



**WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY
UNDER A BIDEN-HARRIS
ADMINISTRATION (PART THREE:
RELIEF AND RECOVERY)**

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The following is the third in the three-part series on what the Biden-Harris administration means for the Women, Peace and Security agenda. For part one, click [here](#). For part two, click [here](#).

Content Notice: This article contains references to sexual assault and domestic violence.

The social and economic fallout of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic is negatively impacting women, with [a rise in women's unemployment](#) in part due to their overrepresentation in industries hardest hit by the pandemic. Moreover, according to recent UN reporting, lockdown measures introduced to prevent the spread of the virus [have contributed to an increase in global rates of domestic violence](#). The pandemic,

alongside new and evolving climate threats, uninterrupted conflict, and mass displacement, have cast a light on the gendered consequences of humanitarian emergencies. The Biden administration has acknowledged the need to safeguard women in such contexts with their "[Plan to Support Women During the Covid-19 Crisis](#)." Ensuring women's rights are protected during humanitarian crises is also fundamental to the fourth pillar of the [Women, Peace and Security \(WPS\) Agenda, Relief and Recovery](#). In this third and final installment of our series examining how this administration may influence the implementation of WPS in the Indo-Pacific, we consider how Biden and Harris could advance WPS Relief and Recovery in the region.

Overview of the Relief and Recovery Pillar

The WPS Agenda, as laid out in United Nations Security Council [Resolution 1325](#) (2000), recognizes the gendered impacts of conflict and affirms the importance of strengthening women's participation in peace processes. The Agenda rests on four pillars: *Participation, Prevention, Protection, and Relief and Recovery*. This article focuses on the last pillar, which calls for integrating women's needs into crisis response and recovery efforts.

This fourth WPS pillar is grounded in the understanding that instability stemming from conflict and climate change affects men and women differently. Conflicts and disasters often [exacerbate gender-based violence](#), which encompasses domestic violence, sexual assault, and sexual exploitation. Gender-based violence, particularly sexual violence, [is routinely perpetrated against women and girls](#) during armed conflict. In addition, humanitarian crises have the ability to [weaken societal structures](#) that protect women and girls. Humanitarian emergencies may also [impose significant barriers to women's wellbeing](#) by limiting opportunities for educational attainment and economic empowerment. The relief and recovery pillar [aims to lessen the severity of the gendered effects](#) of humanitarian emergencies by incorporating women's needs and voices into response plans. The pillar also emphasizes that [women's involvement in post-crisis](#)

[reconstruction contributes to](#) sustainable peace and durable stability.

Biden-Harris on the WPS Relief and Recovery Pillar

Through their domestic policies, Biden and Harris have demonstrated their commitment to protecting women affected by conflict, displacement, and climate change. In [Biden's plan for supporting women](#) during COVID-19, he pledges to expand government funding for gender-based violence crisis shelters in the US, including those serving displaced populations. He [issued an executive order](#) on Feb. 4, 2021 to upscale the number of asylum seekers admitted to the US. Women, children, individuals facing persecution as a consequence of their gender identity and/or sexual orientation, and survivors of gender-based violence [will be prioritized for admission](#).

Other linkages between the Biden-Harris administration and the WPS relief and recovery pillar can be found in the new administration's foreign policy plans. As part of [Biden's goal of restoring America](#) as a global leader and force for good, he has [promised to prioritize climate security](#) in US foreign policy. There are several ways climate change, as a threat multiplier, is likely to increase the risks of conflict in regions that lack political stability: emboldening cross-border natural resource competition; initiating mass migrations due to [deteriorating coasts, farmland, and clean water](#), as well as natural disasters such as floods and fires; and [disrupting financial markets](#) and food prices which lead ultimately to unemployment crises. Aside from the effects of climate change-induced conflict, women and girls in particular face other [direct and indirect climate-related risks](#). In the Indo-Pacific, these risks include direct threats in the face of floods and fires due to conservative gender norms that dictate restrictive clothing, physical movement, and withholding of medical help; increased responsibilities for farming, gathering fuel, and collecting water in the face of drought—responsibilities which limit women's economic opportunity; and rising pressures to give into [forced and child marriages](#) due to the [declining economic fortunes](#) of husbands, fathers, and brothers. Addressing climate-related instability in US foreign

