It was 31 October 2000 when the Security Council of the United Nations convened to adopt the landmark resolution 1325 on the topic “Women, Peace and Security” (WPS). Resolution 1325 was the first of its kind as it strengthened the protection of women from conflict-related gender-based violence in and recognized the fundamental importance of an increase in their participation in peace processes. Throughout the years, seven follow-up resolutions on WPS have been adopted by the Security Council, focusing on the two sub-topics alternatively, enforcing new methods for protection and unveiling new principles calling upon a wider gender representation in peace operations at all levels. However, the WPS agenda remains a controversial topic for the international community, that tends to handle it cautiously in the UN executive forum. Despite this slight reluctance, the whole UN system has found ways to address the specific issues deriving from the ramification of the WPS agenda, from gen-
der-inclusive electoral processes to disarmament and arms control. Erroneously, the WPS agenda is believed to address only countries affected by conflict, while it intends to build a more inclusive concept of peace and security for every UN Member State. For this reason, the Security Council has called upon every state to develop a national strategy for implementation on the basis of the principles embedded in its WPS resolutions. Many countries have done so successfully, including Italy, that should adopt its fourth national action plan in 2019. Others, maybe more in need of an effective regulation, have failed in complying with the Security Council’s directives. Gender-mainstreaming in disarmament and arms control efforts is perhaps one of the most overlooked issues related to the Women, Peace and Security mandate. It is undeniable that arms proliferation affects men and women in different ways: while men account to the majority of victims from direct arms violence, women suffer from more indirect forms of violence deriving from weapons proliferation, such as gender-based violence. Women are also affected when men are injured or killed as a consequence of arms proliferation, as they are the ones who must take on additional roles to provide income to sustain their families. This all happens within and outside conflict, being even a consequence of the lack of effective regulation and control at state-level. Although the importance of international and regional entities in addressing the issue is fundamental, it should always be concerted with national efforts towards implementation. In fact, it is well recognized that the primary responsibility and implementation capacity for translating the WPS agenda into action are states. Although states have been called upon to develop national action plans to include a gender perspective on every issue related to the WPS agenda, in many cases, these plans have lacked reference to disarmament or, even where strongly necessary, plans have
not been outlined at all. Of the national action plans developed by 79 UN member states, only 30% make reference to issues specific to defence capacity-building, including disarmament and regulation on small arms. Other countries, especially in Latin America and in the MENA region, where provisions on disarmament are required, do not have a strategy at all. For instance, in Colombia, in 2017, the local Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) published a report regarding “Women for Disarmament” to highlight the connection between Resolution 1325 (2000) and the need for security stabilization following the 2016 agreement between the government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia—People’s Army (FARC-EP). The agreement succeeded in the disarmament of the FARC-EP but failed to address the disarmament and de-militarization of other guerrilla groups. Widespread violence due to light arms proliferation among such groups is harming rural communities, especially women, who remain the most vulnerable in this context of instability and insecurity. Nonetheless, discussions and negotiations on disarmament, arms regulation and military expenditure almost never include women, nor their points of view. This occurs mostly because women are viewed as potential vulnerable victims compared to men, who have historically been considered in charge of protection. Eventually, the need to mainstream a gender perspective in every defence and security-related field is striking. When dealing with disarmament, including a gender lens in negotiations and discussions can lead to the reduction of the risks deriving from uncontrolled arms proliferation and gender-based violence. A greater inclusion of women in national and international fora entitled to deal with these issues would increase the chances to have a gender-sensitive outcome, finally complying with the directives of the Security Council.