Study Report

More Than a Mandate?

Making Gender Training in Security Institutions Matter

THE ELSIE INITIATIVE FOR WOMEN IN PEACE OPERATIONS

DCAF 25 YEARS

Canada

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First published in June 2025.

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Cite as: Carlsson, Karin, and Mia Schöb, More Than a Mandate? Making Gender Training in Security Institutions Matter (Geneva, Switzerland: Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance DCAF, June 2025).

Layout: Leamaija Works Oy, www.leamaija.works

ISBN: 978-92-9222-780-7

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More Than a Mandate?

Making Gender Training in Security Institutions Matter

This paper is embedded in the context of the Canadian-led multistakeholder Elsie Initiative for Women in Peace Operations (in the following: the Elsie Initiative). The Elsie Initiative seeks to develop and test a combination of innovative approaches to overcome barriers to women's meaningful participation in peace operations. Gender training forms an integral part of the responses to the findings of the Measuring Opportunities for Women in Peace Operations (MOWIP) assessments, conducted in 20 Troop- and Police Contributing Countries (TPCCs). The need for a comprehensive overview of existing knowledge on gender training arose from self-reflection within DCAF's Elsie program, one strand of the larger Elsie Initiative. The main goal of the Elsie Initiative is to increase the meaningful participation of women in UN peace operations. Therefore, while the review addresses literature on the security sector in general, it emphasizes training for personnel in peace operations and in TPCCs.

DCAF's contribution includes a baseline study and the development of the Measuring Opportunities for Women in Peace Operations (MOWIP) methodology in partnership with Cornell University. In the MOWIP pilot phase, DCAF supported 8 countries in implementing the methodology and collected lessons learned from the process. In the current phase of the programme, DCAF is supporting four countries to implement MOWIP recommendations and/or the security sector institutions' more general sectoral gender strategies. The implementation plan for each of the countries include training activities for different audiences.

Content

Introduction

Gender training and capacity building for security personnel has become one of the key approaches to promoting gender equality and implementing the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda.

Mandated by international, regional, and national action plans, expectations of what gender training activities can, and should achieve, are high. Training participants are expected to be introduced to normative frameworks, to understand gender analysis in specific areas of thematic work, and to be equipped with tools to integrate a gender perspective into day-to-day operational activities.

Gender training is expected to lead to institutional change, policy development, and increased capacity to respond to gender-specific security needs, while also aiming to build a common understanding of values related to gender equality, increase awareness of the context (or human terrain), and influence the impact that security personnel themselves have on the operational environment (Lyytikäinen, 2007; Lamptey, 2012). The ultimate goal is often to achieve more gender equal security provision and to produce more effective peacekeepers who contribute to the fulfilment of mission mandates (Carson, 2016). Aiming for all these objectives, sometimes at the same time, it is not an overstatement to claim that gender training is often “trying to be all things to all people” (Martin-Brûlé et al, 2020).

The seemingly over-encompassing list of objectives raises questions about conducting gender training within security institutions, such as:

- How, and when, does gender training contribute to the results we expect?
- When does it work, and why?
- What are the mechanisms that enable gender training to have a successful impact?

We do not know enough about if, how, and when gender training achieves what it is supposed to achieve (Martin-Brûlé et al, 2020). There are existing studies that address gender training in peace operations. For example, Caparini (2019) studies different approaches to pre-deployment and in-mission gender training for UN police peacekeepers, and the impact of deploying specialised teams to respond to sexual and gender-based violence to train local police forces (Caparini & Osland, 2016). Karim & Gorman (2016) look at the impact of Security Sector Reform more generally on individual peacekeepers' professional and gender competencies. However, the studies do not look specifically at the long-term impact of gender training, but rather reiterate the need to find more effective ways of evaluating it (Caparini, 2019).

Gathering lessons learned about how and under what conditions gender training can transform and impact peace operations is important to help practitioners plan and implement training activities, and security institutions to set goals for what training should achieve within their organization.

Therefore, the purpose of this study report is to offer practitioners an up-to-date and accessible overview of literature on gender training in peace operations and security institutions to date, with suggested recommendations for action. We will summarize conclusions and identify gaps and needs for further research or action. The intended audience is primarily those conducting gender training for security sector personnel, especially in connection to the Elsie Initiative. We also add practitioner perspectives to the academic conversation on gender training.

In research, national action plans, and policy documents, the term "gender training" encompasses diverse concepts in different contexts. In some cases, gender training seems to mean "training for and about women". In other cases, gender training focuses on protection from gender-based violence such as conflict related sexual violence (CRSV), sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) and harassment. In a third understanding, training on gender is about how security personnel can apply a gender perspective to improve their operational work. Finally, sometimes gender training is seen as theoretical and normative; sometimes as practical and operational. A critical first step in developing a clear understanding of gender training standards is to recognize that their scope will vary. Gender training should have a purpose that is tailored to the needs and requirements of the security institution (e.g., reducing bias in the workplace or working with a gender perspective) and will serve as a tool to enable the institution to do its work better in that particular area.

All gender training cannot have the same purpose, but the purpose and relevance of each training should be clearly defined to ensure that it meets the required objectives and that results can be followed up on.

The existing literature on gender training for peace operations and for the security sector in general tends to address one of three issues: why do gender training, how to do gender training, or what is missing from current gender training efforts and how they can be improved. Finally, literature discusses the 'soft power' of gender training and how introducing gender training in traditionally male-dominated institutions influenced by masculine norms is always a political practice.

