



GLOBAL NORMS ON THE ELIMINATION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

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ABSTRACT

Do global norms change? This paper argues that the global norms on the elimination of violence against women first agreed upon in connection with the adoption of the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women in 1993 have changed in subsequent agreements at the UN. These agreements include the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women, 1995; the agreed conclusions of the 42nd session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW42), 1998; the agreed conclusions of the 57th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW57), 2013; and the agreed conclusions of the 65th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW65), 2021. The agreements are analysed in detail using a methodology based on interpretative content analysis. Five different elements of the normative regime associated with the issue are identified. They have to do with framework, responsible actors, approach, sites, and definition of violence against women. In relation to three of these normative elements, significant change has taken place since 1993. This paper does not put the findings into theoretical context or analyse the causes of normative change.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CEDAW	Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination of Women
CSW42	42 nd Session of the Commission on the Status of Women
CSW57	57 th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women
CSW65	65 th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women
ECOSOC	Economic and Social Council
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
VAW	Violence against Women

INTRODUCTION

This paper seeks to discuss the extent to which global norms change over time by analysing the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (DEVAW) from 1993 and a number of subsequent UN resolutions and documents related to violence against women (VAW). Many studies of global norms focus on their impact on national policies and legislation largely assuming that global norms are fixed entities exercising a stable and uniform pressure on political processes at the country level. While this may be the case for particular global norms, the assumption needs to be interrogated critically. With respect to the issue of VAW, there is reason to believe that there are evolving interpretations of the norms associated with its elimination. For instance, a disputed issue in recent years concerns the extent to which global norms on gender equality and VAW should address relations within the family. Other norms may also be contented suggesting that their contents could be evolving if this is what has happened in the case of VAW. Thus, the conclusions may have wider implications. The analysis in this working paper neither engages with the relevant literature nor seeks to explain norm continuities, norm change or the power relations involved (Epstein 2017). It limits itself to interrogating how the norms on the elimination of VAW have been phrased in different documents and the extent to which the phrasing reflects a change of norms.

The paper takes the DEVAW as the authoritative attempt to define global norms related to the elimination of violence against women¹ and then explores the extent to which subsequent UN resolutions and documents take up new concerns, change existing arguments or adopt different emphases. As the DEVAW covers different aspects of the elimination of VAW, the paper refers to a set or a regime of global norms on the elimination of VAW. Some of the norms constituting the normative regime may be more central than others suggesting that the regime may survive the change of certain elements, but not of others. The paper is based on the understanding that global norms are defined as “acknowledged, but not necessarily accepted, understandings of collective ambitions” (Fejerskov et al. 2020). This indicates, first, that some sort of decision-making process perceived to be legitimate has taken place leading to a framing of collective ambitions and, secondly, that global norms are likely to be disputed ideas about social goals. The quality of being disputed is a major reason why one may expect that global norms change over time. On the other hand, some actors, who perhaps backed the original framing of the norms, are likely to defend them, and disputing earlier agreements may be both difficult and costly. Thus, changes of global norms can be expected to be subtle and gradual, if they take place.

¹ This can be disputed on the grounds that other UN statements, resolutions and declarations adopted in this period also have helped shape the normative regime on the elimination of VAW. Important adoptions include the Resolution 1991/18 on Violence against women in all its forms by the Economic and Social Council; the General recommendation No. 19 of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination of Women (CEDAW), 1992; the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action of the World Conference on Human Rights, 1993; the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, 1994; and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women, 1995.

The paper is written by a white, middle-class, elderly, permanently employed, male researcher. This has implications. Although outraged by the poverty and inequality characterising a materially abundant world, I am not personally aggrieved by VAW and am as interested in the issue of normative change as in the deep inequality and human misery that VAW reflects. Moreover, I regard issues of human rights, gender equality and social development not as Western constructs, but as pertinent concerns for marginalised groups everywhere and, accordingly, global normative developments on these issues as possible instruments for improving their plight. This does not mean that normative developments are devoid of power relations and politics, only that they are difficult to understand in a Western/non-Western dichotomy. However, this paper does not explore the underlying struggles, disagreements, contentions, etc. which are likely to explain the (lack of) normative change.

The methodology adopted in the paper is inspired by interpretative and qualitative content analysis. This is a broad range of techniques based on the assumption that any text contains both manifest and latent elements (Drisko and Maschi 2016). They go beyond word counting and the like and include inductively created codes and interpretations by the analyst. They also emphasise the importance of the context in which the communication is situated, and they may incorporate interpretations of the antecedents and the consequences of the communication. Interpretative and qualitative content analyses typically proceed along certain steps, first elaborating codes closely describing different elements of the text followed by increasingly abstract summaries based on the researcher's interpretations. While some analysts seek to establish validity and replicability of their analysis, others look for credibility and trustworthiness. In any case, it is crucial to document clearly to the reader how the researcher arrives at specific inferences and interpretations. The first step of the approach adopted here is to analyse the texts partly through narrative summaries closely linked to the text and partly by an extensive use of quotes. On this basis the second step is to identify central issues, concerns and messages characterising the text and in particular make inferences to a global norm regime on the elimination of VAW. The third step is to sketch elements of contextual changes that may have influenced the communication (this is only done in relation to the DEVAW). This last step is far from comprehensive because it is methodologically difficult to identify salient contextual features as well as their influence on the actors involved in and the processes leading to a particular communication.

The paper begins with an analysis of the DEVAW in relative detail identifying five central elements of the normative regime on the elimination of VAW presented in the declaration. Subsequently, four different relevant international agreements will be analysed. These are: the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) and the agreed conclusions of different sessions of the Commission on the Status of Women, namely CSW42 (1998), CSW57 (2013) and CSW65 (2021). The analyses will focus on existing normative elements that are being elaborated, on new, but uncontroversial elements, and on new elements challenging existing ideas. The conclusion brings the analyses together and goes through the changes of the five central elements of the normative regime presented in the DEVAW.

