prices, as shown by Valerie Hudson).²

Expectations and ambition, combined with too short timelines, can be a barrier. A respondent serving as a consultant on a project tasked with increasing the number of women in leadership positions found that the client struggled to reach the initial 50% target. Readjusting to a more gradual framework to reach more realistic goals helped achieve them and delivered results for the company.

Fiscal initiatives such as tax credits, grants, or subsidized funding were also cited. Some multinational corporations favor bids that explicitly include WPS-related components. Integrating WPS into reputational strategies can benefit companies. Building corporate policies and practices that recruit, retain, and promote women of talent are also strong incentives. One interviewee called for greater transparency in promotion strategies. Still, public disclosure of promotion policies and other internal human resources policies, such as basic leave policies or pay transparency, remains relatively limited among U.S. companies. Here, the significant challenge of overturning structural barriers to advance WPS principles is unmistakable. Finally, in terms of risks to firms for engaging with WPS, respondents generally perceived them as low for companies themselves, given the advantages for private sector firms in creating and

implementing a business case that incorporates WPS principles.

However, risks, when noted, were focused on if the business interests of U.S. companies still committed to WPS principles in their business practices will be negatively impacted by the current political environment. The view was that the risk of seeking business abroad is lower and should be considered.

Partnerships to Encourage WPS Engagement

Interviewees were asked about leveraging partnerships to encourage business firms to engage with WPS. Interviewees stressed the need for firms to partner with NGOs and women’s organizations. Purposeful involvement in seeking multi-stakeholder partnerships—with NGOs, women’s organizations, foundations, professional associations, and other potential partners—creates real advantages for the business firms. The private sector has the convening power to bring diverse actors together, break down silos, and build new types of partnerships.

For example, one expert interviewed spoke of her work in a global engineering firm. The firm was accused of human rights violations by employing forced labor. She brought all sides to the table and engaged with NGOs to develop strategies to prevent forced labor practices in supply chains, which led to her initiating and leading a global response to modern slavery issues. Collective efforts thus bring distinct advantages. When companies partner with NGOs or climate organizations to develop common standards, they establish standards for how companies operate, which can give those companies a competitive edge—a potential incentive for businesses.

As one respondent stated, the corporate sector gets interested when “one of their own” becomes involved with an organization or group working on WPS. Corporate support flows when a connection is cultivated, not from its own initiative.

² Valerie M. Hudson and Hilary Matfess, “In Plain Sight: The Neglected Linkage between Brideprice and Violent Conflict,” *International Security*, Vol. 42, No. 1 (Summer 2017), pp. 7–40.

There are other access points for building connections between WPS and the private sector. As noted earlier, legal experts interviewed pointed out the potential advantages of approaching the ABA and its law centers, such as the International Rule of Law Center and the Women’s Law Center. The Association of Corporate Counsels is an active professional network of attorneys that is another possible partner.

Several interviewees recommended looking abroad for partnerships, since the U.S. is increasingly seen as vacating its role as a force for the rule of law and anti-corruption. Other countries are looking to maintain the space where WPS is a critical player. One interviewee asserted that companies remain eager to engage with organizations that demonstrate to their customers that they still take these issues seriously. “Whoever can offer a cost-conscious and practical solution will prevail.”

One respondent remarked that in the past, much of the focus on WPS has been on conflict and conflict-related sexual violence, issues that the private sector is not equipped to handle. A blended structure of private and public partnerships can make an impact, especially if the partnership aligns with a well-known, highly topical issue, such as climate change. The impact of climate change is something the private sector does grasp, and it is one of the largest threat multipliers to war and conflict. WPS is closely linked to climate resilience, and connecting them inside a business case can advance both.

Survey Questionnaire Findings

As part of this research project, the survey sought to understand:

- How private sector actors currently perceive WPS;
- What barriers prevent meaningful adoption by private sector firms; and
- What incentives could drive sustained engagement by the industry.

The overarching objective was to identify pathways for translating global WPS norms into practical tools that align with business priorities, particularly in complex and high-risk operating environments. Survey responses paralleled and reinforced many of the interview findings.