The paper is structured based on these key questions. It begins with a summary of international organizations' policy commitments to gender capacity building in security institutions, mainly focused on training for personnel in peace operations. It then proceeds to review current literature on why we do gender training, how we do gender training, and what is missing from it, and further discusses the political nature of gender training and implications thereof. We conclude by offering recommendations based on the conclusions of the study report and a checklist to plan gender trainings to be more strategic and purposeful and enable long term follow-up on impact of gender training.

WPS Policy commitments on gender training

The UN Security Council urges UN agencies to integrate a gender perspective across all functions through the WPS Agenda.

The United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 explicitly recognizes the need for “specialized training for all peacekeeping personnel” as one tool to implement the resolution, as do several of its subsequent resolutions.[1] The resolution mandates the UN to incorporate gender training and gender sensitive training, while urging member states to do the same (SC/RES1325, 2000).

The UN Department of Peace Operations' (DPO) Policy on Gender Responsive UN Peacekeeping Operations further reiterates the need for training on gender equality and WPS for senior management as well as for peacekeepers at operational level (Lamptey, 2012; UNDPO, 2018). UNSCR 2553 (SC/RES2553, 2020) on Security Sector Reform also recalls the resolutions on Women, Peace and Security, and underscores the importance of adequate training for security personnel to address gendered security needs and the inclusion of more women in the security sector.

Other organizations, such as the EU, the AU, ECOWAS, and NATO, also include gender training in their policies on WPS. NATO and the EU both have entire sections of their WPS action plans dedicated to gender training. For example, the EU strategic approach to WPS and joint action plan (2019) includes mandatory training on gender mainstreaming for all staff, and training on WPS for all staff. It also encourages member states to prioritize gender training in their National Action Plans (NAPs).

[1] UNSCR 1820, UNSCR 1888, UNSCR 1889, UNSCR 1960, UNSCR 2106, UNSCR 2122, UNSCR 2242, UNSCR 2467 and UNSCR 2493.

At the national level, as of December 2024, there were 108 UN member states who developed a NAP on WPS, with 3 more forthcoming.[2] There are also 11 regional action plans developed by regional networks or organizations.[3] Out of the 108 existing NAPs, only a handful do not include gender training in their objectives. All of the 11 regional action plans include gender training in one or several objectives. However, they differ in their scope and understanding of what kind of training this should entail. In general, the NAPs and regional action plans mention specific gender training in one or several of the following three contexts:

1. offering specific capacity building or mentoring for women in leadership and mediation skills or other relevant fields to increase their participation;
2. training for military, police, and prosecuting authorities in preventing and responding to sexual and gender-based violence; and
3. training of security personnel on UNSCR 1325, gender specific impacts of conflict, gender and human rights.

The above categories were defined through qualitative content analysis of the national and regional action plans.[4] While several action plans include sex-specific training under gender training, the forthcoming recommendations of this paper will refer to gender training as training on gender perspectives for security personnel, not including specific training for women or men.

[2] LSE – WPS National Action Plans; 1325 National Action Plans – An initiative of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (peacewomen.org).

[3] ECOWAS, Southern African Development Community, Great Lakes Region, ECCAS, ASEAN, Pacific Region, European Union (EU), NATO, Leage of Arab States, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), Organization of American States (OAS/OEA).

[4] The analysis used training related search words which were then analysed within their context (full sentence and paragraph) to ensure they referred to training on gender and/or women, peace and security.
In English: training, workshop, capacity building, capacity development.
In French: formation, sensibilisation, atélier, renforcement des capacités.
In Spanish: Capacitación, formación, taller, sensibilización, fortalecimiento de capacidades.

Prior research: The “why”, “how” and “what” of gender training

Why do we train on gender?

Both in research and in international policy frameworks, the "why" of gender in peace operations and security institutions tends to be framed in terms of three main arguments:

- **Rights-based** – From a human rights perspective, it is the appropriate course of action to ensure equal participation and gender equal security provision.
- **Normative** – It is an obligation that states and organizations have committed to through national and international frameworks.
- **Instrumental** – It is "the smart thing to do" because a gender perspective improves situational awareness, enhances operational effectiveness, and ensures security for the whole population.

Sources: *Lamptey, 2012; Kvarving & Grimes, 2016; Longworth, Miteva & Tomic, 2016; DCAF, OSCE/ODIHR, UN Women, 2019.*

In an analysis of 12 gender training manuals from a sample of UN agencies, states, and NGO's, Prügl (2013) confirms that they generally focus on three main objectives: improving gender equality, transforming security practices, or addressing gender-based violence.

> Gender training, implicitly or explicitly, is framed as one of the main tools (in addition to e.g., gender advisors and gender focal point networks and reporting with sex disaggregated data) to integrate gender in peace operations and in the work of the security sector.

As noted above, UNSCR 1325 explicitly calls on member states to train personnel on "the protection, rights, and the particular needs of women". Training on gender and WPS is often mandated by national action plans and national, international, or organizational frameworks. In some peace operations, the resolution that mandates the peace operation refers to UNSCR 1325 and the WPS agenda.[5] A review of policies and action plans shows that training is often framed as a solution to a problem. For example, training on sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA), conflict related sexual violence (CRSV) and gender-based violence (GBV) is intended to improve responses to and prevention of these issues. While some national action plans frame it as such, sex-specific training on particular skills is generally not considered gender training. However, training on specific skills such as English or French language skills can also be used as a tool to enhance women's access to peace operations (Munch and Holvikivi 2021).