THE DECLARATION ON THE ELIMINATION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

The declaration consists of a preamble of 13 paragraphs followed by six articles all in all amounting to seven pages. Every paragraph in the preamble takes up a specific issue:

- ‘equality, security, liberty, integrity and dignity of all human beings’
- ‘the Universal Declaration of Human Rights’ and other ‘international instruments’
- ‘the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women’
- ‘violence against women is an obstacle to the achievement of equality, development and peace’
- ‘violence against women constitutes a violation of the rights and fundamental freedoms of women’
- ‘violence against women is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women’
- ‘some groups of women [...] are especially vulnerable to violence’
- ‘violence against women in the family and society [is] pervasive and cut[s] across lines of income, class and culture’
- the need for ‘an international instrument that would address explicitly the issue of violence against women’
- ‘the role that women’s movements are playing’
- ‘opportunities for women to achieve legal, social, political and economic equality in society are limited’
- ‘need for a clear and comprehensive definition of violence against women’ and a call for ‘commitment by States’
- ‘every effort be made so that [the Declaration] becomes generally known and respected’

Thus, the preamble refers to the values associated with the elimination of VAW; the international agreements supporting the declaration; the social obstacles, human rights violations and historical inequality and injustice caused by VAW; particularly vulnerable groups and the widespread prevalence and the severity of VAW; the importance of women’s movement; and the need for an international instrument clearly defining and condemning VAW. In short, the preamble describes the international normative setting, the significant negative consequences of the issue, and the need for international agreement and action. This appears as a standard organisation of a preamble to a UN resolution, yet

contains a few noteworthy points. First, none of the paragraphs refer to moral or other arguments condemning violence in general or violence based on other social characteristics in particular. In very few societies around the world is violence perceived to be a legitimate practice except for extreme, life-threatening situations. This is partly because ‘we can assert in a general way that social interdependency characterizes life, and then proceed to account for violence as an attack on that interdependency, an attack on persons, yes; but perhaps most fundamentally, it is an attack on “bonds”’ (Butler 2020: 16). Placing VAW or gender-based violence within such a broader understanding of violence is absent from the declaration and it can, thus, be read as an indirect legitimization of non-gender-based violence. Secondly, the preamble refers to legal texts agreed internationally thereby failing to draw on ideas and experience in concrete societies – something which could possibly make the declaration more relevant to people in different parts of the world. Thirdly, VAW is mentioned as an obstacle to ‘equality, development and peace’ before its ‘violation of the rights and fundamental freedoms of women’. Given the strong framing of the declaration in human rights vocabulary, this relative emphasis on societal consequences is remarkable and resembles contemporary arguments promoting gender equality to achieve economic growth. One may speculate the reason being that the fundamental purpose of the United Nations is to promote peace and development.

The subsequent six articles define VAW, emphasise the human rights that women enjoy, specify the obligations of the state, and note the role of the United Nations.

The first article defines violence against women as:

‘any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.’

This definition is characterised by several important points. First, it provides a comprehensive definition of violence as everything causing physical, sexual or psychological harm. Secondly, it covers both public and private life, making no room for exceptions in a particular institutional sphere of life. Thirdly, it includes coercion which may be carried out without direct harm or suffering. These points suggest that many different acts can be considered as VAW. On the other hand, the restriction of the violence in question to that being gender-based introduces some ambiguity into the definition because in many cases it may not be clear whether an act of violence is gender-based or not. Moreover, neither the definition nor the declaration as a whole clarifies how to identify gender-based violence as something different from non-gender-based violence. This means that an act of violence needs to be linked to a gender-related motive of the perpetrator or to a social context which strongly suggests the gendered nature of the act. Although one of the paragraphs in the preamble points to the ‘historically unequal power relations between men and women’ and to VAW as ‘one of the social mechanisms by which women are forced into a subordinate position compared with men’, many acts of violence committed by men against women may not be explained by

gender-related issues but may have gendered consequences in terms of a social subordination of women to men. This evidently complicates the definition's focus on *gender-based* violence which must be understood as *caused* by gender-related factors thereby excluding a lot of violence that cannot be convincingly explained by reference to gender issues, but which may have significant gendered consequences.

The second article extends the definition of VAW by providing examples of violence 'occurring in the family', 'occurring within the general community' and being 'perpetrated or condoned by the State'. Thus, the article lays out the three important sites where VAW should be addressed including the family, which in recent years has become an issue of contention internationally in discussions of gender equality. The article also clearly names specific acts of violence such as 'battering', marital rape', and 'female genital mutilation and other traditional harmful practices to women', which certain countries are reluctant to criminalise.

The third article frames the VAW issue in human rights terms and lists some of the various rights that women are entitled to including the rights to 'life', 'equality', 'liberty and security of person', 'equal protection under the law', 'be free from all forms of discrimination', 'the highest standard attainable of physical and mental health', 'just and favourable conditions of work' and 'not to be subjected to torture, or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment'. It is puzzling that this is at all necessary to mention. Are women not human beings? Are they not entitled to exactly the same rights as men? Is the widespread nature of VAW really based on an understanding that women are less entitled to these rights than men? In this way the article provides input for reflection. On the other hand, the article undoubtedly serves the purpose of emphasising the extreme importance of eliminating VAW as this deeply challenges human rights. The focus on human rights appears as the fundamental framework of the declaration, and this framing of the elimination of VAW partly excludes the above-mentioned perspective of regarding life as social interdependency.

The fourth article focuses on the role and obligations of the state. It starts by stipulating that states 'should not invoke any custom, tradition or religious consideration to avoid their obligations with respect to [VAW's] elimination'. This is a significant point as it rules out that states can use context-specific norms to legitimise inaction with respect to the declaration. The article goes on to describe 17 different appropriate actions that states should undertake. These actions can be grouped into four categories pertaining to (i) internationally-related initiatives, including the ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), reporting on VAW to the UN and promoting the issue in regional organisations; (ii) domestic legislation, including 'penal, civil, labour and administrative sanctions' and 'just and effective remedies' to redress the wrongs caused by VAW; (iii) policies and practices, including to 'refrain from engaging in violence against women' and to 'punish acts of violence against women', 'national plans of action', 'specialized assistance' to victims of VAW, 'training' of law enforcement officers and other relevant public officials, and

‘education’ and ‘all appropriate measures [...] to eliminate prejudices, customary practices and all other practices based on the idea of the inferiority or superiority of either of the sexes’; and (iv) women’s movement and non-governmental organisations, including cooperation and facilitation of their work. It is obvious that this list is the result of negotiations as it contains several qualifying sentences such as ‘in accordance with national legislation’, ‘as provided for by national legislation’, ‘as appropriate’, ‘to the maximum extent feasible’, ‘where needed’, and ‘where appropriate’. Moreover, the article reflects the basic idea in the declaration that state action is central to the elimination of VAW. The two other sites of VAW (the family and the general community) identified in Article 2 are not addressed in separate articles whereas appropriate state action is specified in some detail assuming that such action can change practices and norms characterising the other sites. This seems to reflect a human rights approach to VAW where the state is considered the duty bearer with women as the right holders. This omission of men, community leaders, non-governmental authorities, private organisations, neighbourhoods, social movements, etc. appears, however, surprising given the pervasive nature of VAW and the responsibility of these actors, and it may constitute a weakening of the normative strength of the declaration.

