

4. Gender and Diversity

Key definitions: why gender and diversity are important security issues?

Sex refers to whether a person is born as a male, female or intersex. Gender is about the social, political and cultural expectations placed on people to behave in a way that corresponds with their sex (for example, to behave in a way that is masculine or feminine). Sex is determined by biology and can only be changed by medical intervention. Gender is a social identity that changes with the expectations of the individual and the society they are part of. Together with other social traits, like age ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, and level of wealth, gender shapes both the causes and consequences of violence and insecurity. Security services cannot provide security and protection for all of the population unless they understand the different security threats that people face because of their diverse identities. Gender is an especially relevant category for public safety and national security because women and people of lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender identities have been historically excluded and targeted with violence because of their gender (gender-based violence). Reflecting the security needs of a diverse population is important for security services as a matter of fairness, because the security needs of all citizens should be met without discrimination. Fairness also means that all people should have access to the opportunity to serve in the security services if they can prove they meet merit-based criteria. Diversity within the security sector also improves its effectiveness by including in the ranks security personnel who better understand the different security threats that people may face because of their gender or other aspect of their identity.

Why gender and diversity matter for security sector reporting?

Reporting on the security sector helps shape social expectations about what they can and should expect from an essential public service. When journalists ask questions about how issues of gender and diversity affect security provision, this provides a basis for the public to expect higher standards of service that meet the needs of all of the population, regardless of their gender or other identity markers. Journalists have a responsibility to avoid potentially harmful stereotypes that can affect attitudes both among the public and within the security services themselves. For example, the belief that security provision is not an issue or a profession for women, or that marital or family status (number of children) should shape conditions of service. Reporting that focuses on or features women or minorities making an active contribution in their field can have an empowering effect that promotes greater inclusion and diversity.

Key issues for reporting on the security dimensions of gender and diversity

Equality before the law? Laws both reflect and shape the societies they are made in. Stereotypes based on gender and other kinds of identity are sometimes written into laws that affect security, for example, when the law makes assumptions about the rights of some people over others (e.g., a husband cannot rape his wife, a father cannot have primary custody of his children, a person must live in accordance with the sex/gender assigned to them at birth, certain ethnicities have legal rights that others do not). The idea that gender identity or any other kind of identity, shapes which laws apply to some people and not others goes against the principle that all individuals should be equal before the law and judged accordingly. Sometimes, the law itself may be problematic, either because it perpetuates or fails to protect people from gender-based discrimination (among other kinds) or because not all laws are aligned with fundamental protections on rights. For example, laws that discriminate against women may continue in force even though equal treatment before the law is guaranteed under a constitution. Sometimes the principle of equal treatment may be well established under the law but not applied in practice because of the implicit bias of people involved in law enforcement and the justice system.

→ **Journalists can ask:**

- ✓ Are the rights of people of all genders and identities equally reflected in law and respected in court proceedings and judgments?
- ✓ What do court and sentencing records reveal about the protection of rights to equality and respect for diversity? Are there patterns in the treatment of certain groups?
- ✓ What have been the experiences of people of diverse identities who have been through court proceedings? How do they differ from what the law proscribes or what might be otherwise expected?
- ✓ Do attitudes held among court and law enforcement officials reflect a respect for diversity?
- ✓ What funds are allocated to promoting gender equality and improving access to justice and equal representation?
- ✓ What measures would be in order to ensure the justice system and the security sector could integrate a gender perspective into their work and better promote gender equality?

Equal protection for all? Diversity in the security sector is also a matter of effectiveness as well as fairness because a security service fails to fulfill its primary mission if it cannot provide security equally for all members of the public no matter the differences in their identities. To ensure they can meet this goal, security services need to ask how their policies, operations and standing procedures affect people of different identities and genders to identify specific needs (this is called gender mainstreaming or applying a gender lens). For example, knowing that women are more likely than men to face violence in the home and reporting rates are low, law enforcement authorities should ask what procedures are in place to address women's specific needs in such situations.