Respondent Profile

The survey received 21 anonymous responses, primarily from individuals with current or previous private sector experience. Respondents represented a diverse set of sectors, including:

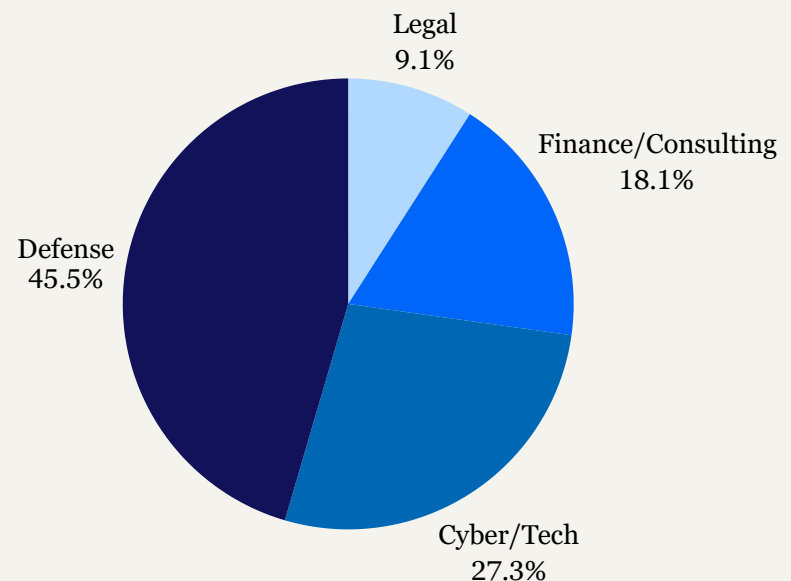
- Security and defense;
- Energy and extractives;
- Finance and investment;
- Consulting; and
- International development and NGO–industry partnerships.

This cross-sectoral representation ensured insights grounded in real-world operational contexts, rather than theoretical or purely normative perspectives.

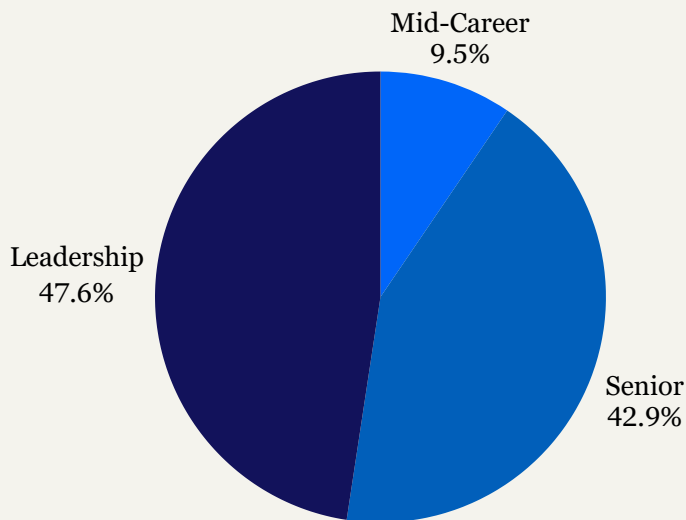


Based on surveys and interviews, many respondents were either extremely unfamiliar or very familiar with the WPS agenda and national action plans (NAPs).

Respondents by Private Sector Vertical



Respondents by Rank



Awareness vs. Practice

A central finding of the survey is a clear disconnect between awareness of WPS principles and practical application. Instead, the WPS agenda is often perceived as values-based or normative—important, but peripheral to core business strategy. For example, while most respondents demonstrated moderate to high familiarity with WPS concepts, far fewer viewed the WPS agenda as:

- A decision-making framework;
- A risk management tool; and
- A core operational or compliance standard.

WPS Relevance to Business

Despite limited implementation, respondents identified several areas where the WPS agenda is clearly relevant to private sector operations:

- Risk management and conflict sensitivity;
- ESG and reputational risk;
- Workforce resilience and inclusion;
- Community relations and social license to operate; and
- Operations in fragile and complex environments.

However, respondents emphasized that WPS principles are rarely embedded into core strategies, compliance systems, or performance metrics, limiting its impact.



The primary challenge is not private sector resistance to adopting the WPS principles, but rather a lack of translation into operationally relevant tools and frameworks.

Barriers to Private Sector Engagement

Survey responses revealed that structural barriers, rather than ideological opposition, are the primary obstacles to private-sector engagement with WPS. Key barriers include:

- The absence of standardized WPS frameworks or metrics;
- Lack of incentives tied to contracts, financing, or regulation; and
- Unclear internal ownership within firms (e.g., HR vs. compliance vs. leadership).

Additionally, WPS is often viewed as externally driven by governments or NGOs, rather than as a business-critical framework.

Incentives to Drive Engagement

Respondents consistently indicated that voluntary commitments alone are insufficient to drive meaningful uptake. Private sector engagement increases when WPS is linked to:

- Market access and contract eligibility;
- Risk mitigation and operational resilience;
- Investor and client expectations; and
- External benchmarking and validation.

