

Navigating Networks

A Roadmap for the Creation and Operation of Women- led Peacebuilding Networks in

Central Asia, Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus

gnwp Global Network
of Women
Peacebuilders

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Background and Purpose

The following roadmap was developed as part of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe's (OSCE) project, "WIN for Women and Men – Strengthening Comprehensive Security through Innovating and Networking for Gender Equality." In the pursuit of advancing gender equality as a prerequisite for achieving and maintaining stable, prosperous and peaceful societies in the OSCE area, the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders (GNWP) led a regional initiative to strengthen women's peacebuilding and mediator networks across Central Asia, Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus (CAEESC). Based on the expertise and experience of junior and seasoned women peacebuilders from the region, "Navigating Networks" offers a regional strategy for the creation and operation of effective women-led peacebuilding networks in CAEESC.

This roadmap aims to share best practices and lessons learned with local Women, Peace and Security (WPS) actors in CAEESC to guide them in reinvigorating existing peacebuilding networks at the national and regional levels. It was prepared in response to

the call from local women and young women peacebuilders in CAEESC to understand the necessary elements for creating sustainable and effective peacebuilding networks. The roadmap is not a prescriptive process; it is meant as a tool for reflection for both current and emerging women's peacebuilding networks. It provides a valuable resource for these networks to consult as they navigate the journey toward effectively achieving their goals. Overall, this roadmap aims to empower women's peacebuilding networks to accelerate the promotion and implementation of the WPS agenda.

To identify the status of women-led peacebuilding networks in the region, GNWP conducted sub-regional mappings and consulted a diverse group of women peacebuilders from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Ukraine through several focus group discussions from 2023 to 2024. According to these women, peacebuilding networks are crucial spaces for local peacebuilders to gain information, skills and resources as

well as conduct advocacy on the WPS and Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agendas for their communities; however, few such networks meet the needs of peacebuilders. Many known networks across CAEESC have been dissolved, have stalled in their work, are not reaching the goals of their network or, such as in the case of inter-regional networks on WPS, simply do not exist. The reasons for the inefficiency of these WPS networks vary, including inconsistent and insufficient funding, competition for resources among civil society organizations, political and security challenges, fragmented efforts by network members and barriers to intergenerational and inclusive participation. “Navigating Networks” was created in recognition of the importance of women’s peacebuilding networks in the path to inclusive and sustainable peace and the call from women peacebuilders in CAEESC to rectify persisting ineffectiveness of these networks.¹

What is a peacebuilding network?

A peacebuilding network is a coalition of individuals and/or organizations from national, regional and/or global levels that through collective efforts seek to empower individuals with the knowledge, skills, opportunities and

advocacy initiatives needed to contribute to decision-making and policy for sustainable peace. A **gender-responsive and conflict-sensitive** peacebuilding network is a collaborative and inclusive network focused on promoting sustainable peace, empowering women’s leadership in decision-making on peace and security and addressing the unique challenges women face in conflict and post-conflict settings. Key to effective gender-responsive and conflict-sensitive peacebuilding is the understanding that peace cannot be defined as the absence of war but instead centered on human security and the presence of a “culture of peace.”² Such peacebuilding is rooted in equitable partnerships that leverage the unique strengths of all peace actors, resulting in more impactful responses to the complex and multidimensional challenges facing the world today.³ Therefore, peacebuilding networks should recognize and actively address the overlapping, intersectional barriers women in all their diversity face in accessing opportunities and participating in decision-making on peace and security. Such barriers may include age, economic, educational, ethnic, political, cultural, urban/rural and social inequalities that restrict women’s full, equal and meaningful engagement.

Advancements in WPS are not possible without women’s leadership in

1. These findings are based on GNWP’s three sub-regional mappings in Central Asia, Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus on existing regional networks, resources, and opportunities for women peacebuilders and mediators to advance their advocacy for Women, Peace and Security (WPS) resolutions’ implementation

and women’s meaningful participation in peace processes. The mappings were conducted with the support of the OSCE’s WIN Project.

2. A. Fal Dutra Santos. (2019). “Building and Sustaining Peace from the Ground Up: A Global Study of Civil Society and Local Women’s Perception of Sustaining Peace.” GNWP. Pg.

peacebuilding networks. By centering women's leadership and perspectives, **women-led peacebuilding networks** that are gender-responsive and conflict-sensitive contribute to more holistic and effective approaches to conflict resolution and peacebuilding while advancing gender equality and women's rights. The path to effective

and impactful women-led peacebuilding networks requires collaboration and coalitions, both formal and informal. The key elements of a successful women-led peacebuilding network are detailed throughout this roadmap.

What is an "effective network" to women peacebuilders from Central Asia, Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus?

At the June 2023 "Women's Networks WIN" regional conference in Istanbul, GNWP and the OSCE hosted local peacebuilders from CAEESC and asked them this question. Their responses can be seen in the below word cloud.

Coordination **Unity**
Transparent **Shared goals**
Cohesion **Solidarity**
Trust **Sustainable** **Impact**
Communication **Active**