policy is therefore essential to mitigate [the disproportionate harm it can cause](#) to women and girls. The new administration is also eager to protect and empower women through international engagement and peacebuilding. Biden and Harris [promise to amplify the voices of women leaders while working multilaterally](#) to develop COVID-19 recovery plans. They also [vow to support](#) the "[Safe from the Start Act](#)," a bill that ensures all US humanitarian assistance addresses gender-based violence.

The Status of the WPS Relief and Recovery Pillar in the Indo-Pacific

Violent unrest and climate change have directly and indirectly impacted women and girls in the Indo-Pacific. Women and girls in regional conflict zones [have been subjected to sexual violence](#) at the hands of contesting armed groups. Climate- and conflict-related instability has [generated mass displacement](#) throughout the region. Various factors, including overcrowded facilities and limited law enforcement, [worsen levels of gender-based violence](#) in displaced settings. Over [60% of adolescent girls](#) in Rohingya refugee settlements in Bangladesh reported hearing about or witnessing sexual violence. Moreover, instability [often disrupts livelihoods](#), [imposing additional barriers to](#) women's economic empowerment. Women living in unstable contexts may struggle to find employment or may be limited to [working in low-paid and low-skilled informal sector roles](#). In Mindanao, Southern Philippines, which is the site of a protracted conflict, [women's labor force participation is 15% lower](#) than other areas of the Philippines. In addition, [74% of women in Mindanao](#) are employed in the informal sector (compared to 40% of women nationally).

COVID-19 and WPS Relief and Recovery: The US and the Indo-Pacific

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic is exposing pre-existing gender inequalities. Women [are losing their jobs more readily](#) than men. The National Women's Law Center reported that [cumulatively there were 140,000 jobs lost in December](#); men gaining a net 16,000 jobs, and women losing 156,000. Rates of women's unemployment [were highest in the](#)

[hospitality sector](#), where women are overrepresented. Other factors contributing to women's unemployment include the uneven burden of increased childcare, with mothers in the US [three times more likely than fathers](#) to perform the majority of unpaid childcare during the pandemic. Women in the Indo-Pacific are also [facing higher levels of unemployment](#) than men. The UN [warned of a "shadow pandemic"](#) due to the sharp upward trend in global rates of domestic violence during lockdowns. The rise in domestic violence [has been attributed to](#) heightened stress, economic uncertainty, and growing social isolation. In the US, domestic violence reports [increased by 10%](#) from March through May 2020. Domestic violence hotlines in Singapore, Malaysia, India, and Fiji have also [reported a significant increase in call volumes](#) since the onset of the outbreak.

Next Steps on WPS Relief and Recovery in the Indo-Pacific

The Biden-Harris administration has introduced measures to accelerate the implementation of the WPS *Relief and Recovery* pillar both at home and abroad. Yet given the gendered challenges resulting from conflict, climate change, and displacement—and in light of the rise in women's unemployment and domestic violence during the COVID-19 pandemic—it is essential that the new administration work with governments around the Indo-Pacific to develop relief and recovery plans that address women's needs and seek to empower women in the long term. The new administration could also work with governments to ensure that women are given meaningful roles in the creation and implementation of relief and recovery. Women's long-term empowerment and their inclusion in post-crisis reconstruction will also help cultivate stability and prosperity. The global nature of the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on women provides the opportunity for the new administration to learn from approaches taken by governments across the Indo-Pacific. Biden and Harris could facilitate a cross-border exchange on best practices in managing the spike in women's unemployment, the surge in gender-based violence, and methods for rectifying power structures that reproduce patriarchal values and gender disparity. You can read our full analysis and

Relief and Recovery policy recommendations in our in-depth [Issues & Insights article](#).

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