The fifth article addresses the agencies of the United Nations and specifies how they should ‘contribute to the recognition and realization of the rights and the principles’ of the declaration. This should be done by fostering ‘international and regional cooperation’, ‘creating and raising awareness’, stimulating ‘coordination and exchange within the United Nations system’, incorporating VAW ‘into ongoing programmes’, developing ‘guidelines or manuals’, integrating VAW in ‘the implementation of human rights instruments’ and cooperating with ‘non-governmental organizations’. It is slightly surprising that a central declaration seeking to eliminate VAW worldwide details how agencies in the United Nations system should approach the issue particularly when the stipulated activities are of a standard nature. Nevertheless, the article provides a strong basis for those who seek to ensure that UN agencies actually work to eliminate VAW.

The last article emphasises that the declaration must not be used to ‘affect any provision that is more conducive to the elimination of violence against women that may be contained in the legislation of a State or in any international convention’.

In addition to the above, it is worthwhile to delve briefly into the title of the declaration and its emphasis on elimination of VAW. While the ambition to eliminate this scourge is appropriate, it is unrealistic outside of the long-term, ideal future; though it may be reasonable to seek to combat, reduce, minimise, etc. VAW or, more positively, to pursue relations between women and men free of violence. There is nothing that can legitimise anything short of the elimination of VAW, but adopting a terminology pointing to a goal which is unlikely to be realised within a foreseeable future anywhere in the world may weaken the declaration and the normative regime that it seeks to promote. It could be regarded as detached from people’s everyday life and concrete societies. It is

understandable that advocates fighting VAW cannot settle for anything less than elimination, but the discursive victory may to some extent be won at the expense of normative effectiveness.

Now, a few words tentatively situating the declaration are needed. The declaration was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly during its 85th plenary meeting on 20 December 1993. The context of the adoption was characterised by (i) some 20 years of women's strong mobilisation for gender equality, (ii) the fall of the bipolar world, and (iii) a strengthened focus on human rights and poverty reduction in international development cooperation. The Mexico City, Copenhagen and Nairobi World Conferences on Women in 1975, 1980 and 1985, respectively, the UN Decade for Women 1975-1985, the adoption of CEDAW in 1979, and the growing strength of women's movements in many countries and internationally all contributed to a culmination of the struggle for gender equality in Beijing in 1995. The declaration was adopted in the midst of the preparations for this Fourth World Conference on Women and a few months before the Cairo Conference on Population and Development highlighting the importance of gender equality and women's empowerment. The significant dynamism characterising the work on gender equality during these years may be one reason why the declaration focused on the elimination of VAW and not some weaker phrasing of the struggle against it. Moreover, the end of the Cold War and of the Iron Curtain in Europe signalled a stronger focus on democracy and populations rather than on nation states. In most African countries new constitutions were adopted and democratic elections held during the first half of the 1990s. This contributed to an atmosphere where the needs and the rights of the individual were getting more political attention. In international development cooperation the structural adjustment programmes that had dominated the agenda during the 1980s began to be criticised, and in 1990 the United Nations Development Programme produced its first Human Development Report, and the World Bank published its first World Development Report that concentrated on poverty reduction. While mainstream economic thinking applauded the Washington Consensus and its focus on deregulation and privatisation, the "lost decade" of the 1980s in Africa and the negative social consequences of structural adjustment created an increased concern with the human consequences of development cooperation. This concern was shared not least by UN agencies and civil society organisations getting a stronger voice in a situation of declining influence of geopolitics on development cooperation. Internationally, the attention to human development produced the World Summit for Social Development in the same year as the Beijing conference. All these developments created an environment conducive to adopting the DEVAW, and its human rights approach seems largely to be a consequence of the turn from geopolitics to human development. Thus, the particular framing of the declaration seems to have been supported by broad contemporary changes.

What does the above suggest in terms of a normative regime on the elimination of VAW? How can one interpret the precise normative contents of the declaration? Arguably, there are five decisive elements of the normative regime developed in the declaration. First, it is framed as a matter of human rights. Frame articulation

or framing ‘involves the connection, or splicing together, of issues, events, experience, and cultural items, including strands of one or more ideologies, so that they hang together in a relatively integrated and meaningful fashion’. (Snow, Tan and Owens 2013: 229) A human rights approach emphasising the rights of the individual constitutes largely an *ideology* that has gained traction since the end of the Cold War as a way of supporting oppressed and marginalised groups. It is accordingly useful to draw on this ideology in the case of gender-based violence. Moreover, the declaration refers to *issues* of liberty, freedom, equality, integrity, dignity etc. and domination, discrimination, inequality, force, subordination etc. The latter characterise the current situation while the former describes the goals to be achieved. These are fundamental in a human rights approach and supports the framing of the normative regime as a matter of human rights. Underlying the issues, the declaration refers to specific *experiences* in terms of battering, sexual abuse, marital rape, female genital mutilation, trafficking, forced prostitution and the like, all strengthening the point that the current situation must be changed. As *cultural items* and *events* pointing in the direction of a human rights framing of the normative regime and establishing the regime at the level of other international norm sets, the declaration refers to several rights-based international declarations, establishes itself as a complement to the CEDAW, and draws on the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women from 1985 as well as Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) resolutions from 1990 and 1991. Culturally, the declaration is organised with preamble and paragraphs as UN declarations generally are. All in all, the declaration frames the elimination of violence against women as a matter of human rights based on several existing and widely known UN declarations.²

A second element characterising the normative regime is the identification of the state as the central actor responsible of implementing the declaration and eliminating VAW. This is in line with the human rights framing of the regime that the state is the essential duty bearer responsible for ensuring the rights of all human beings within its jurisdiction. It is also the logical consequence of the organisation of the United Nations which centres around member states as the constituent entities. It implies, however, that the normative regime does not identify other actors as responsible for eliminating VAW. Moreover, the ambiguous role of state authorities is clearly recognised as these may condone VAW while they are responsible for addressing the issue. The ambiguity is acknowledged, but not really addressed in the article on the state which concentrates on policies and practices that state authorities should adopt to eliminate VAW in society, but not on internal practices and priorities that affect state action.