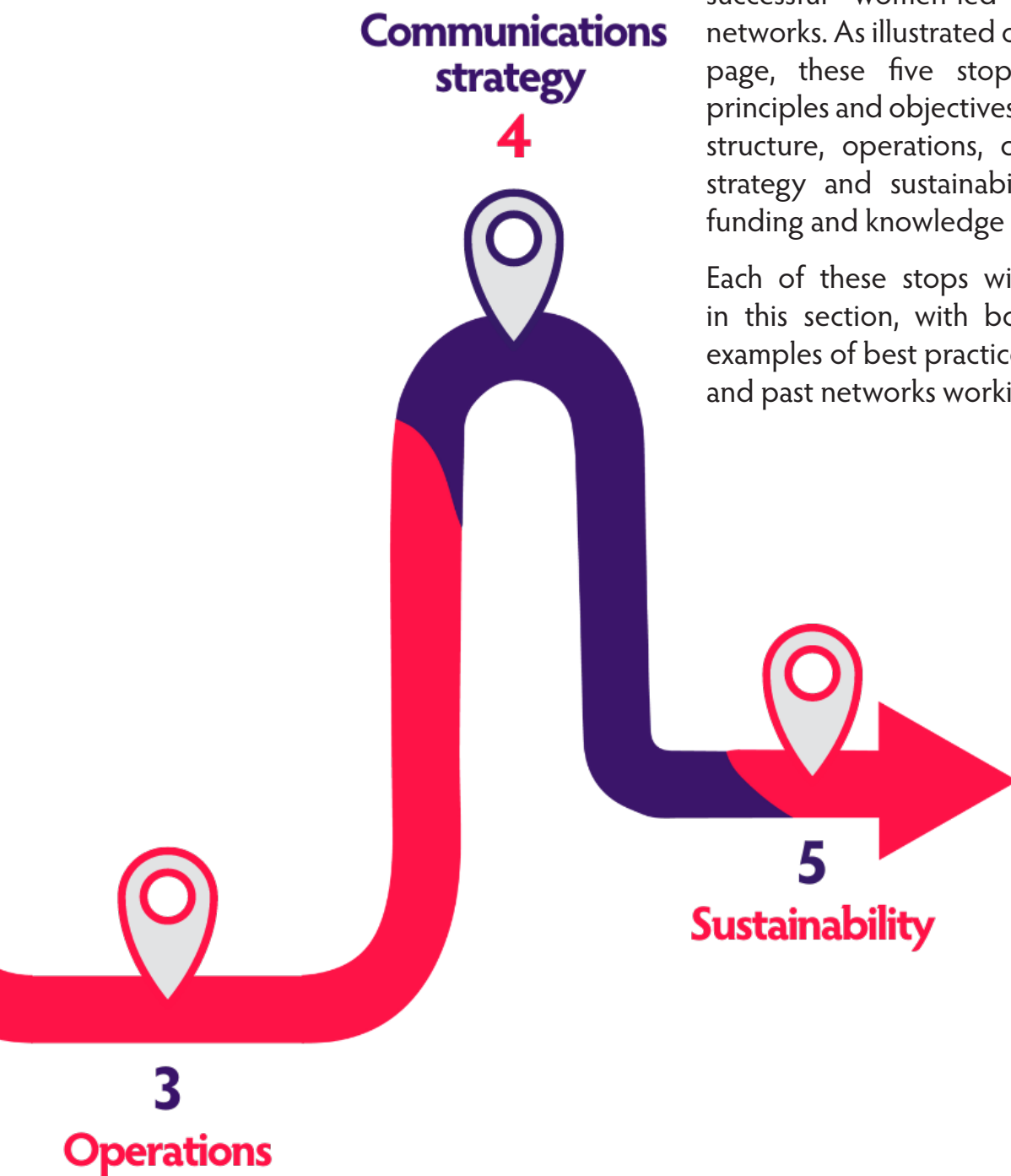
21. Available at: https://gnwp.org/wp-content/uploads/GNWPReport_24october_4web-1.pdf

3. United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security. (2016). "Human Security Handbook." United Nations. Pg. 8. Available at: <https://www.un.org/humansecurity/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/h2.pdf>

Key Routes Toward a Successful Women-Led Peacebuilding Network

This section of the roadmap explores key elements contributing to a peacebuilding network's success and sustainability. The elements were identified by an intergenerational, diverse group of women peacebuilders from the three regions, drawing on the expertise of women with decades of experience, as well as young women championing youth-led peacebuilding efforts. The roadmap below was crafted based on consultations through four virtual drafting sessions, a regional conference and GNWP's best practices. Over twenty-five local peacebuilders from CAEESC contributed to this roadmap.





There are five key steps on the road to successful women-led peacebuilding networks. As illustrated on the following page, these five steps are guiding principles and objectives, organizational structure, operations, communications strategy and sustainability related to funding and knowledge transfer.

Each of these steps will be explored in this section, with boxes containing examples of best practices from existing and past networks working in CAEESC.



Strategic Foundation

Values and Guiding Principles

Values and guiding principles were identified as the first critical element underpinning all network activities and actions. These principles should be crafted during the network's inception through a consensus-based approach involving every member and participant. Consensus-based decision-making can be facilitated through various tools and techniques, such as a needs assessment, problem analysis, member voting or others. Once established, the values and principles function as a compass, steering the network toward its objectives and guiding its activities throughout its existence. Periodic review and revision of these guiding principles can ensure the network responds to members' emerging needs around the ever-evolving peacebuilding situation across Eastern Europe, South Caucasus and Central Asia. This regular "upkeep" gains particular significance as the network expands and incorporates many new organizations or individuals. These reviews should be conducted using a consensus-based mechanism, which may be the same or different from the method employed in the initial establishment of values and guiding principles.

In the consensus-based process of crafting or revising these principles, ensuring

inclusivity and a safe environment for all network members is important. An **inclusive** process necessitates tools that ensure all voices are recognized, fostering a space where each perspective is not only heard but also valued. Each network is encouraged to formulate its own specific and contextual definition of inclusivity, specifically accommodating youth, young women, ethnic minorities, religious minorities, persons with disabilities, individuals from marginalized social groups and members of the LGBTI+ community.

This commitment to inclusivity is inherently linked to the **creation of a safe space** where diverse members feel at ease sharing a spectrum of viewpoints, confident that their opinions are acknowledged and appreciated. When determining guiding principles, network members should also aim to collectively determine procedural and operational principles, including the level of commitment required from individual or organizational members, the criteria for remaining a member and the process for leaving the network.

Collectively establishing values and guiding principles forms a foundational element for the success of networks, especially those dedicated to peacebuilding: **trust**. Fostering trust among members is essential and requires continuous and unwavering commitment. Trust isn't merely built; it's nurtured. Network members should engage in open discussions to identify structural sources of mistrust within peacebuilding spaces. It is important to acknowledge that, in many cases,

distrust among individuals stems from external factors. For example, competition among peacebuilding actors results from the limited global donor financing for peacebuilding, and this same competition can deteriorate trust

amongst peacebuilding actors. Network members may wish to consider specific principles to foster trust, including principles based on transparency and non-competition.