Holvikivi (2021) has examined policy commitments specifically related to gender training in 6 regional action plans and 75 national action plans on Women, Peace and Security. The analysis "establishes a normative understanding of gender that is focused primarily on vulnerability to sexual violence, and that frames gender as a question of skills and capacities rather than political investments or moral values" (Holvikivi, 2021: 175). Holvikivi concludes that, in mission mandates, gender training for personnel in peace operations is generally framed as a problem-solving strategy to better address certain issues, above all sexual violence. While research on gender training in policy commitments addresses how gender training is framed and understood in policy, it does not necessarily address whether the policy is implemented or not.

Training on gender-sensitive conflict analysis, WPS, and gender in the operational context aims to counter gender-blind lines of action. In peacekeeping contexts, gender training of personnel aims to ensure that they have a better understanding of the needs of the population they serve and that they can also promote principles of gender equality in post-conflict reconstruction (Lamptey, 2012).

Finally, one study indicates that if training addresses the peacekeeper's personal gender biases and views, then it could improve their inclination to report misconduct. The "Saving the world, one gender training at a time" Elsie Policy Brief used data from MOWIP pilot countries to assess the relationship between participation in gender training and the attainment of less discriminatory or more equitable views of gender roles (Munch & Holvikivi, 2021: 3). The authors do not find such a link. However, the MOWIP data show a correlation between holding discriminatory and traditional views of gender roles and being less likely to report misconduct and sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) in peace operations (DCAF, 2022). Based on these findings, Munch and Holvikivi conclude that gender training could increase the likelihood to report misconduct, meaning that gender training has a largely unused potential to address peacekeepers' personal biases and views.

[5] For example, MONUSCO (UNSCR 1925), UNMISS (UNSCR 1996) and UNAMID (UNSCR 1769).

How should we train on gender?

Both research and policy papers elaborate on what methodologies to use for gender training (UNWTC, 2022; Lysychkina et.al, 2016; Pepper, 2012, Tõnisson Kleppe, 2008). Even if the main goal is to equip participants with knowledge and skills, it is difficult to conduct gender training without somehow confronting participants' attitudes towards gender. It is about intellectual, but also attitudinal and emotional transformation (Mackay, 2003; Lyytikäinen, 2007; Lamptey, 2012; Lysychkina et.al, 2016). As Lysychkina et al. (2016: 104) put it: "Teaching gender is not about imparting knowledge. It aims higher – to improve or change the attitudes and behaviors of learners". However, this does not mean that the purpose of gender training in a bureaucratic institution is to enforce personal attitude change. It is to ensure that personnel act in accordance with institutional objectives, such as integrating a gender perspective and adhering to the code of conduct. Like any other professional requirement, it is something that personnel are required to do regardless of personal opinions.

At the same time, feminist methodologies include encouraging attitude change (Pepper, 2012) and critical self-reflection as a part of gender training (Holvikivi, 2021; Carson, 2016, Lysychkina et al, 2016). These methods are therefore particularly suitable to impart knowledge, while simultaneously challenging attitudes and behaviors. This aligns with insights

from political and cognitive psychology, which show that, especially when it comes to values and political opinions, facts do not change minds, but emotions do (Haidt, 2001. Nyhan & Rifler, 2010. Kolbert, 2017. Belizzi, 2022. Westen et al, 2006). Training approaches that inevitably engage with opinions, attitudes, and behavior thus do well to work at the emotional level for unpacking implicit bias and prejudices, and deconstructing gender stereotypes, for example.

Good practices of gender training or capacity building show methods that are participatory, contextualized, and tailored to specific training needs and group dynamics.

Good practices include:

- Conducting a thorough training needs assessment prior to the training to understand the audience, their previous knowledge about gender, and the operational environment of the institution, in order to determine what approach to take (Martin-Brûlé et al, 2020; Pepper, 2012; Tõnisson Kleppe, 2008). It is also important to tailor the training to the context, roles, and responsibilities of the training audience, which can be a challenge in e.g., e-learning environments (Puechguirbal, 2003; Martin-Brûlé et al, 2020).

- In terms of content, spending enough time on explaining the concept of gender, including both rights-based (gender as a human rights), normative (international and legal frameworks), and instrumental (operational effectiveness) approaches, is considered good practice (Mackay, 2003; Lysychkina et al, 2016; Pepper, 2012). It is also important to separate the concepts of gender, women's inclusion and participation, and issues such as preventing and responding to sexual exploitation and abuse and gender-based violence. Often, these concepts are conflated (Martin-Brûlé et al, 2020).

- Gender training needs to be guided by principles of adult learning, such as valuing learners' experiences as contributions to the training, adapting to different learners' styles, and closely connecting the learnings to their everyday work.[6] Instructors act as facilitators, and participants are responsible for and continuously reflect on, their own learning (Tõnisson Kleppe, 2008; Lysychkina et al, 2016; Martin-Brûlé et al, 2020; Berbec et al, 2021).

- Participants need to know why they are learning what they are learning and how they will be expected to implement it in their work. Formulating clear learning objectives, and using participatory and interactive methods, including experiential and problem-based learning such, as role play where gender is integrated into security related exercises, as well as realistic and comprehensive case studies, is recommended (UNWTC, 2022; Lysychkina et al, 2016; Pepper, 2012, Martin-Brûlé et al, 2020; Tõnisson Kleppe, 2008). In sum, participant-centred and interactive training with space for sharing experiences and participants reflecting on their own learning is advised when training on gender in security institutions and peace operations.