² This view is disputed by Hilary Charlesworth (1999: 382) who argues that DEVAW ‘makes violence against women an issue of international concern but refrains from categorizing violence against women as a human rights issue in its operative provisions. The failure to create a nexus between violence against women and human rights was due to a fear that this might dilute the traditional notion of human rights’. While this fear may have been present at the time, it does not appear to have made it into the declaration.

Thirdly, the proposed approach towards the elimination of VAW is relatively legal and administrative in nature. Instances of VAW should be punished according to national legislation, and this legislation should be developed to redress the wrongs, improve women's access to justice and protect victims presenting their case in the judicial system. Specialised assistance to victims of VAW should be organised, and civil servants working with the issue should receive training. When preventive measures and national plans of action are mentioned, they directly target the protection of women against violence. The modification, particularly through education, of social and cultural patterns of conduct is also mentioned with the purpose of changing stereotyped gender roles. This points in the direction of broader issues of gender equality and change of gender relations, but the text is generally framed with a narrow focus on violence and does not suggest initiatives for strengthening women's broader social, political and economic situation.

Fourthly, the regime identifies three sites where VAW exists, namely in the family, in the community and caused by the state. This is an important attempt to ensure that the declaration is relevant everywhere and in all situations. Identifying the family as an important site of VAW is significant in three ways as it reflects women's experience, whereas men tend to focus on violence outside the family; as it specifies that VAW cannot be a private matter outside policy reach; and as it extends the human rights discourse into the family. Furthermore, identifying the state as a site of VAW points to the possibility of systematic gender-based violence in addition to the multiple individual outbreaks of violence due to gender inequalities. When public and social institutions are organised in a way that leads to VAW whenever particular situations occur, the violence could be described as systematic.

The last element of the normative regime is its broad definition of VAW as gender-based violence resulting in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women. It is noteworthy that psychological harm or suffering is included in the definition as it could extend the meaning of violence to areas that are not normally perceived as characterised by this. The broad understanding of violence has been further expanded to verbal and economic violence in the Maputo protocol from 2003 specifying the rights of women in Africa (Schiferaw Mulu 2020), indicating the need to understand violence much broader than a physical matter and rather as gender-based actions limiting women's opportunities. The distinction between harm as suffering and harm as circumventing opportunities is not clear cut, and while the declaration exemplifies VAW with reference to battering, sexual abuse, female genital mutilation (FGM), etc., it also emphasises the rights to equality and to be free from all forms of discrimination. This suggests that the declaration is somewhat open-ended in its definition of violence.

NORMATIVE DEVELOPMENTS

Since DEVAW was adopted in 1993, numerous agreements have been reached with relevance to the normative regime on the elimination of VAW. This paper focuses on four: (i) The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women, 1995; (ii) the agreed conclusions of the 42nd session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW42), 1998; (iii) the agreed conclusions of the 57th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW57), 2013; and (iv) the agreed conclusions of the 65th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW65), 2021. While the agreed conclusions of CSW42 and CSW57 focus exclusively on VAW, those of CSW65 address ‘women’s full and effective participation and decision-making in public life, as well as the elimination of violence, for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls’. The four agreements have been selected partly to cover the period since 1993 and partly because they have been agreed to by all countries in the United Nations.³ None of the agreements, including DEVAW, are binding. Nevertheless, the negotiations leading to their adoption have often been full of disagreement and struggle.

The analysis concentrates on three different kinds of normative development: (i) Elaboration of existing elements; (ii) addition of new points that do not challenge existing ideas; and (iii) revision of elements of the normative regime or addition of new points that challenge existing ideas. The difference between the three types of normative development is not always clear-cut and even the first type may over time lead to a change of the normative regime.

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, 1995

This declaration is often seen as the most progressive UN agreement on gender equality, and meetings labelled ‘Beijing + x number of years’ have been organised regularly to assess its implementation. It covers many different issues and includes a section on the elimination of VAW, which is analysed below.

The section of altogether 11 pages is organised into two parts: The first consists of 12 paragraphs stating the significance of the subject, its definition as well as particularly important aspects that need attention and the second part includes 7 paragraphs with several sub-paragraphs addressing recommended action. This organisation resembles the DEVAW, and the declaration uses the first two articles of DEVAW (definition of VAW and identification of the three sites of VAW) verbatim.

Although clearly building on the DEVAW, the section on the elimination of VAW in the Beijing declaration is far from a copy of it. With respect to normative elaboration, four elements emerge from a comparison of the texts. First, the Beijing

³ Many other agreements could have been selected, not least the Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security from 2000. While clearly related to VAW, this resolution deals with situations of war, violent conflict and recovery which are (hopefully) extreme situations compared to the daily experience of VAW in all countries – the subject of this paper.

declaration goes into some depth concerning the consequences of VAW in terms of 'fear and insecurity' and notes that 'fear of violence, including harassment, is a permanent constraint on the mobility of women and limits their access to resources and basic activities'. Moreover, this leads to '[h]igh social, health and economic costs to the individual and society' (§117). Thus, the Beijing declaration elaborates in more detail the experience and the permanent impact of violence. Secondly, and in extension of this, the declaration notes that '[i]n many cases, violence against women and girls occur in the family or within the home, where violence is often tolerated'. Such incidences of violence 'often go unreported and are thus difficult to detect'. They are, however, far from trivial as they include 'physical and sexual abuse, and rape of girl children and women by family members and other members of the household' (§117). Accordingly, the Beijing declaration highlights the family as a crucial site for VAW instilling fear, insecurity and limited opportunities. Thirdly, the declaration emphasises data collection, statistics and research to a much larger extent than the DEVAW does. In order to design appropriate action and monitor changes, the declaration underscores the need to 'study the causes and consequences of violence against women and the effectiveness of preventive measures' (p. 85). Fourthly, education, campaigns and training programmes are repeatedly mentioned as a way of raising awareness: 'Educational systems should promote self-respect, mutual respect and cooperation between women and men' (§119) and governments should '[o]rganize and fund information campaigns and educational and training programmes in order to sensitize girls and boys and women and men to the personal and social detrimental effects of violence in the family, community and society' (§125g). This expands on the training of law enforcement officers and other relevant civil servants and the adoption of 'all appropriate measures, especially in the field of education, to modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct' mentioned in article 4 in the DEVAW.