Box 1: Examples of Guiding Principles

Women peacebuilders from the regions have identified several values and guiding principles which, in their experience, have contributed to the success of previous WPS and peacebuilding networks:

- **Responsibility:** Network members are responsible for upholding commitments made in order to achieve the network's objectives.
- **Inclusivity:** The network should institute measures to ensure that diverse voices are included and taken into account throughout the network's operations. Inclusivity incorporates diversity, equality and respect.
- **Solidarity:** Successes and challenges should be shared within and between networks.
- **Accountability and transparency:** As part of civil society, the network should be accountable to its members and especially to the communities in which it works.
- **Conflict sensitivity:** The network should employ a conflict-sensitive and "do no harm" approach in its operations and communications.
- **Reflexivity:** The network should reflect and examine the lessons it is learning to share with others who may face similar challenges in the future.
- **Reciprocity:** The relationship between the network and its members must be reciprocal, particularly in terms of responsibility and accountability.
- **Proportionality:** The network should aim to balance the "benefits" or added value of participating in the network, with the contributions made by members. This is particularly important in the context of women's (largely unpaid) contributions to peacebuilding networks.
- **Achieving Peace by peaceful means:** The network and its members should commit to the fullest possible extent to prevent violent conflicts and contribute to conflict-positive transformation and resolution by peaceful means.

Good Practice from Existing Networks:

The Network of Women Mediators of the South Caucasus unites professional women peacebuilders dedicated to trust-building through mediation and dialogue. Grounded in **trust, openness and democratic principles**, it is the first network in the region, with members committed to fulfilling its mandate for effective conflict prevention and lasting peace.

Ultimate Goal and Objectives

Once the network's guiding principles have been determined, they can serve as a foundation for determining its mission, vision and goals. Articulating the network's **ultimate goal** ensures that all networks are collectively working towards the same outcome. It can be helpful to involve key stakeholders, including network members and partners, in discussions to gather diverse perspectives and build consensus. This inclusive approach ensures that the ultimate goal reflects the collective vision and needs of all involved, fostering commitment and alignment. Networks are composed of individuals and/or organizations with diverse experiences, each contributing a wealth of insights

in the realm of peacebuilding. Network members can collaboratively identify key issues by pinpointing potential shared challenges — whether currently prevalent (such as communication hurdles for regional networks spanning multiple countries) or anticipated in the future (such as challenges arising from new or escalated conflicts). Based on these shared challenges, networks can formulate effective strategies to respond to them.

A well-articulated goal should be easily understood by everyone in the network and should clearly outline the desired long-term outcome. Define the ultimate goal in clear and specific terms, avoiding vague or broad statements. This clarity helps in guiding the network's strategic

BOX 2: Network objectives

Based on decades of collective experience in peacebuilding networks and organizations in the three regions, women peacebuilders have shared a list of potential objectives an emerging peacebuilding network can consider. These are general objectives with an example of how they can be made SMART. The examples below need to be tailored to each network.

- **Objective 1: Sharing Best Practices and Lessons Learned** To facilitate the sharing of good practices, lessons learned and challenges encountered in the field of peacebuilding, with a particular focus on cross-regional experiences, through quarterly webinars with network members.
- **Objective 2: Strengthening Connections for Peacebuilding** To foster connections and facilitate dialogue among civil society actors — as well as between civil society, international organizations and government institutions — to enhance multi-stakeholder cooperation in the pursuit of peacebuilding goals by holding biannual regional conferences and establishing a collaborative online platform by the end of the year.
- **Objective 3: Women's Peacebuilding Visibility** To increase and sustain the visibility of women's contributions to peacebuilding and to amplify women's voices in the realms of peace and security by launching a social media campaign and publishing monthly profiles of women peacebuilders in a dedicated newsletter within the next six months.

planning and decision-making processes. Setting goals before diving into specific objectives ensures that the network has a clear, overarching direction.

With the ultimate goals clearly defined, the next step is to establish specific, measurable **objectives** that will guide the network's activities and ensure progress toward these overarching aims. An objective refers to a specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound (SMART) goal or outcome the network aims to accomplish. Objectives help guide the network's efforts and resources toward the desired impact and serve as benchmarks for evaluating its success. These objectives can be identified through a consensus-based approach, similar to how the guiding principles were

established. Networks are encouraged to develop a strategy for achieving their objectives, serving as the foundation for monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to gauge progress toward them. Members may choose to establish distinct timelines for each objective or, alternatively, periodically review and revise objectives, such as annually.

4. UNIFEM. (2003). Women for Conflict Prevention and Peace Building in the Southern Caucasus: A UNIFEM Initiative.

5. In Azerbaijan, "Coalition 1325" and "the National Network of IDP Women" were established. In Armenia, a "Peace Coalition" was established. In Georgia, "The Unity of Women for Peace Network" was established.

6. UNIFEM. (2005). UNIFEM calls for stronger international support for women's participation in peace processes.

- **Objective 4: Advancing Women's Participation** To actively collaborate on advancing women's meaningful participation in conflict resolution and humanitarian action, fostering inclusivity and gender equality by creating a mentorship program over the next year.
- **Objective 5: Transformative Approaches** To ensure that all efforts advancing the WPS and YPS agendas, as well as humanitarian action, are sustainable, systemic, transformative and contribute to the well-being of all individuals involved by integrating gender-sensitive indicators into all project evaluations and conducting annual reviews of progress towards these goals.

Best practices from past networks:

From 2001 to 2006, UN Women (formerly UNIFEM) established local women peacebuilder networks in Eastern Europe, South Caucasus, and Central Asia under the project "Women for Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding in the Southern Caucasus." This led to the creation of national coalitions⁴ and the formation of the South Caucasus Regional Coalition "Women for Peace."⁵ The primary objective was to foster a "culture of peace"⁶ through cross-border dialogues, advocacy, and educational initiatives, which they incarnated by crafting regional advocacy documents, engaging the media sector, and developing learning tools and training manuals. Despite success, the coalition's activities became irregular after a funding suspension in 2006.