- It is important to ensure that the right audience is trained, but also that the right trainers are delivering the training. This means selecting trainers who have in-depth knowledge of gender and other relevant issues, but who are also able to relate theoretical concepts and policies to their practical implications in the day-to-day work of security personnel and the operational requirements of field missions (Martin-Brûlé et al, 2020). Some training materials have been criticised for being too academic or theoretical for audiences in tactical and operational contexts. It is important that trainers can contextualize the training and offer concrete, research-based examples (Lyytikäinen, 2007), integrating research in an accessible way for the training audience.

- Feminist methodologies further require trainers to have a strong context-sensitivity and

[6] See, for example, Malcolm Knowles principles of adult learning or andragogy.

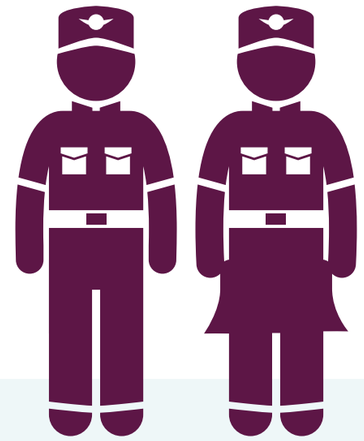
self-awareness: they need to avoid reinforcing stereotypes and to be aware of their own biases and privileges. In addition to delivering content, they need to ensure that gender roles, norms and relations in the learning environment are addressed throughout the training and that gender-inclusive language is used. This includes promoting diversity and a safe environment among participants and in the instructor and training development team. Without awareness of gender dynamics in the learning environment, gender bias can creep into the content, tasks, and assessment of learners' competencies (Watson, 2016), reinforcing what trainers aim to deconstruct through the training.

- Recording change and evaluating impact is crucial. Feedback loops and observational notes before, during, and after the training, including instructors' interpretation of training dynamics, such as body language, level of participation, and questions from participants (Martin-Brûlé et al, 2020), can help recording changes. As changing attitudes is a long-term process, following up shortly after the training (Lamptey, 2012) and/or after three to six months (Munch & Holvikivi, 2021) is also recommended. Ideally, this is done by the organization or institution in question as part of following up on the objectives they set for the training. Pre-course surveys or other pre-training data establish a baseline from which to measure change and results.

- Furthermore, blended learning approaches, that combine online pre-studies with in-person courses, are recommended (DCAF et al, 2012). In the aftermath of the COVID pandemic, a new body of learning has emerged that addresses online training solutions (UNWTC, 2022). Lessons learned from online training include the need to continue using participatory methods online, and ensuring that elements of personal experiences and critical thinking are maintained in the online environment. From a gender perspective, there are challenges (some of them gender-specific) but also benefits from online learning, such as greater accessibility and flexibility (Martin-Brûlé et al, 2020, UNWTC, 2022).

- As any process aiming at institutional change, gender equality training can sometimes invoke resistance. Gender trainers often address the need to prepare to handle possible resistance during training activities. There are several resources offering good practices for responding to resistance. Good practices include acknowledging resistance when it occurs and asking questions to find out where the resistance comes from in order to better address it. Encouraging an open dialogue and safe learning environment can make resistance part of moving the training forward, rather than hampering it (EIGE, 2016:47–49; VicHealth, 2018; ITC-ILO, n.d). Referring to codes of conduct and mission mandates, as well as normative, rights-based, and instrumental arguments can be important. However, considering the above-mentioned research that emotions, rather than facts, change minds, drawing on concrete examples and personal experiences tends to be more productive. Naturally, handling resistance always requires prioritizing a safe learning environment for trainers and participants, and involving leadership support if necessary.

- Finally, in addition to gender-specific training, gender should always also be mainstreamed into the general training agenda, e.g., curricula (Lyytikäinen, 2007).



What is missing from gender training?

Even in cases when gender training is not lacking in itself, the lack of resources devoted to it often prevents it from fulfilling its potential. If gender training is not provided as mandated in policies or action plans, and it is treated as a "second choice initiative", or lacks continuity, it is unlikely to affect organizations and practices on a larger scale.

The same applies when it is provided on an ad-hoc basis or only as self-paced introductory courses and when only specialised staff such as gender advisers participate in more in-depth training (Mackay, 2003; Razakamaharavo, Ryan, & Sherwood, 2018; Razakamaharavo, 2019).

In general, the literature seems to be in relative agreement that training on soft skills – such as communication, trust building, awareness, increased self-reflection, introspection, and debate regarding gender bias in your own culture and at the personal level – is mostly lacking in gender training for peacekeepers (Carson, 2016; Duriesmith, 2017; Holohan and Singleton, 2017; Holohan 2019; Holvikivi 2021; Munch & Holvikivi 2021). Further, self-reflection that specifically involves and focuses on masculinities and men and boys, not just as "allies" but also as gendered beings, is lacking (Laplonge, 2015; Duriesmith, 2017).

Regarding UN operations, Laplonge states that, "[a]t no point is there any reference to the need to reflect on understandings of gender within the peacekeepers' own cultures. Gender is thereby removed from the person who is the peacekeeper and located in the local culture" (2015:96). Gender is seen as something that is relevant mainly in the operational contexts, and peacekeepers are assumed to be able to leave their own learned biases and gendered behaviours at home – and be capable of being peacekeepers regardless of their own attitudes towards traditional gender roles. Hence, a strand of research voices the need to discuss gender as a set of personal attitudes and beliefs, in addition to an additional lens that provides a solution to a problem.