Support for a WPS Certification Model

One of the strongest findings from the survey is broad support for an International Organization for Standardization (ISO) certification. Respondents expressed particular interest in certification models that:

- Align with existing ESG & compliance systems;
- Are scalable and adaptable across sectors;
- Provide external credibility and validation; and
- Reduce reputational and operational risk.

Certification was widely seen as a mechanism to move companies from commitment to implementation.

Strategic Opportunity

The survey confirms that the WPS community is uniquely positioned to play a catalytic role in advancing private sector engagement with the WPS agenda by:

- Translating WPS principles into business-relevant frameworks;
- Developing standards, benchmarks, or certification pathways;
- Providing applied training and advisory support; and
- Convening private-sector, investor, and policy stakeholders.

Next Steps

Based on the survey findings, we suggest exploring several next steps, including:

- Development of a private sector WPS framework;
- Piloting certification or benchmarking initiatives;
- Expanding training and advisory offerings; and
- Building strategic partnerships with donors, investors, and industry leaders.

Summary & Recommendations

The analysis of KIIs and survey results identified issues, gaps, and opportunities that provide important guidance in developing a research and implementation strategy to engage the private sector on the WPS agenda. Together, these insights, suggestions, and recommendations can be aligned with the report’s main findings:

<p>Closing the Knowledge Gap</p>	<p>The perceived disconnect in the private sector between general knowledge about WPS and its established benefits when integrated into core business strategies could be addressed in various ways:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customize public awareness campaigns for different niche sectors • Build partnerships between NGOs and women’s groups with private sector actors • Access the private sector through professional associations and networks, such as the ABA, ASIS International, Association of Corporate Counsel, and Women in Trade
<p>WPS is an Underutilized Tool</p>	<p>A close link must be established between building the political will and rationale to see WPS as a business essential and the tools that can implement the WPS agenda:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus resources on identifying sectors that are “ripe” for building a strategic plan of action, particularly newly emerging business sectors • Develop business case studies for distribution in these sectors where WPS is closely aligned with highly topical issues, such as pro bono work (legal), trust and safety (tech/cyber), OSINT (defense), and renewables (climate)

<p>Breaking Structural Barriers</p>	<p>Structural barriers are the strongest obstacle to advancing WPS principles, but a focused set of actions can work to mitigate their effect:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An “insider-outsider” approach that allies with women leaders with an interest in incorporating WPS in a company’s business strategy and its policies and practices such as anti-harassment policies, and recruitment and retention • Equally important are building talented and diverse pools of employees that can increase a firm’s client base and its business • Overcoming the problem of positioning WPS as a business essential that contributes to firm profitability requires programming that provides concrete evidence and case studies for approaching private sector firms—knowledge, tools, leadership to overcome preconceptions of WPS principles
<p>Identifying Incentives</p>	<p>A firm’s credibility and reputation can be enhanced by:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offering professional certification(s) for businesses on how to invest in WPS, such as a non-state market-driven certification that can help expand a company’s market share • Researching how a WPS component might be inserted into existing certification programs, or international standards via the ISO
<p>Building and Leveraging Partnerships</p>	<p>Constructing an approach to engage with the private sector on WPS requires multi-stakeholder partnerships:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A core need remains to seek cooperative arrangements and partnership facilitation between private firms and NGO/non-profit sector organizations focused on prominent topics in which WPS has a role to play • Rethinking traditional nodes of collaboration is a priority, especially in emerging business sectors that cross sectoral borders—technology, intelligence, cyber, risk management/mitigation, legal due diligence assessment in high-risk markets, and others

What support capabilities would help private sector organizations engage with WPS?

- Toolkits involving standardized frameworks for integrating WPS objectives into technology, cyber, and intelligence programs;
- Standards and certification programs for business firms incorporating WPS agenda principles;
- More robust and inclusive cyber norms;
- Improved trust in digital systems;
- Funding digital literacy;
- Cyber and physical security protocols for staff and beneficiaries;
- Training on WPS in ethical AI and privacy compliance; and
- Pamphlets and digital booklets shared on websites or existing marketing routes.

The qualitative data collected in the KIIs complemented and supported the quantitative data results from the survey, which are outlined above (see “Survey Questionnaire Findings”). The results show that incorporating the WPS agenda in the private sector requires increasing the visibility of its principles, and presenting a business case that provides both an evidence-based rationale and tools for private sector actors and organizations to utilize in their business strategies.

Appendix

Detailed Survey Responses: (Scan the QR Code)




Interview Protocols & Questionnaires: (Scan the QR Code)




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