Organizational Structure

A network's success and sustainability heavily depend on an effective organizational structure. The structure should balance practicality and inclusivity, meeting the network's objectives while avoiding excessive centralization of power and control. To ensure the efficient operation of a network, these structures should be outlined in an internal document that is binding on all network members. This document can be in the form of a **charter, constitution** or set of **bylaws**.⁷ Bylaws should be participatory, designed and reviewed regularly — for example, during annual general meetings. Additionally, the document should encompass procedures for amending bylaws and provisions addressing the dissolution of the network.

The bylaws should also outline the network's **governance structure**. A governance structure defines the relationships and interactions among various stakeholders — such as the executives, the secretariat, board members, network members and other relevant parties — and establishes decision-making procedures. Key to a network's governance structure is clarity about the roles of members, including specifying the nature of membership, whether organizational or individual. In

many civil society organizations and non-governmental networks, a supervisory board plays a pivotal role in governance. Typically composed of independent individuals with diverse backgrounds, the supervisory board is responsible for overseeing the organization's activities, providing strategic guidance and ensuring compliance with legal and ethical standards.

A suggested best practice from local women peacebuilders is establishing a **secretariat** tasked with the organization's overall management. The secretariat can be elected regularly to allow different network members to be involved in the organization's management. Network members should also specify whether the secretariat holds an operational role (for the day-to-day management of the network) or if secretariat members also hold a leadership position (and can make decisions on behalf of the network with some degree of autonomy). If the network members agree to elect a secretariat, the election procedure should be transparent and well-documented, and the terms of reference for each secretariat member should be clearly defined. Additionally, it is worth noting that in some networks, there exists a practice where secretariat members can be hired from outside the network, contributing to diverse perspectives and skill sets. Determining the scope of the secretariat's role in the early stages of network development is a good

7. While any of these terms are acceptable, this document will use "bylines" moving forward for sake of brevity.

Box 3: Membership

- **Broad Sectorial Representation:** Consider a diverse membership that spans various sectors, including civil society, academics or research institutions, with a focus on conflict prevention and peacebuilding and beyond.
- **Diversity and Intersectionality:** Emphasize diversity and intersectionality in recruitment, particularly reaching out to historically marginalized individuals and communities. These groups may include women, youth, ethnic minorities, religious minorities, organizations of people with disabilities, individuals from marginalized social groups, members of the LGBTI+ community, and more. Ensuring a wide range of expertise and perspectives strengthens the network's capacity to address complex issues and can improve its credibility and impact.
- **Inclusion of Young Women:** Prioritize the inclusion of young women, enhancing the network's intergenerational dynamic and capturing the intersections of WPS and YPS.
- **Expertise Organization:** Develop mechanisms to organize members based on their experience and expertise, creating an expert pool for collaborative support.
- **Formalizing Commitments:** Consider formalizing members' commitments through a written application or portal, ensuring a clear dedication to supporting the network.
- **Flexible Contributions:** Allow flexibility in contributions, encompassing financial, programmatic, advocacy, or policy-based support.
- **Membership Recognition:** Explore formal evidence of membership, such as business cards or certificates, to enhance both the network's and its members' reputations.

Best Practices from Existing Networks:

The **Global Network of Women Peacebuilders (GNWP)** unites over 100 women and youth peacebuilding organizations from 50 countries affected by crises and conflicts. This diverse membership facilitates direct collaboration with women in local communities, including in Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus and Central Asia. GNWP supports its members by enhancing project implementation, sharing experiences, fostering collaboration and maximizing collective impact. Some members may become implementing partners or consultants based on regional activities, offering them access to updates, capacity-enhancing opportunities and input into organizational projects. **A key tenet of GNWP's membership model is to celebrate and amplify the identity of each member organization, ensuring that members are not overshadowed by the network secretariat. Rather, each member is a vital piece of the network puzzle, making it whole.**

Box 3: Membership (Continued)

GNWP is governed by a Board of Directors overseeing strategic direction, supporting the CEO, and ensuring mission fulfillment. The management team, led by the CEO, includes Program Coordinators and a Chief Financial Officer, responsible for program implementation, reporting and evaluation. The Program Coordinators supervise Program Officers and other staff. An International Advisory Council (IAC) comprises thought leaders advising GNWP on planning and program development, leveraging their expertise in various thematic areas, including gender equality, peacebuilding, and sustainable development.

approach for preventing the emergence of future conflict among members.

While the secretariat is tasked with managing the overall operations of the network, individual **working groups** can be established to work on particular issues, including thematic or geographic issue areas. The work of each working group should be aligned with the network's current objectives. While working groups can work independently of one another, the network should create a mechanism for regular communication among them to foster collaboration and address issues that fall at the intersection of multiple work themes. This regular communication is also essential to ensure that the work of each working group is continuously feeding into the broader work of the network. Furthermore, the activities of working groups should align with the provisions outlined in the network's charter or bylaws.

Provisions for conflict resolution should be included in the bylaws when determining the management and organizational structure. Network members can consider potential areas

of future conflict (for example, overlaps in jurisdictions or areas of work among network members or disagreements over strategies, objectives, or network activities) and determine a specific conflict-resolution process that they can access. This process should be aligned with the networks' values and guiding principles.

The bylaws should also determine the **membership process and structure** of the network. The network should consider whether membership is open to individuals, organizations or both. The bylaws can outline a formal membership process, including membership application and any requirements, like expressed alignment with the network's key principles or mission, to join the network. Alternatively, an informal membership structure may be adopted to maximize the accessibility and inclusivity of the organization.

The bylaws should also explain whether membership in the network is free, associated with a small fee or entails a required amount of fundraising or work hours for the network. Many networks

use membership fees to finance their activities. Based on past experience with networks in the regions of interest, drafting team members recommend not including officials or elected representatives as network members. This is particularly important for avoiding issues of conflict of interest or duty. Alternatively, the network can create specific mechanisms for regular communication and collaboration with these actors instead. Section IV of the Roadmap includes further information on such external collaboration opportunities.

Networks may also wish to include general provisions for the network's operations, including the frequency and modality of all-member gatherings and general guidelines for network activities. In developing these provisions, care should be taken to avoid creating too rigid or inefficient structures, which may be difficult to revise or alter once established.