A recent meta-analysis of 18 MOWIP reports[7] revealed further gaps regarding gender training in peace operations. Eight of the MOWIP reports (44%) find that women's access to training and personal development opportunities related to peace operations is generally lower than that of men. However, women peacekeepers are overrepresented when it comes to participation in gender training. In five out of 18 MOWIP countries (27%), women are more likely than men to serve as gender focal points in the mission and more likely to have participated in gender training in general. They are also more likely to be encouraged by senior management to attend gender training (Karim et al, 2025).

This, in contrast to women's lower access to training overall, suggests that gender equality is seen as a women's issue rather than a general competency required for all staff – a conclusion further reinforced by the finding that gender training is not a standard part of the curriculum in many MOWIP countries. The data show that not all deployed personnel have participated in gender training prior to deployment and that the majority of personnel are not familiar with UNSCR 1325, the first resolution of the United Nations Security Council on the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) Agenda. There is no correlation between increased awareness among staff and the existence of National Action Plans (NAPs) on WPS in their country. Furthermore, gender training does not appear to be a requirement for advancement or promotion, nor a consistent requirement for top-down leadership across MOWIP reports (Karim et al, 2025).

Outside the field of peace operations, some literature focused on human resource management, psychology, and organizational change also discusses the effectiveness of training on unconscious bias regarding gender. The focus on individual biases rather than systemic discrimination or change is questioned (Williamson & Foley, 2018; Noon, 2017). With a lack of research on the long-term outcomes of unconscious bias training, there is in fact not enough evidence (yet) to suggest that it achieves change in organizational cultures, increases gender equality or diversity (Williamson & Foley, 2018; Emerson, 2017; Nielsen & Kepinski, 2016). Some studies suggest that imposed training on unconscious bias may even have the opposite effect (Apfelbaum et al, 2008; Dobbin & Kalev, 2016) or normalize stereotypes (Duguid and Thomas-Hunt 2015). If done wrong, gender training might even reinforce norms and stereotypes. In addition, there is criticism of focusing on gender in isolation, claiming that intersectional and diversity perspectives must be included in all gender training (Plantega, 2010).

Finally, Martin-Brûlé et al (2020) find a general lack of systematic evaluation when it comes to gender training in international peace and security. They argue that three additional areas should be addressed (1) the extent to which the training impacts the practices of the audience in the short and long term; (2) whether the training enables participants to develop competencies that are applicable to their field of work; and (3) how well the participants engaged in the training and, in turn, how adequately trainers adapted the training to their needs" (Martin-Brûlé et al, 2020:9). The lack of systematic evaluation of impact means that, for example, we don't know

[7] Data from 14 troop- and police- contributing countries (TPCCs) include data from surveys with 9,267 uniformed personnel (46,1% women) and interviews with 345 key decision makers.

enough about capacity building and its impact on peacekeepers' values or their inclinations to commit or report SEA (Carson, 2016). Neither do we know enough about the impact of training on institutional or policy change (Lamtpey, 2012, Martin-Brûlé et al, 2020).

The lack of evaluation, especially across institutions and organizations, in a long-term perspective and with a self-reflective effort, leaves uncertainty about whether gender training in general is achieving its stated goals. Lamptey (2012) and Razakamaharav (2019) argue that follow-up systems and possibilities to update knowledge and skills after taking initial gender training or post-mission are generally lacking, and Lamptey (2012) and Laplonge (2015) claim that long-term, deep-rooted change in attitudes is unlikely to happen in a single workshop. Caparini (2019) claims that evaluations tend to focus on participants' immediate memory of course content and receive more positive than critical feedback. In summary, there is a gap in research on the impact of gender training on security personnel's behaviour and impact in their work environment (Lyytikäinen, 2007). However, it is challenging to balance the ideal of long-term evaluation with the realities of working in security institutions, where staff often change positions and leadership changes, and follow-ups are consumed by other tasks.

What is also missing, both in evaluation and in literature on lessons learned, is the view of the participants – especially when some time has passed since the training. Not only immediate follow-up, but also follow-up with a long-term perspective to learn what participants have brought from gender training, if and how they have seen changes in their own approach or in their organizations, is largely missing from the reviewed literature. The long-term perspective is particularly interesting, as assessing a process of transformation of attitudes cannot be done after a single training. Post-deployment training and evaluation focusing on participants may also be needed as “it is unrealistic to expect that attitudes and behaviours built over a lifetime can be transformed within the few months that they serve in a peacekeeping mission” (Lamptey, 2012:15). This is missing in many troop- and police-contributing countries.

In sum, the fact that gender training is not the same as “training for women”, needs to be clarified. Reflection on peacekeepers’ and trainers’ own biases and beliefs, in addition to learning about gender as an analytical lens, needs to be included. The lack of conclusive research on long-term outcomes of unconscious bias training, or of gender training at all, leaves a knowledge gap regarding its actual impact on individuals and institutions. This does not mean that it should be dismissed as ineffective, but rather that more knowledge about its long-term effects, both for individual participants and their organizations, is needed.

Gender training in security institutions: An inevitably political practice

Both when it aims to be, and even if it actively attempts to avoid it, gender training is highly political (Razakamaharav, 2019; Holvikivi, 2023). Even if it is framed as a solution to existing problems, adapting to the terminology and approach of the security sector, Holvikivi (2021:178) argues that gender training is "a political practice that intervenes in the culture of martial institutions, rather than simply a value-neutral transfer of technical knowledge and skills".