→ **Journalists can ask:**

- ✓ Are security services considering the needs of all members of the population fully and equally?
- ✓ What policies are in place to ensure that the needs of diverse members of the public are being met, and in particular how the specific needs of all men, women, boys and girls are identified and addressed?
- ✓ What statistics around complaints, crimes, victimization or incident reports are disaggregated by age, sex or other identity factors, and what patterns emerge from such data?
- ✓ Are justice and security institutions tracking their progress towards more gender-responsive practice and policies? If so, how and are these reports available? If not, why not?
- ✓ Is there evidence of systematic patterns of neglect, harassment or abuse among security forces and certain groups? (e.g., based on witness testimony, incident reports, or complaints, etc.)
- ✓ Are investigative procedures and facilities adapted to meet the different needs of people of every gender or identity?
- ✓ Which special measures are taken to support gender- or identity-specific needs of victims/survivors before, during, and after court proceedings?
- ✓ Are there patterns in outcomes of charges, prosecutions, or outcomes for certain types of cases (or cases involving certain types of complainants or defendants)?
- ✓ Do certain types of crimes have particularly high attrition or low conviction rates?

Representation and meaningful participation in security policymaking and service provision? Decisions about security—from the policy level to the operational level and across all services—are better made when a diversity of views have been considered. Ensuring that people of every gender and diverse identities have the chance to participate meaningfully in decision-making about security, improves the effectiveness of security services as well as their management and oversight. Around the world, security sectors are overwhelmingly dominated by men, yet recruiting from a larger pool of talent that does not exclude women or other people based on identity strengthens security by including people whose background or identity gives them the ability to recognize issues, propose solutions or perform tasks that others cannot. Moreover, security sector personnel have themselves come to pose a significant danger of sexual abuses especially against women and children. While increasing diversity within the ranks of the security sector is not enough to solve this problem, it can present security institutions developing abusive sub-cultures that condone or even encourage gender-based violence.

→ **Journalists can ask:**

- ✓ How are people of diverse identities and genders represented in security policymaking, and the security services?
- ✓ What measures are in place to promote diverse recruitment, career development and promotion?
- ✓ Are minimum standards fairly weighted to promote inclusivity?
- ✓ What policies do institutions have in place to meet the needs of diverse personnel? (e.g., separate quarters/bathrooms, uniforms that fit, family care policies, appropriate measures for different religions, anti-harassment/discrimination policies)
- ✓ Do people of all identities and in particular women have access to all career paths equally within the security sector?
- ✓ What action is the security sector taking to counter negative organizational cultures and attitudes?
- ✓ How are commitments to diversity reflected in budget priorities?
- ✓ What changes have been made to institutional policies for diversity and how have their impacts been tracked?

Further resources on gender and diversity in the security sector:

- Gender and Security Toolkit, by DCAF, OSCE/ODIHR, UN Women. Available at: <https://www.dcaf.ch/gender-and-security-toolkit>
- Gender and Diversity Hub. Available at: <https://www.gdhub.ch/resources>
- Handbook on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of Armed Forces Personnel, by DCAF/OSCE. Available at: <https://www.osce.org/odihr/31393>

Box 14 Practical example: “Investigations launched against police and military for sexual abuse of minors”

In June 2020, soldiers from the Colombian army gang raped a young indigenous girl. Under sustained media scrutiny following the revelation of this abuse in July 2020, the Colombian Army Commander General Eduardo Zapatero was forced to publicly admit that since 2016 some 118 incidents of sexual violence against minors have been or are still being investigated. In response the Colombian deputy attorney general Martha Janeth Mancera, announced the creation of a working group aiming to develop guidelines on the rights, guarantees, and protection of minors and women to ensure less gender-based violence both in the army and the police. This example demonstrates how security sector reporting can hold security services responsible for their failures to provide security for women and girls of all identities, and to inform the public on the need for reform that will meet this objective. Similar examples of reporting about sexual abuses by security sector personnel in Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo have also led to investigations and reforms.

Sources: “Investigan 12 casos de violencia sexual contra niñas indígenas de Colombia”, July 2020, <https://www.dw.com/es/investigan-12-casos-de-violencia-sexual-contra-ni%C3%B1as-ind%C3%ADgenas-de-colombia/a-54056840>;

“Van 288 policías y militares investigados por abuso sexual a menores”, October 2020, <https://www.eltiempo.com/politica/congreso/abuso-sexual-de-menores-cifras-de-militares-investigados-por-violacion-544080>

“Ugandan soldiers accused of rape and assault to face court martial”, June 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2017/jun/06/ugandan-soldiers-accused-of-rape-and-assault-to-face-court-martial-human-rights-watch-report>

“UN report confirms nearly 200 women and girls raped by Congolese troops, rebels”, May 2013, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2013/05/439112-un-report-confirms-nearly-200-women-and-girls-raped-congolese-troops-rebels>

Image: Actress and Activist
Comments on Violence
against Afghan Women.
Kabul, Afghanistan, 2009 ©
UN Photo/Fardin Waezi.