Operations

The operations of the network should be aligned with and based on the network's objectives. This section will outline several potential areas of work, noting that the applicability of each may vary among networks and at different points in time.

Capacity-enhancing opportunities for members are one of the most common types of activity carried out by such networks. Network members or external experts can carry out capacity-enhancing programs. Networks may wish to create

a mechanism for surveying members about their needs and interests, including mapping needs and capacities, and introduce targeted capacity-enhancing activities.

Other network activities, particularly those carried out by the working groups, may wish to focus on specific issues. For these activities, care should be taken to avoid the creation of silos in the network's work and to foster **multidisciplinary collaboration**. Organizations and members should have the opportunity to work on issues that may fall outside of their area of expertise or organizational focus. This will serve as an opportunity for skills and knowledge development of members, and strengthen the implementation of activities, which will benefit from the inclusion of diverse

Box 4: Capacity-enhancing Ideas for a Peacebuilding Network

Organizational and Professional Skills Development

- English and foreign-language training
- Internal communication
- Data collection and analysis training
- Accounting and financial management courses
- Professionalism and engagement with formal stakeholders
- Leadership training
- Fundraising, grant proposal writing and advocacy
- Cybersecurity and online safety

Conflict and Crisis Management Skills Development

- Context and conflict analysis
- Digital communications for peace
- Impact assessment, monitoring and evaluation
- Emergency and crisis response, including psychosocial first aid
- National Action Plan for WPS development and Localization
- Counter-extremism, mediation and negotiation
- Early warning systems, risk management and protection

viewpoints and skill sets.

Many issues within the purview of peacebuilding work will similarly require **cross-regional collaboration**. Multinational and regional networks should consider how the network's activities can be inclusive and accessible to members from different countries and regions, and address their diverse needs and interests. Cross-regional collaboration can be ensured in different ways, for example, by ensuring equal representation of participating countries in the governing bodies, fostering a more balanced and inclusive decision-making process.

To ensure the success and sustainability of the network's activities, efforts should be dedicated to **risk identification and mitigation**. This includes risks

associated with ongoing conflicts and crises, and changing conflict dynamics. Risk identification and mitigation can be integrated as an element of each network activity, or occur as a separate and ongoing function of the network. Drafting team members suggest conducting a risk assessment of the network operations annually.

The network may also wish to partner its activities with advocacy initiatives that are aligned with the network objectives. Advocacy can be oriented at national governments or regional or international bodies. In many cases, peacebuilding networks serve as a critical avenue for bringing together various peacebuilding actors to create a unified and stronger advocacy approach to a particular issue. The network and its members should

Best Practices from Existing Networks:

"MOZHU" (ICAN network) is a national network in Ukraine with an overall goal of eliminating the barriers that hinder the full participation of women in all matters of peace and security. To ensure the capacity building of its members they elaborated the Training Needs Analysis (TNA) document, disseminated with its members and based on the top priority needs they started to provide four different types of courses: English Language, Accounting, Proposal Writing and Advocacy Campaign Planning courses.

GNWP, in collaboration with local consultants across Central Asia, Eastern Europe and South Caucasus under the OSCE WIN project, conducted targeted capacity-enhancing trainings for regional mediators and peacebuilders. Tailored to the results of pre-training surveys, these sessions addressed specific issues such as gender-security intersections and supporting survivors of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence in Eastern Europe, sustainable networking and social media advocacy in Central Asia, and regional cooperation and opportunity identification in the South Caucasus, including collaboration with media, international organizations, and donors.

determine whether the network aims to amplify and support the existing advocacy efforts of its members or pursue its own advocacy efforts as a network entity. If aligned with its objectives, networks may also wish to integrate into more formalized civil society advocacy

processes, including consultations for creating National Action Plans (NAPs) or Regional Action Plans on Women, Peace and Security (WPS). In this way, networks can push for and support the adoption, implementation, budgeting, monitoring and evaluation of the NAP.

Box 5: Value of Cross-Regional Collaboration

Women peacebuilders from the regions have identified several values and guiding principles which, in their experience, have contributed to the success of previous WPS and peacebuilding networks:

- **Sharing common challenges and lessons learned across diverse local and national contexts:** Members have access to solidarity and support good practices and successful resolutions to challenges from a much wider pool of experience.
- **Increased status, visibility and authority for the network:** Based on representing a wider and more diverse array of members, the network can present an authoritative front when engaging with regional and international multilateral actors and governments, which can in turn benefit all member organizations, and civil society in the region more broadly.
- **Increased visibility for women peacebuilders and their expertise:** Women peacebuilders and their organizations will gain greater visibility within and outside their region of operation, and their expertise will be better recognized.
- **Improved ability to synchronize activities across regions:** Members of cross-regional networks can coordinate and synchronize activities across regions to increase the collective impact of particular approaches or programs.

Best Practices from Existing Networks:

The Women's Peace Dialogue Platform, the only known regional WPS network covering all three regions of Central Asia, Eastern Europe, and the South Caucasus originated in 2015 as a Ukraine-Russia bilateral initiative. The platform expanded in its second year to include ten countries across Eastern and Southern Europe and Central Asia, allowing it to address multiple conflict contexts and threats. Although unsuccessful in pushing for the OSCE Regional National Action Plan (NAP) on 1325, the platform developed a Regional Action Plan for UN Security Council Resolution implementation, fostering regional coordination.



IV

Communications Strategy

Effective communication is essential to the success of any network or movement. One of the first operational documents a network should create is a shared commitment to the network's internal and external communications, which can be outlined in a short document known as a **communication strategy**. Networks may further wish to create a communication committee or team composed of members that will manage and facilitate the network's communication needs.

The **internal communications** of the network should be based on the network bylaws, and aim to facilitate connection and collaboration among the network members. Networks should consider the frequency of in-person and virtual internal engagements, and establish a shared medium for communication (for example, virtual platforms like WhatsApp or Slack). It is crucial to choose a virtual platform that is freely accessible to all participating countries and safe for all members. When determining the internal communication approach, the network should keep in mind the accessibility and security of its members.