In an analysis of gender training manuals, Prügl (2013:60) states that the common denominator is their purpose to regulate the behaviour of individuals in order to create a common understanding of security or the "common good," which includes, for example, protection from sexual violence. In the view of these authors, there is an element of soft power, an attempt to change mindsets and attitudes, embedded in the delivery of gender training.

Even if the ultimate aim is to achieve organizational objectives through practices, skills, and behaviours, working for gender equality ultimately aims at redistribution of resources and power: a political endeavour per se.

In fact, when gender training is integrated into an institution with the aim of not being too political or disruptive to existing norms, this implies a political positioning in itself. Gender training thus walks a delicate line between contributing to

changing structures and working from within those structures. Some critics argue that rather than challenging the culture of the security institution or peace operation per se, gender training is translated into a context dominated by masculine norms, often within a framework and language that fits that analytical and problem-solving context. For example, gender training often focuses on gender differences, improving protection, and considering security needs, rather than addressing uncomfortable dynamics of power, privileges, and patriarchy (Carson, 2016; Holvikivi, 2021, 2023, 2024). Some scholars criticize that security institutions often overemphasize protection against sexual violence while neglecting the structural challenges within their own system (Martin-Brûlé et al, 2020), by supporting masculine protection norms (traditional ideas that men should act as protectors) and placing the main focus of gender training on security personnel providing protection from sexual violence. Furthermore, when gender is framed as an analytical tool or a skill that will help improve operational effectiveness, this translates gender into masculine and military code words and thus adapts to the institutional culture without challenging its dynamics. Gender training can thus ultimately become a negotiation between gender equality ideals and (traditionally masculine) institutional norms, simultaneously shaping and being shaped by security institutions (Holvikivi, 2024; Prügl, 2013:60).

Furthermore, Duriesmith (2017) argues that gender training that focuses on "male allies" risks reinforcing dynamics in which "good" men protect women from "other" or "bad" men. "Good men" campaigns risk engaging men without holding them accountable (Duriesmith, 2017) and reward men as gender champions as long as they express some support for gender equality. This approach implicitly treats masculinity as a conscious attitude and, at worst, shows privileged men and women condemning other men. In addition, it implies that gender equality doesn't necessarily concern all men in the first place, when it of course is a question that concerns people of all genders – not just women.

> Gender training that is unaware of these dynamics could create a divide between "good male allies" or "gender champions" and "other, bad and violent men" who are framed as the problem.

Gender training also sometimes fails to address global power dynamics. Holohan (2015) surveys European peacekeepers and finds that gender training tends to focus on women, but also on cultural differences between peacekeepers (as more gender equal) and the beneficiary population (as less gender equal). Notably, this research cannot necessarily be generalised to other contexts. However, it is consistent with Holviviki's (2021) research on national action plans, where countries in the global north tend to portray themselves as gender-aware, while countries in the global south are portrayed as in need of gender training. She emphasizes that NAPs of the global north tend to focus on pre-deployment training for their own personnel as well as training of the local population in other countries. Global south NAPs tend to focus on pre-deployment training and training of security officials in the national context. Holvikivi (2024:44,111–112) further provides an example from participant observation in gender training when, during gender training in the global north, sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) committed by own forces was portrayed as bad behavior by certain individuals, "a few bad apples", while conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) in the country context of the peace operation was rather described as "cultural."

In conclusion, we cannot and should not avoid the political nature of gender training. Critical literature argues that training sometimes compromises or adapts to existing power dynamics in order to fit into security institutions where challenging the entire system may create too much resistance. Instead of addressing power dynamics, sexual harassment and attitudes within their own institutions, organizations may prefer to emphasize gender inequalities in other country contexts and among the peacekeeping population in the training (Holvikivi, 2021). Gender inequality tends to be framed as an external rather than an internal problem, and while it challenges some power dynamics, if done in a certain way, it can also reinforce others ("good" and "bad" men, "global north and south" power dynamics, peacekeepers and beneficiary populations). However, academic literature may not take into account that security institutions often would organizationally separate responsibilities for internal power dynamics, harassment and, attitudes (personnel branch) from gender analysis in the operational environment (among others, intelligence, and operations branches). While the criticism of prioritizing one type of (less sensitive) training over another is important to address, in practice, there will likely need to be different – but interrelated – trainings conducted by separate operational branches to address different topics. This comes back to the importance of specifying the specific purpose of the training and tailoring it to the participants and their tasks.

Recommendations

Based on this review and the DCAF Elsie programme's experience, the following recommendations offer a roadmap for the community of practice conducting gender training within security sector institutions.

We consider these complementary to recommendations that are recurrent in the literature, such as: conducting comprehensive needs assessments, adopting interactive and participatory training methods, strengthening senior management support, allocating sufficient resources, using best practices and lessons learned to inform training, and integrating gender training across all levels.

In addition, we have developed a reality check list of good practices for gender training (see Annex 1). While by no means exhaustive, we consider it a useful tool to plan gender trainings to be more strategic and purposeful, and to enable long term follow-up on impact of gender training.