In terms of normative additions that do not challenge the DEWAV, the Beijing declaration notes three manifestations of VAW and one important institution. First, VAW during armed conflict is not mentioned in the DEVAW, whereas the Beijing declaration includes 'murder, systematic rape, sexual slavery and forced pregnancy.' (§114) Secondly, '[a]cts of violence against women also include forced sterilization and forced abortion, coercive/forced use of contraceptives, female infanticide and prenatal sex selection' (§115). Thirdly, the Beijing declaration emphasises in several paragraphs the significance of trafficking in girls and women as well as the plight of migrant women. The DEVAW does not deal with the latter whereas the former is mentioned only once. Fourthly, whereas the media is not addressed in the DEVAW, the Beijing declaration specifically includes it in the following: 'Raise awareness of the responsibility of the media in promoting non-stereotyped images of women and men, as well as in eliminating patterns of media presentation that generate violence' (§125j).

These normative elaborations and additions do not in themselves challenge the DEVAW, but they establish the foundation for an understanding of the elimination of VAW which to some extent differs from the one presented in the DEVAW. This becomes clear in the following three instances of what could be

described as normative revision. First, many more actors than the state are identified as important stakeholders and actors in the elimination of VAW: 'Men's groups mobilization against gender violence are necessary allies for change' (§120). Moreover, a whole range of institutions including 'local governments, community organizations, non-governmental organizations, educational institutions, the public and private sectors, particularly enterprises, and the mass media' (§125) are asked, in addition to the government, to take specific actions. Unlike the DEVAW, the Beijing declaration also mentions girls on par with women. All in all, this significantly enlarges the set of actors involved in the elimination of VAW, changing the language from one of rights holders and duty bearers. Secondly, the declaration calls for the mainstreaming of a gender perspective in all actions seeking to eliminate VAW. This is to ensure that 'before decisions are taken, an analysis may be made of their effects on women and men, respectively' (§123), thereby introducing a broader gender perspective rather than a narrow focus on the violation of human rights. Thirdly, the declaration enlists actions 'with a view to promoting a violence-free society' (§129d) and calls for both 'partnership' and 'cooperation between women and men' (§119). It also demands '[d]eveloping a holistic and multidisciplinary approach to the challenging task of promoting families, communities and States that are free of violence against women' (§119). These ways of framing the purpose of action are broader than a focus on human rights violations, and although the declaration in general relies strongly on human rights, it seems that the section on the elimination of VAW includes elements that were absent from the DEVAW, namely gender mainstreaming and a vision of a violence-free and cooperative society. However, most significantly is the change of focus from the state to multiple actors that are expected to play a role in the elimination of VAW.

Agreed conclusions of CSW42, 1998

This is a short 5-page agreement beginning with a brief introduction reaffirming the Beijing Platform for Action and requesting states to take action. Six sections follow, describing these actions related to an integrated, holistic approach, to provision of resources, to creation of linkages and cooperation, to legal measures, to research and gender-disaggregated data collection and to the change of attitudes. Each of these sections addresses actions to be taken by governments, NGOs, private actors, the international community etc.

These agreed conclusions change relatively little compared to the Beijing Platform for Action. Many points are repeated, and the conclusions can be read as an extension of the agreement in Beijing. Regarding the elaboration of existing elements, four issues seem to receive more attention. First, the integrated, holistic approach indicated in Beijing is spelled out and highlighted in the first section calling for 'comprehensive and multidisciplinary and coordinated national plans, programmes or strategies' (1). Secondly, and likewise, the provision of resources is emphasised in a separate section. Thirdly, the workplace receives separate attention as a site that should be 'free from sexual harassment or other violence' and where employers should 'put in place policies designed to eliminate and deal effectively with harassment of women whenever it occurs' (3). Fourthly,

'evaluations of the impact of measures and policies' are specifically mentioned as a complement to research and data collection.

With respect to the addition of new points that do not challenge existing ideas, the following can be mentioned: First, 'all forms and manifestations of terrorism, in particularly those that affect women and children' are condemned (1). As noted, the Beijing Platform for Action mentions armed conflict, but it has no reference to terrorism which is highlighted early in the CSW42 agreed conclusions. Secondly, 'the participation of women in law enforcement agencies so as to achieve gender balance' (3) is a new measure which – in line with the holistic approach – indicates that the combat against VAW requires diverse initiatives. Thirdly, the document mentions 'mechanisms such as national rapporteurs, who report to Governments on the scale, prevention and combating of violence against women' (4). This is an attempt to institutionalise the elimination of VAW outside legal measures and this is new. Fourthly, 'the responsible use of new information technologies, in particular the Internet' (5) introduces a new site for the combat against VAW. None of these points challenges the Beijing Platform for Action. Rather they support its move towards a holistic approach, also broadening the issue to new areas.

There are no attempts to revise existing ideas or to integrate new elements that challenge already agreed points in the Beijing Platform for Action. However, the conclusions strengthen the Beijing agreement's identification of many different actors as responsible for the elimination of VAW as well as its integrated and holistic approach to achieving 'violence-free societies' (4) with 'men's own initiatives to complement efforts of women's organizations to prevent and eliminate violence against women and girls' (5). In this sense, the conclusions consolidate the normative changes of the Beijing Platform for Action.