The network should also consider its **external communication** and the degree of engagement with external stakeholders. These stakeholders include natio-

nal and foreign governments, international or regional organizations, and other networks and platforms. The success of a network's advocacy lies in the strength of its external communications. When crafting joint advocacy messages, the communications team should facilitate a process that ensures the collective voice of the network is heard and that its advocacy efforts reach and convince decision-makers and policy-makers. By involving all network members and aligning communications with the network's goals and objectives, the network can enhance its influence and drive meaningful change in peacebuilding initiatives.

In its inception, the network should determine how communication and relationship-building with these external stakeholders will contribute to achieving the network objectives. Should a communication body be established within the network, it should be responsible for managing the network's external image, including management of its social media presence and serve as the network's first point of contact (for example, through a centralized network email). As with various other components explored in this Roadmap, networks may benefit from creating a process for regularly reviewing external relations and communications, and ensuring that they remain strategic and aligned with the network objectives. It is crucial to emphasize that member organizations within the network maintain autonomy in communication matters, allowing for diverse perspectives and opinions to be expressed, even in cases where they differ from the network's collective stance on certain issues.

Global Advocacy Spaces on WPS

Media and communication campaigns during global advocacy periods are a powerful way to:

- Raise awareness and knowledge of WPS issues
- Demand greater accountability from governments, multilateral and regional organizations and fellow civil society actors to honor their commitments to the Beijing Platform for Action and their obligations under UN Security Council Resolutions on WPS.
- Make your advocacy agenda and recommendations visible to all WPS stakeholders
- Transform the depiction of women in conflict settings from victims to peacebuilders, decision-makers and agents of change.
- Expand your network to other like-minded organizations and activists
- Touch and motivate a broader base of potential supporters and donors

The **Anniversaries of the adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325** on Women, Peace and Security serve as crucial advocacy spaces, marking milestones in the global commitment to addressing the impact of conflict on women and promoting their meaningful participation in peace processes. The events serve as occasions to raise public awareness about the importance of women's involvement in peace and security. Campaigns, events and media coverage during these periods contribute to educating the public, fostering support and advocating for continued efforts to address gender-specific impacts of conflict.

The **Commission on the Status of Women (CSW)** event is a global advocacy space hosted annually by the United Nations. At its core, CSW is a platform for robust policy discussions where member states present achievements, challenges and commitments related to women's rights. The event significantly contributes to shaping the global agenda on women's issues, reviewing progress on established goals and identifying emerging challenges to influence future priorities and actions. CSW is a hub for networking and collaboration, fostering partnerships among governments, NGOs, activists and experts. For guidance on how to meaningfully engage at CSW, see GNWP's ["Our Voice Makes a Difference: A Civil Society Guide to Advocacy on Women, Peace and Security."](#)

The annual **16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence** movement is an international campaign that runs November 25 — the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women — to December 10 — International Human Rights Day. This campaign aims to raise awareness about gender-based violence, mobilize efforts to end violence against women and promote gender equality. The campaign's duration and alignment with significant international days ensure maximum visibility on a global scale. The concentrated 16-day period creates a sense of urgency and focus, encouraging individuals, organizations and governments to intensify their efforts and commitments during this specific timeframe. The campaign provides an opportune moment for advocates to push for policy changes and legal reforms addressing gender-based violence.

The above advocacy periods are platforms dedicated to engaging global gender equality and WPS, however, these are cross-cutting issues that can — and should — be raised in advocacy spaces that are not specifically focused on WPS.

Box 6: Develop Advocacy Campaigns

- 1. Get everyone in your network on board:** Engage network members, secretariat staff, volunteers, board members, like-minded networks and organizations. Leverage existing relationships within the network to gain access to decision-makers and policy-makers. Personal connections can be instrumental in ensuring that your messages are heard.
- 2. Determine your advocacy objective:** Organize workshops and consultations with all network members to brainstorm and draft joint messages. These sessions should encourage diverse perspectives, foster a sense of ownership among members and ensure the messages are aligned with the overarching goals and objectives of the network.
- 3. Analyze your target audience:** Conduct an analysis to identify the key decision-makers and policy-makers relevant to your advocacy goals. Understand their interests, priorities and preferred communication channels.
- 4. Develop an engaging and convincing message:** Develop clear, concise and compelling messages tailored to the identified decision-makers and policy-makers. Utilize compelling storytelling supported by data and evidence. Use language and formats that resonate with them.
- 5. Continue to engage and monitor:** Maintain regular communication with decision-makers and policy-makers by providing updates on the network's activities, progress and successes. Continuously monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of your communication strategies. Use this data to refine and improve future campaigns.

Best Practices from Existing Networks:

Young Peacebuilders Ukraine's advocacy and media campaign successfully amplified young women's voices, shedding light on their experiences during times of war and challenging gender norms. The initiative, supported by Internews Ukraine and UN Women Ukraine, showcased leadership stories, such as Marta Kovalets, who provides free legal consultations. The conference on "Localizing the Women, Peace and Security Agenda in Ukraine using a youth lens" further raised awareness of young women's crucial role in recovery and peacebuilding. Overall, Young Peacebuilders Ukraine's efforts serve as a commendable advocacy practice for empowering and highlighting the contributions of young women in conflict-affected regions.

In 2022, the **Ensan Diamond** association in Kyrgyzstan ran a successful advocacy campaign supporting peace initiatives in the Ak-Sai, Batken border village. Their efforts garnered support from the local leadership and deputies, leading to the endorsement of the campaign's goals. In October 2023, they organized the "Women's Participation: A Guarantee of Peace and Stability" forum, supported by the OSCE, with 58 participants. The forum resulted in a resolution that forms the basis for an upcoming advocacy message, illustrating the practical impact of their advocacy work on local governance and community safety.

When preparing the network's communication strategy, the network may also wish to select a specific visual identity, including the network logo and color palette, that should be included in a brand kit available to all members. The communications strategy should outline how and when members should use the network's visual identity to present a unified and professional external image of the network and its members.