Purpose and objectives

1 Ensure that the training purpose is aligned with institutional objectives

Training objectives must be tied to the mission mandate and anchored in the organization's purpose. Embed gender training within the broader institutional framework to ensure that it is not treated as a stand-alone, one-off activity. This includes an objective, a follow-up plan, and accountability mechanisms. Design training both on gender-responsive external operations and on internal gender equality promotion, including enhancing gender equality as part of institutional culture. Also, make sure to integrate a gender perspective into all training for all levels of all staff. By institutionalizing gender training and integrating it into broader institutional processes, organizations can foster a culture of gender equality. Leadership support for training is key to make it happen.

2 Clarify training objectives and scope

Clearly define the scope, purpose, and relevance of each training. Ensure that it meets the required objectives, and that results can be followed up. Tailor training curricula or modules to specific goals, such as operational gender analysis, gender-responsive leadership, or preventing SEA and CRSV. Ensure these are delivered consistently across institutions and missions, including to personnel in leadership roles. Emphasize that gender training is available (or mandatory) for all personnel, regardless of gender or position. Highlight how a gender perspective benefits all aspects of operations, from leadership to tactical engagement.

Practical implications

3 Choose the best training format and prioritize continuity over length

The continuity of the training is more important than the length of individual training activities. Short gender training sessions, as long as the training is practical and applicable, can be useful to create momentum and interest, especially for senior managers. It is key to implement a sequence of sessions over a longer time span, ideally every 3-6 months. It is also advisable to combine training sessions with individual coaching and follow-ups, to make direct connections between the training and participants' everyday work duties. If possible, this should be led or co-coordinated by the security sector institution and linked to their internal monitoring processes of the larger institutional objectives that the gender training is part of.

4 Foster emotional engagement and experiential learning in gender training

Emphasize that integrating a gender perspective is an analytical competency that needs to be learned. Also, recognize that the mere presentation of factual information is not enough to change attitudes towards gender equality. To foster attitudinal change, gender training should include emotional engagement and experiential learning. This can be achieved by incorporating concrete real-life examples that connect directly to the participants and their work, personal narratives, storytelling, and interactive activities that evoke empathy and reflection. Encourage participants to share their own experiences and engage in role-play scenarios that challenge their preconceived notions and biases.

5 Emphasize cultural reflection for participants

Gender training for security sector personnel should go beyond addressing gender bias solely within the host country context or population, and should also incorporate reflection on cultural biases and power dynamics, including how they affect one's personal behaviour and appraisal of situations and contexts. By emphasizing cultural reflection in gender training, security sector personnel can develop a nuanced understanding of how gender biases manifest in different contexts. This awareness not only enhances their effectiveness as peacekeepers but also contributes to creating inclusive and respectful environments within their teams and among the communities they serve.

6 Emphasize trainers' self-reflection

Encourage trainers to engage in continuous self-reflection on their own attitudes and positionality (their own social identities in relation to those of the participants). Trainers must recognize how their

personal experiences, biases, and social positions influence their perspectives on gender topics and their approach to training. Providing opportunities for trainers to reflect on and discuss their own positionality during the training design phase can enhance their sensitivity and effectiveness in delivering gender training. This process should include discussions, reflective exercises, and peer feedback mechanisms. The overall quality and impact of gender training programmes can be significantly improved when trainers continuously reflect on and recognize how their personal experiences, biases, and social positions influence their perspectives and training approach.

Accountability and monitoring

7 Adopt a monitoring approach that includes long-term follow-up

Adopt a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation approach that includes a baseline and long-term follow-up on the specific objectives of the training to assess the impact of gender training. Follow-ups should be part of the training design itself. They should include continuous feedback mechanisms, self-reflection exercises for participants, and regular evaluations to measure changes in attitudes, behaviours, and institutional practices. Such an approach will help identify areas for improvement and ensure that the training is achieving its intended results over time.

Conclusions and ways forward

In conclusion, the literature raises key questions: does gender training challenge existing power dynamics or merely adapt to them?

When tailored to security institutions – often male-dominated and shaped by traditionally masculine norms – critical researchers argue it may inadvertently reinforce gender norms. While framing gender training as a solution within the security sector's mandate is pragmatic, it may not be the most progressive path to fostering gender-equal institutions.

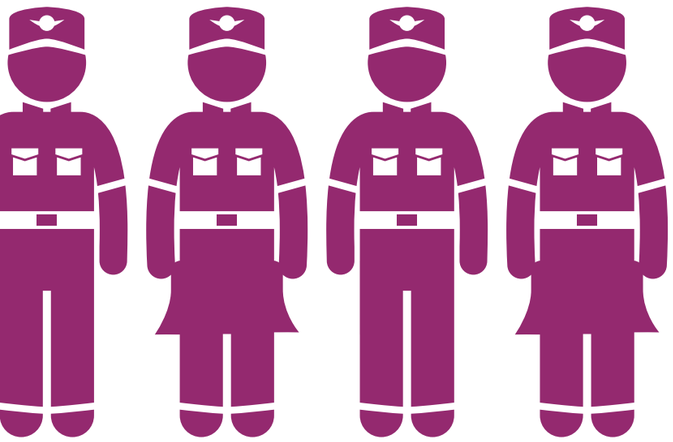
It requires balancing transformative action with institutional mandates, operations, and functions; therefore, it is inherently political. For practitioners, these critiques offer valuable reflections, though they often remain separate from the practical goal of integrating a gender perspective to help security institutions meet their objectives.