Agreed conclusions of CSW57, 2013

These 17 pages of conclusions are organised into five sections. The first is a lengthy introduction reaffirming and recalling a large number of declarations, conventions, commitments, summits, statutes, laws, resolutions, instruments and initiatives all constituting 'an international legal framework and a comprehensive set of measures for the elimination and prevention of all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls' (§3). The conclusions of CSW42 only used one paragraph to refer to the Beijing Declaration, the CEDAW and the DEVAW. The use of nine paragraphs in the CSW57 conclusions for the purpose of recalling earlier agreements indicates that they may not have been seen as common and agreed knowledge. The following 25 paragraphs of the introduction highlight different issues. The second section, 'Strengthening implementation of legal and policy frameworks and accountability', resembles earlier attempts to create an institutional environment to address cases of VAW although some new points are added (see below). Like in the Beijing Declaration and in the agreed conclusions of CSW42, many different actors in addition to the state are regarded as responsible for taking action. The third and fourth sections, 'Addressing structural and underlying causes and risk factors so as to prevent violence against women and

girls' and 'Strengthening multisectoral services, programmes and responses to violence against women and girls', provide a more detailed account of initiatives needed to prevent and mitigate VAW. The last section, 'Improving the evidence-base', is much in line with earlier calls for more research and data collection.

In addition to repeating a large number of elements of earlier agreements some points are elaborated further, including: the relationship between human rights and the elimination of VAW (in particular §§15, 16, 18, 22, 34cc and 34nn); the relationship between development, gender equality and the elimination of VAW (in particular §§17, 19, 20, 21, 34i, 34j, 34u, 34ee, 34ff and 35); sexual and reproductive health (in particular §§22, 34nn, 34pp, 34ss and 34lll); the definition of VAW being supplemented with 'the economic and social harm of such violence' (§11); and a call for 'private sector investments in programmes, campaigns and strategies' (§34v).

In terms of new points that do not challenge existing ideas, the following can be mentioned: Intersectionality is noted as 'women and girls who face multiple forms of discrimination are exposed to increased risk of violence' (§12). Violence in public places is also highlighted, 'especially when it is being used to intimidate women and girls who are exercising any of their human rights and fundamental freedoms' (§23). This strategic use of violence has not been discussed in earlier agreements and, thus, the conclusions call for a safe environment through investments in public infrastructure (§§34cc, 34xx and 34zz). As something new the text also refers to 'femicide or feminicide' and 'gender-related killings of women and girls' (§24), and it notes 'that the illicit use and illicit trade in small arms and light weapons aggravates violence, inter alia, against women and girls' (§25). Furthermore, 'the vulnerability of older women' (§§26 and 34bb) is emphasised in addition to repeating earlier emphasis on the challenges of indigenous, migrant and trafficked women and girls. Other groups that need protection are 'women human rights defenders' (§34z) and 'women and girls deprived of their liberty' (§34aa). Conversely, acts of violence 'perpetrated by people in positions of authority' (§34x) should be punished and impunity for such crimes ended. A new context for addressing VAW is 'disaster risk reduction programmes and protocols and humanitarian assistance to address natural disasters' (§34q). The agreed conclusions stress 'that caregiving is a critical societal function, and encourage the equal sharing of responsibilities and chores between men and women in caregiving' (§34oo). In line with this the text also recommends 'to give women full and equal access to economic resources, including the right to inheritance and to ownership of land and other property, credit, natural resources and appropriate technologies' (§34hh) and to '[p]romote women's full participation in the formal economy' (§34dd). These points are not new in discussions of gender equality, but they have not been addressed in the earlier agreements on the elimination of VAW. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, 'the full and effective participation of women and girls' in the conception and implementation of policies and programmes (§34k) and 'the equal participation of women and men in all spheres of political life, political reform and at all levels of decision-making' (§34o) are emphasised. Thus, gender-equal processes of

decision-making and policy implementation are introduced into the agenda of eliminating VAW.

There is no revision of existing elements of the normative regime or addition of new points challenging earlier agreements. However, the conclusions do seem to move the normative regime on the elimination of VAW. First, actors and stakeholders outside the state are emphasised like in the Beijing Declaration and the CSW42 conclusions, but unlike the DEVAW. Secondly, the text seems to revert to and expand the focus on human rights in the DEVAW. The ‘universal, indivisible and interdependent and interrelated’ nature of human rights is highlighted together with ‘the duty of States regardless of their political, economic and cultural systems to promote and protect all human rights and fundamental freedoms’ (§15). Such emphases are less strong in the CSW42 conclusions and the section on the elimination of VAW in the Beijing Declaration which, on the other hand, refer to ‘a violence-free society’ and ‘cooperation between women and men’ – ideas that are absent in the CSW57 conclusions. Thirdly and most significantly, the CSW57 agreement places the elimination of VAW squarely in general efforts to create gender equality, empowerment of women and broad-based development in terms of ‘education, health, HIV and AIDS, poverty eradication, food security, peace and security, humanitarian assistance and crime prevention’ (§20).

Paragraph 21 states

‘that women’s poverty and lack of empowerment, as well as their marginalization resulting from their exclusion from social and economic policies and from the benefits of education and sustainable development, can place them at increased risk of violence, and that violence against women impedes the social and economic development of communities and States, as well as the achievement of the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals.’

This reflects a much broader approach to the elimination of VAW than the one put forward in the DEVAW and it expands considerably the move in this direction that was already visible in the Beijing Declaration and the CSW42 conclusions.

Agreed conclusions of CSW65, 2021

CSW65 produced 22 pages of conclusions starting out with 61 paragraphs reaffirming, reiterating and recalling numerous international agreements and highlighting different specific issues. They are followed by six sections addressing (i) normative, legal and regulatory frameworks, (ii) violence against women in public life, (iii) gender-responsive institutional reforms, (iv) high-quality financing in support of women’s participation in public life, (v) women’s voice and leave no one behind in public life, and (vi) root causes of gender inequality and barriers to women’s full and equal participation. As noted, CSW65 discussed two issues, ‘women’s full and effective participation and decision-making in public life’ and ‘the elimination of violence’, which makes the normative regime on the elimination of VAW less clear because it gets influenced by considerations on decision-making in public life. However, it is no accident that the two issues have been brought together as §24 states:

'The Commission emphasizes that the promotion of full and effective participation and leadership of women in public life and the elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls are interconnected. It expresses concern that violence against women politicians, voters, candidates, election administrators, judges and members of local, grass-roots and women's organizations in public life is common. It recognizes that all forms of violence and discrimination, including in digital contexts, prevent women from exercising their equal right to participate in all spheres of public life.'