Sustainability Funding and Knowledge Transfer

The full implementation of the WPS agenda hinges on the positive impacts yielded by women-led peacebuilding networks. However, these impacts can only be achieved if these networks have the capacity to adequately and consistently sustain their activities. Many networks in the region that were initially successful were ultimately unable to continue their work due to a lack of sustainable funding and “gatekeeping” of knowledge and experience among members. Women peacebuilders from the South Caucasus lament several networks that had to suspend their work after funding was discontinued, including the “Working Together in the Caucasus” Network that was supported by the US Department of State⁸ and the regional coalition “Women for Peace” supported by UNIFEM. Both networks were eventually dissolved after financial support ended, although some network activities continued with irregularity

and members continued their own work without the support of the network.

Women peacebuilders around the world consider insufficient funding as a key barrier to their peacebuilding work.⁹ In 2021, bilateral aid dedicated to gender equality decreased for the first time after almost a decade of steady increase with only 0.2 per cent of that funding going to women’s organizations in conflict- and crisis-affected countries.^{10, 11} Women-led peacebuilder and mediator networks across Central Asia, Eastern Europe and South Caucasus are no exception to these barriers. To increase financial resilience, networks benefit from aligning the scope of their objectives and activities with the availability of resources at the network’s inception. Such resources include individual members’ financial contributions (see Membership section). Networks should also consider whether members are interested in pursuing **external funding sources** to sustain the network and its activities. External funding can be obtained through applications for grants for specific projects and activities or grants to support the overall operations of the network. Such fundraising requires a dedicated team of members who coordinate submitting proposals (see Box 8 for best practices). The network can also consider providing

8. Institute for Democracy in Eastern Europe. Working Together—Networking Women in the Caucasus An IDEE Program for Women Leaders in Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia 1999–2002. Retrieved from: <https://idee.org/wic.html>.

9. Global Network of Women Peacebuilders. (2020). Building peace from the grassroots: Learning from women peacebuilders to advance the WPS agenda. Retrieved from: <https://gnwp.org/amplifying-voices-generating-ownership/>

10. OECD Creditor Reporting System database. (2023). Bilateral aid in support of gender equality and women’s rights in fragile states. Retrieved from: <https://stats.oecd.org/>

11. Secretary-General of the United Nations. (2020). Women and peace and security: Report of the Secretary-General. Retrieved from: https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_2020_946.pdf

BOX 8: Fundraising and Sustainability

Women peacebuilders from Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus and Central Asia have shared some tips on fundraising for emerging peacebuilding networks to keep in mind.

- Where possible, streamline fundraising efforts and establish a dedicated fundraising working group or committee within the network to create a fundraising strategy or plan.
- Be mindful of relying on unpaid labor and volunteers, considering the network's core principles to prevent member exploitation or burnout.
- Focus on 'larger' donors and grants as the first fundraising initiative, in order to effectively launch the work of the network.
- In addition to fundraising for the network, provide fundraising support to member organizations, particularly smaller organizations or those that have not yet established strong relationships with donors.
- Utilize the cross-regional nature of the network to adapt to fundraising trends and support organizations in different regions.
- Establish monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning (MEAL) reporting mechanisms to collect data and demonstrate credible results. If a network can demonstrate results, it is also more likely to receive funding in the future.
- Collect feedback and recommendations for donors and funders, as well as intermediary organizations, and establish strong channels to share this feedback regularly.
- Raise awareness about legislation that may potentially limit the availability of funding or financial flows and liaise with government partners to ensure women peacebuilding networks will not be affected.

Best Practices from Existing Networks:

To see civil society recommendations to donors and governments regarding funding for local women peacebuilders, see the joint publication ["Fund Us Like You Want Us to Win: Feminist Solutions for more Impactful Financing for Peacebuilding."](#)

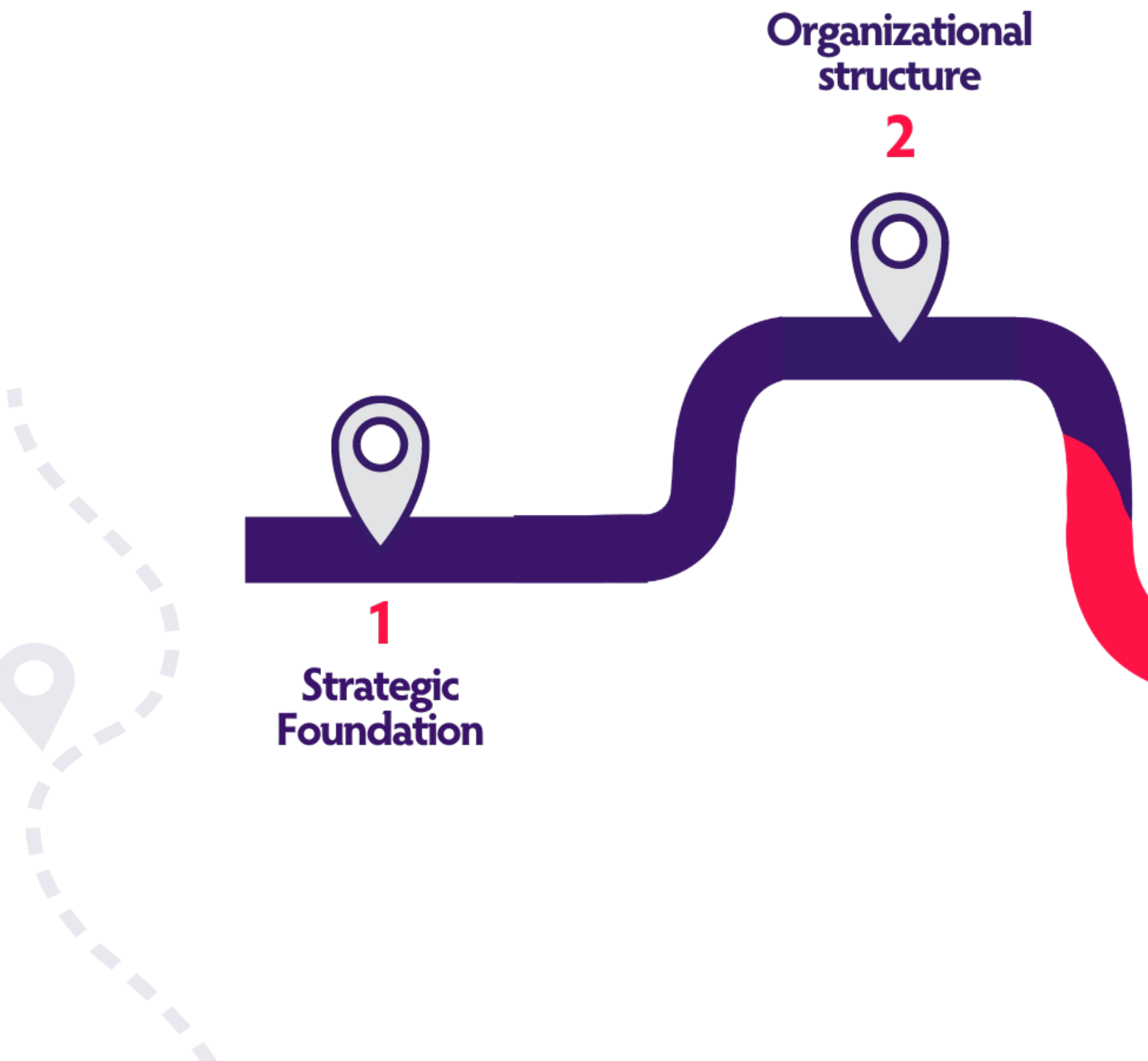
external services, including expert consultations or research, drawing on the skills and expertise of network members to raise funds.