The scope of gender training is broad, yet its target audience is often narrow. Policy and research suggest that "gender training" tends to encompass everything from protection against gender-based violence to gender analysis in operations, as well as specialized training for women – while specific training for men is rarely labelled as gender training. Furthermore, women tend to be overrepresented in these sessions, when they, at the same time, often have less access to other forms of training and competency development. Rather than serving as a catch-all solution, each iteration of gender training should have clearly defined, specific objectives that set realistic

expectations and allow for long-term follow-up. This includes making it explicit that gender training is not training for or about women. The scope of the training needs to be focused, while the group of participants needs to be broadened.

Debates on gender training – its purpose, methods, and effectiveness – have largely been shaped by the perspectives of trainers and researchers. It focuses on the implementation aspects of training, rather than its impact. Missing from the literature is the viewpoint of participants: how do they experience the training, and what are its short- and long-term effects on their careers and institutions? The MOWIP data suggests that gender training does not lead to career advancement. This raises questions about how it is valued and how gender expertise is used within security institutions, and highlights the need for long-term impact assessments. This perspective is crucial for policymakers, trainers, and organizations that promote training as a key tool in implementing the Women, Peace, and Security agenda. To better understand its impact, iterative follow-ups with participants and their institutions, ranging from check-ins to in-depth research, are necessary.

Nevertheless, gender training does not, and should not, occur in a vacuum. Other structures, such as leadership support, institutional policies, resources (material and human), and accountability structures will also likely impact trainees' possibilities to implement their learnings and continue to use a gender perspective in their everyday work. Integrating gender training with other gender mainstreaming efforts, such as Gender Focal Point networks, policy development and reporting requirements are thus crucial. It needs to be embedded in a larger institutional purpose and commitment.



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Annex

Annex 1. Reality Check List

Based on the recommendations of this paper, the list below provides a tool to plan gender trainings to be more strategic and purposeful and enable long term follow-up on the impacts of gender training. Use the list to do a reality check to set your gender trainings up for impact and sustainability!

Before the training

- ☑ Define clearly what the purpose and desired learning outcomes of the training are and how they fit into larger institutional objectives and processes.
- ☑ Integrate the training into other gender mainstreaming efforts, such as Gender Focal Point networks, policy development, and reporting requirements.
- ☑ Ensure leadership support and engagement during the training and follow-up.
- ☑ Agree on the format of the training with the security sector institution and ensure that it includes several follow-ups over a longer period, to deepen and monitor learning and evaluate results (the impact).
- ☑ Conduct training needs assessments with participants and/or their organizations to adapt the training to the audience.
- ☑ Know your audience (work description, level of experience, rank/positions, degree of responsibility, gender training background, etc.) and their everyday working context.
- ☑ Identify clear examples from the training context for your exercises, which will resonate with participants' experiences and work descriptions. If participants are unknown, work with your point of contact in the security sector institution to learn as much as possible about them.

- ☑ In your training content, discuss gender both in the external operational environment and in the participants' organizational environment
- ☑ Teach analytical tools, such as gender analysis, while also creating safe spaces for self-reflection that involve emotional components of learning.
- ☑ Ensure gender training addresses gender norms, masculinities, femininities, and the security needs of men and women rather than only emphasizing women and protection.
- ☑ Include self-reflection on stereotypes, implicit bias, or gender inequalities in the context of the trainers/participants and not just in their operational environment.
- ☑ Take an intersectional approach to ensure that "men" and "women" are not approached as monoliths but rather address the different privilege, power, and exclusion when gender is combined with ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, and gender identity, and other.
- ☑ Select trainers with the right experience and contextual knowledge to adapt the content to the audience.
- ☑ Create a pre-post survey to measure immediate impact.

During the first training block

- ☑ Start with discussing the learning objectives of the training and why these are important for the security sector institution.
- ☑ Consider bringing in a commander / senior leader to give a keynote speech on how the training fits into the wider objectives of the security sector institution.
- ☑ Provide concrete tools that participants can use in their work.
- ☑ Take observatory notes or fill a training diary to take note of qualitative progress and of priorities that require deepening in the follow-up training.

- ☑ Integrate participants' continuous reflection on their own learning and how they can use the training elements in their own work.
- ☑ Guide participants to make personal commitments at the end of the training, which implement the learned in their everyday working or private lives. Ideally, these should be precise, time-bound, and time-bound, and measurable.
- ☑ Collect data through the pre-post survey.

For consecutive follow-up training blocks

- ☑ In the follow-up training sessions, integrate modules to fill in the gaps identified through your pre-post surveys and/or observed during the training (observatory notes/diaries).
- ☑ In the framework of follow-up sessions, record participants' stories and monitor them over time. Follow up on participants' personal commitments, asking them about their experiences in applying the learned, and in achieving their commitments. This is a great opportunity for longer-term monitoring and capturing participants' perspectives!
- ☑ If you have the possibility, include into your training plan more in-depth research on participants' experiences and views (e.g., through interviews with participants).
- ☑ Repeat the pre-post survey at every follow-up session to monitor participants' learning curve.

After the training process

- ☑ Analyse the monitoring data and brief the security sector institution about learning outcomes and identified needs to sustain the progress.
- ☑ Work with the security sector institution to ensure they have a follow-up, monitoring, and evaluation plan. Ensure the plan establishes responsible entities and ensures continuity even when staff rotates. The plan should include several check-ins with participants after the training programme has ended, even as they change positions within the same organization.
- ☑ Through the longer-term follow-up plan, integrate regular check-ins with training participants into working routines of the security sector institution at national level. This ensures national ownership of the process and circumvents practical barriers of limited funding structures and short-term project timelines for gender trainings. It will allow the security sector institution to monitor learning effects and evaluate longer-term impact.

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