This interrelated nature of the two issues and their selection as focus for the CSW65 session further underscore the broad approach to the elimination of VAW expressed in the CSW57 conclusions. VAW cannot be tackled without significant reductions of gender inequalities in all parts of life. Interestingly, the framing of the session also appears to downplay domestic violence, which was strongly highlighted in the Beijing Declaration and was one of the three sites identified in the DEVAW. It is mentioned twice in listings of various types of violence and once in connection with the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. This is not because the theme of the session has led the participants to focus exclusively on the public sphere as the demand for and the unequal sharing of unpaid care and domestic work are emphasised repeatedly (§§31, 33, 40, 42, 61bb and 61tt) and discussed as a separate issue in three paragraphs (§§46, 47 and 61yy).

Like in the earlier agreements many different points are repeated more or less unchanged. Similar to the CSW57 conclusions, the CSW65 text refers to an international legal framework and describes its constitution, and it highlights the human rights and their universal, integrated and indivisible nature. Among well-known elements that receive significant attention and are developed more fully compared to earlier agreement, three should be mentioned: First, the workplace and International Labour Organisation standards are mentioned repeatedly (§§6, 52, 61c, 61q, 61ww) including the promotion of 'the rights to freedom of association, peaceful assembly and collective bargaining' (§61h) and the creation of 'a safe, enabling and violence-free working environment for women' (§61cc). Secondly, 'the growing impact of violence against women and girls in digital contexts, especially on social media' (§27) is noted together with cyberstalking and cyberbullying (§§27, 42, 61r), and the conclusions recommend to '[m]ainstream a gender perspective in the conceptualization, development and implementation of digital technologies and related policies' (§61w). However, the significant opportunities provided by information and communication technologies are also highlighted (§§41), and the commission calls for closing the gender digital divide (§61hhh) as well as 'the substantial digital divides and data inequalities that exist within and among countries and regions' (§61iii). Thirdly, international cooperation should be strengthened (§61jj) to mobilise 'adequate financial resources' (§54) and create 'a conducive external environment in support of national efforts' (§55). Developed countries are urged 'to fully implement their respective commitments, including the target of 0.7 per cent of their gross national income for official development assistance to developing countries' (§61ii) and to '[r]efrain from promulgating and applying any unilateral economic, financial or trade measures not in accordance with international law and the Charter of the

United Nations’ (§61d). These points indicate an increasing attention to the international context of the elimination of VAW although some of this probably is due to the mixing of this issue with that of women’s political participation.

Regarding new elements that do not contradict earlier agreements, the conclusions pay due respect to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in a paragraph balancing between ‘national realities’ and ‘international rules and commitments’ (§12). Climate change is taken up (§§61ee and 61ff), and the conclusions both point to its adverse consequences that disproportionately affects women (§13) and underline ‘women’s full and effective participation and leadership in decision-making on the mitigation of and the adaptation to climate change’ (§14). Similarly, the COVID-19 pandemic is addressed in several paragraphs emphasising the disproportionate and negative impact on women and girls (§31), ‘the critical role that women have played and continue to play in COVID-19 pandemic response efforts’ (§32), ‘the specific needs of women and girls in COVID-19 response and recovery efforts’ (§61aa) and the importance of mainstreaming a gender perspective into initiatives addressing the pandemic (§§61bb, 61cc and 61dd). This is all fine, but the alarming increase in domestic violence during the pandemic is only noted in a single and somewhat convoluted sentence: ‘[The commission] further expresses deep concern over the increased demand for unpaid care and domestic work and the reported surge of all forms of violence, including sexual and gender-based violence, during confinement, as well as harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation’ (§31). As noted above, the conclusions take up unpaid care and domestic work as a very important topic, and they highlight the need for family-oriented policies to achieve a proper ‘work-family balance’ (§§48 and 61zz). Given the contentious nature of the family in international discussions of gender equality it is worth noting that the Commission underscores ‘the self-sufficiency of the family unit, and recognizes the need to ensure that all social and economic development policies are responsive to the changing needs and expectations of families in fulfilling their numerous functions’ (§48). As something new the agreement also addresses social protection as a separate issue in one paragraph (§49) and makes reference to it in 16 other paragraphs (§§32, 33, 40, 46, 50, 53, 61c, 61s, 61ff, 61ll, 61tt, 61uu, 61ww, 61yy, 61zz and 61aaa). The argument is ‘that universal access to social protection plays a central role in reducing inequality, eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions and promoting opportunities for women’s full and effective participation and decision-making in public life as well as the elimination of violence’ (§49). Birth registration and citizenship documents are furthermore highlighted as necessary to avoid ‘marginalization, exclusion, discrimination, violence, statelessness, exploitation and abuse’ (§50). Finally, and in addition to mentioning rural women and girls, older women, women and girls with disabilities, indigenous women and girls, migrant women and girls, and women and girls living with HIV/AIDS, the conclusions stress the need to integrate ‘women of African descent in all aspects of society’ (§61nn). Conversely, reference to women and girls affected by trafficking is made in only one paragraph (§30), whereas the combat of trafficking was one out of three strategic objectives with several distinct recommendations in the section on violence against women in the

Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and it was discussed and referred to in five paragraphs in the agreed conclusions of the CSW57.

The agreed conclusions do not introduce issues or points that contradict earlier agreements, but again they emphasise certain topics and downplay others. The elimination of VAW is approached as an element of general efforts to ensure gender equality and women's empowerment as well as sustainable development. It is also increasingly put into an international context where the relations between developing and developed countries shape the conditions for addressing gender issues. Moreover, social protection and the sharing of unpaid care and domestic work have received substantial attention. While the former may directly influence and strengthen women's position and thereby enable them to avoid domestic and other violence, the latter seems to be a reflection of recent discussions of gender equality in general rather than a response to VAW. It is also noteworthy that domestic violence and trafficking are almost neglected compared to earlier agreements.

THE NORMATIVE REGIME ACROSS THE AGREEMENTS

The ambition of this paper is to explore the extent to which the global normative regime on the elimination of VAW has evolved and changed since the adoption of the DEVAW in 1993. The analysis identified five central elements of the normative regime promoted in the DEVAW, namely (i) a human rights framing, (ii) the state as the central actor responsible for eliminating VAW, (iii) a legal and administrative approach, (iv) three sites where VAW exists, namely in the family, in the community and caused by the state, and (v) a broad definition of VAW resulting in harm of different sorts ranging from suffering to circumvented opportunities. These are summarised in Table 1.