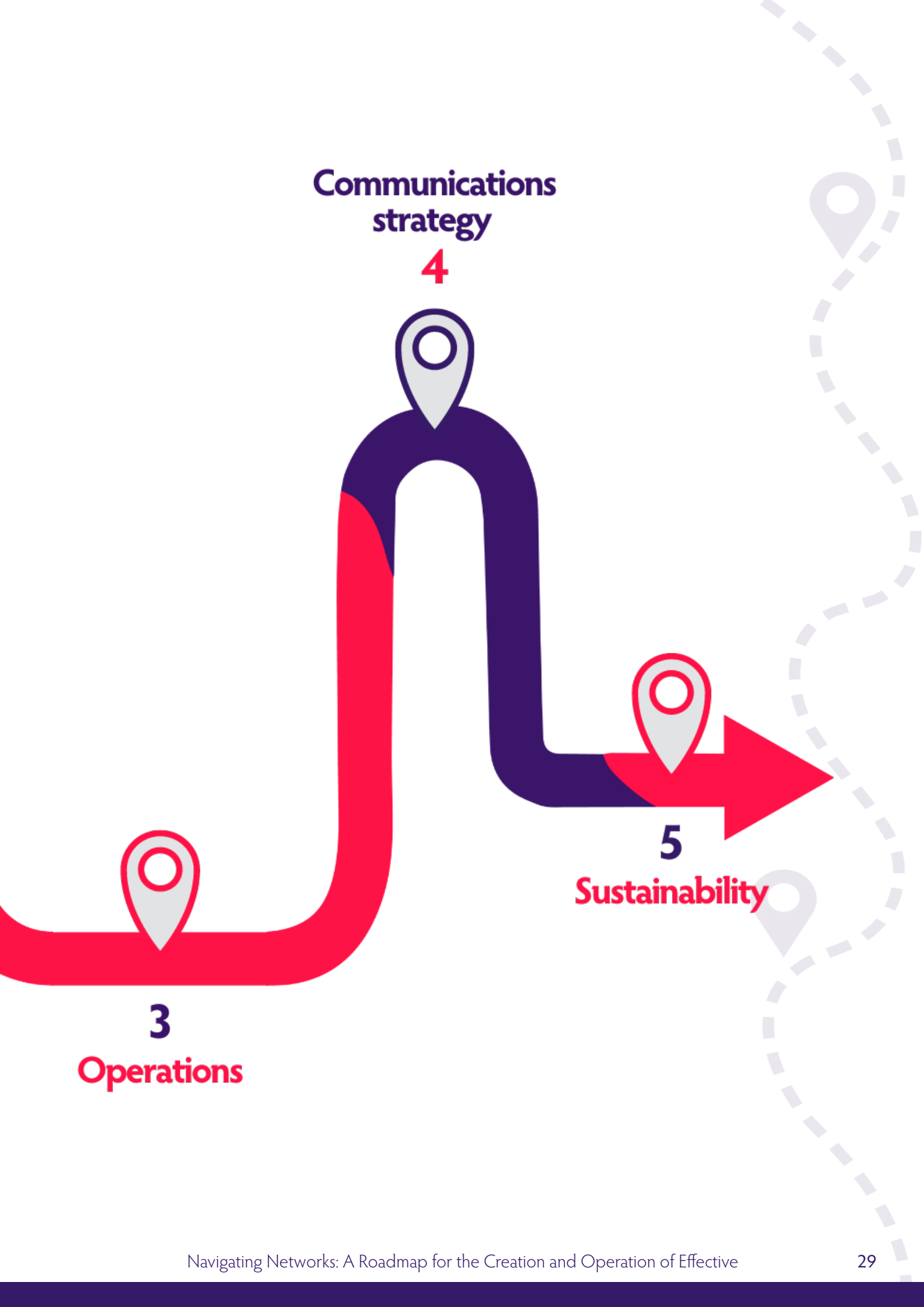
“Gatekeeping” of knowledge, experiences and connections amongst members hinders network sustainability. Networks should dedicate attention to ensuring that knowledge developed by the network — including expertise and external networks — is not concentrated in the hands of a small number of members or the older generation of network members. Institutional norms of knowledge sharing

and intergenerationality are key to sustainable human resources (see Box 1). By ensuring the diffusion of this knowledge among network members and across generations, the network can continue its work and advocacy over the course of many years as individual members join or leave the network or opt to increase or reduce their involvement. To prevent power concentration and foster inclusivity, networks should consider implementing periodic elections or rotations of organizational representatives in governmental bodies, if specified in the network’s bylaws.

Navigating Networks

A Roadmap for the Creation and Operation of Women-led Peacebuilding Networks in Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus and Central Asia





**Communications
strategy**

4



3

Operations



5

Sustainability

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