All the agreements have presented human rights and fundamental freedoms as the basis for addressing VAW. Violence against women is an infringement of women's rights and should accordingly be punished. This is the basic message albeit with different emphasis. The DEVAW and the agreed conclusions of the CSW57 and the CSW65 are clear on this whereas the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the agreed conclusions of the CSW42 have a few references to a violence-free society and to cooperation between women and men indicating more inclusive ambitions than just clarifying the positions of rights holders, perpetrators and duty bearers. Nevertheless, the normative regime on the elimination of VAW established by the DEVAW has consistently been framed in terms of human rights.

Table 1. The normative regime on the elimination of VAW and its evolution

Agreement	DEVAW 1993	Beijing 1995	CSW42 1998	CSW57 2013	CSW65 2021
Normative element					
Framework	Human rights	Human rights + inclusive approach	Human rights + inclusive approach	Human rights	Human rights
Responsible actors	The state	The state + civil society, media, local government, etc.	The state + civil society, media, local government, etc.	The state + civil society, media, local government, etc.	The state + civil society, media, local government, etc.
Approach	Legal and admin.	Legal and admin. + gender equality	Legal and admin. + gender equality	Legal and admin. + gender equality	Legal and admin. + gender equality
Sites	Family, community, state	Family, community, state, violent conflicts	Family, community, state, violent conflicts	Family, community, state, violent conflicts	Community, violent conflicts
Definition of VAW	Physical, sexual and psychological harm	Physical, sexual and psychological harm	Physical, sexual and psychological harm	Physical, sexual and psychological + social and economic harm	No statement on the definition

Conversely, it is only in the DEVAW that the state is given the exclusive responsibility for eliminating VAW. The DEVAW does applaud the efforts of women’s organisations and other parts of civil society, but the message in the declaration is that the state should support the work of these organisations, not that non-state entities have an independent responsibility for addressing VAW. This is fundamentally changed in the Beijing Declaration and in subsequent agreements where local governments, trade unions, faith-based organisations and the private sector are directly invited to engage in the elimination of VAW. Men and boys are also regarded as ‘strategic partners and allies in [...] the elimination of violence’ (CSW65 Agreed Conclusions §60). Moreover, the media is criticised for disseminating ‘gender role stereotypes’ and ‘commercial advertisements which foster gender-based violence and inequalities’ (Beijing Declaration §129d) – a

criticism which is reiterated in the agreed conclusions of the CSW65 (§59). Thus, the responsibility for eliminating VAW is now shared by many different actors.

The DEVAW promotes a legal and administrative framework for sanctioning cases of VAW, for supporting victims of VAW and for preventing VAW. The declaration refers to 'all appropriate measures, especially in the field of education, to modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women' (article 4j) but does not specify those measures. While in no way abandoning an emphasis on legal and administrative initiatives, subsequent agreements have increasingly viewed the elimination of VAW as integrated into broader attempts at creating gender equality and women's empowerment. This is particularly clear in the conclusions of the CSW57 and CSW65 where the strengthening of women's social, economic and political position is stressed as a prerequisite for the elimination of VAW. The multi-dimensional marginalisation and poverty of many women is pinpointed as a fundamental factor conducive to VAW.

The three sites of VAW – the family, the community, and the state – identified in the DEVAW has partly been abandoned in later agreements. The Beijing Declaration and the CSW42 conclusions refer to the need to punish state agents guilty of VAW, while the CSW57 conclusions broaden this to people in positions of authority whether public or private. The CSW65 agreement does not address this issue, but in all agreements after the DEVAW, situations of armed conflict, civil wars and terrorism are repeatedly mentioned as a site for widespread gender-based violence. Domestic violence is strongly emphasised in the Beijing Declaration whereas it is hardly mentioned in the CSW65 conclusions. Thus, this element of the normative regime is not very clear currently as violence in the family and exercised by the state outside armed conflict has been downplayed judging by the agreed conclusions of the CSW65.

The broad definition of VAW presented in the DEVAW has been expanded to include economic and social harm in the conclusions of the CSW57 while the CSW65 agreement does not make any specific reference to the definition of VAW. However, like its predecessors it emphasises that VAW 'in all its forms and manifestations [...] is a major impediment to the achievement of gender equality' (§23). Accordingly, there is no indication that this agreement seeks to limit the definition of VAW.

All in all, two of the five elements of the normative regime proposed in the DEVAW appear to have undergone only minor changes in subsequent agreements, namely the human rights framing and the broad definition of VAW. The three other elements, on the other hand, have been changed relatively thoroughly. Different actors in addition to the state are now responsible for eliminating VAW, broad-based social change and gender equality are necessary to eliminate VAW, and the state and the family are no longer clear sites for VAW, whereas armed conflict has been emphasised in later agreements. It is worth noting that domestic violence has been highlighted in all agreements except for the last one, and the current pandemic has only strengthened the view 'that domestic violence remains the most prevalent form that affects women of all social

strata across the world' (CSW57 Agreed Conclusions, §12). Thus, the global normative regime on the elimination of VAW evolves neither in a steadily more progressive direction, nor in increased accordance with realities on the ground.

CONCLUSION

According to this analysis the normative regime on the elimination of VAW has evolved significantly since the adoption of DEVAW in 1993. How can this norm change be described? In relation to the translation of global norms in specific social contexts terms like bridging, thinning and parallel co-existence have been used (Petersen 2018). In the present case a broadening of the responsible actors and the approach has taken place in the first part of the period analysed while a narrowing of the sites where VAW is expected to be eliminated, has occurred recently. Despite this latter change, other elements of the normative regime have not been circumvented meaning that the evolution does not reflect, first, a general strengthening and then, a general weakening of the regime. The evolution is more complex, and a substantial degree of detailing is also clear with respect to both particular vulnerable groups of women and specific contexts in which VAW arises.

One may ask whether the normative regime only mirrors the latest agreement or whether earlier agreements contribute to current perceptions of the norms. This is likely to depend on the preferences of the actors and stakeholders involved in concrete activities addressing VAW, but the regular UN reviews of results in relation to the Beijing Platform for Action indicate that attempts are made to make earlier agreements count. On the other hand, if future agreements consistently downplay domestic violence, for example, it is probably difficult to legitimise activities in that field with reference to global norms. Thus, global normative changes may very well have implications down the road for how VAW is addressed in different social settings.

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