

OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN IN PEACEKEEPING: POLICY SERIES

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Organizational Culture Reboot

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The Elsie Initiative is a multilateral pilot project that uses the [Measuring Opportunities for Women in Peace Operations \(MOWIP\)](#) methodology to research barriers to and opportunities for women's meaningful participation in peace operations in seven pilot countries. A comparative analysis of data from MOWIP reports, as well as their primary findings, inform this policy brief series.

Why Do We Need a Reboot?

Organizational culture is the bedrock of a fit-for-purpose institution – one that can optimize its human resources from recruitment to retirement. Security institutions are operating in an increasingly complex and rapidly changing global environment. 21st century peacekeeping is routinely undertaken in the context of health epidemics, climate crisis and mass immigration in addition to conflict and violence. **Ever-increasing mission complexity requires individuals and units to be agile and adaptable, while also arriving to the field with strong communication, conflict resolution and multicultural skills** (see Box 1). MOWIP data identified gender roles and social exclusion as consistent barriers to women’s meaningful participation and an impediment to mission effectiveness in peace operations. This signals a need for an organizational culture reboot – one able to capitalise on women’s meaningful participation and improve mission effectiveness.

Box 1 What are the most important skills of a UN peacekeeper?

These qualities were identified by formerly deployed peacekeepers surveyed using the MOWIP methodology as well as in a study of 3,505 Swedish peacekeepers who served in Bosnia-Herzegovina in the 1990s.¹



The Role of Leaders

Organizational culture is the nexus between the policy and doctrine of an institution, and the extent to which these are consistently applied by personnel at all levels. Organizational culture is created, reproduced, and reinforced by those with leadership responsibility. Leaders play a central role in designing, modernising, and implementing policy and doctrine. As such, organizational culture is not something established and finished; it is dynamic and continuously changing.

Leaders are responsible for fostering an organizational culture that:

- is agile, fit-for-purpose and responsive to the dynamic and multicultural realities of 21st century peace operations,
- effectively leverages the skills, abilities and character attributes required for peace support operations, and
- engenders group solidarity and loyalty in a manner consistent with peace operations mandates, including enhanced trust and cooperation, reduced conflict and exclusion, and efficient decision-making and action implementation.

¹ Eva Johansson, In a Blue Beret: Four Swedish UN battalions in Bosnia, LI, 'R' Series. R:1.

The Consequences of Social Exclusion

The MOWIP defines social exclusion as whether women are treated as equal members of the team. The methodology explores the presence of in-group/out-group attitudes and behaviours and how they translate into marginalisation, ostracization, or harassment/bullying. Social exclusion is an indicator of counterproductive organizational culture, and an impediment to both women's meaningful participation and mission effectiveness. The social exclusion of women is largely correlated with attitudes and values in support of rigid gender roles which dictate whether a man or a woman is most suitable for a specific rank, role and/or unit. For example, men are overwhelmingly considered more suitable for elite jobs that confer greater "prestige, rewards and possibilities for faster rank advancement" like combat or operational command roles.² Social exclusion can manifest as conscious harassment, hazing, and bullying, as well as unconscious bias and discrimination that may be more subtle. This includes accepting only those women who conform to a specific masculine organizational culture or "become one of the guys". Gender roles and social exclusion are consistently high barrier issue areas that impede women's meaningful participation in peace operations.

The data shows that:

- Leaders may be reluctant to deploy women if they have young children, if the peace operation is considered high risk, or when looking to fill operational or tactical roles, regardless of whether these women have the skills and training required. These views may be the result of conscious or unconscious bias in decision-making.
- Men are consistently more likely than women to believe that women are best suited for humanitarian roles, working with women and children, and undertaking functions that avoid operational or tactical engagement. These views may result in social exclusionary behaviours, as well as unconscious bias.
- Social exclusion manifests within all the assessed institutions and included to a greater or lesser extent things like harassing and bullying type behaviour (sharing of unwanted images and messages), making jokes about appearance, discussing sexual conquests, and visiting brothels. These behaviours are neither conducive to women's meaningful participation, nor consistent with peace operations mandates.

MOWIP data also reveals a **link between social exclusionary practices and support for rigid gender roles and counterproductive conduct.**³ Individuals who support rigid gender roles are:

- **MORE PRONE TO ESCALATE A SECURITY SITUATION** and less likely to de-escalate as required by peace operations mandates,
- **LESS LIKELY TO BELIEVE THAT SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE IS SERIOUS**, and
- **LESS LIKELY TO REPORT** colleagues that engage in sexual exploitation and other forms of misconduct – a breach of the UN standards of conduct.
- All MOWIP assessments have identified the presence of social exclusionary behaviours and support for rigid gender roles. This results in an organizational culture that cannot fully enable women's meaningful participation or advance mission effectiveness. It also reinforces other barriers related to deployment selection, household constraints and experience on-mission.

2 Archer, E.M. (2013). The power of gendered stereotypes in the US marine corps. *Armed Forces and Society*, 39 :359-381, 367, in Heinecken, L. (2017). Conceptualizing the Tensions Evoked by Gender Integration in the Military: The South African Case, *Armed Forces and Society*, 204.

3 Huber, L., S. Karim, and L. Pruett (2021). "The Commando Effect: The Impact of Gender on Misconduct, among Security Force Personnel using Experimental Survey Evidence from Four Countries," unpublished manuscript, courtesy of authors.

Six Lessons Learned for Leaders

1 Organizational culture is grounded in the values and identity of the institution. In security institutions these are often associated with a specific form of masculinity. The exclusionary and homogeneous value of the “combat masculine war-fighting”⁴ identity associated with kinetic skills leaves little room for the recognition of the full range of skills, knowledge, and character attributes necessary for successful peace operations.⁵ To achieve mission success, security personnel need to be able to understand and communicate effectively with personnel from partner countries and civilian populations from different cultures.⁶ Peace operations mandates require a range of non-kinetic competence including liaising, negotiating, preventing and de-escalating conflict, facilitating the (re)establishment of the rule of law, protecting civilian personnel, and supporting democratic principles of governance among others.⁷ Escalating conflict, engaging in abusive conduct and failing to report misconduct all correlate with the degree to which personnel hold rigid views on gender roles and the extent to which social exclusion is prevalent within institutions (see Box 2).

Box 2: Academic research using MOWIP data on rigid gender roles



2 Women who are deployed to UN peace operations, particularly in command positions or operational roles, represent important role models for both women and men in security institutions. MOWIP data shows that the first women deployed as peacekeepers contribute significantly to the career of other women serving in security institutions. Moreover, MOWIP data identified that 82% of previously deployed personnel believe women are capable of serving in special tactical operations.⁸ Women trailblazers are critical to fostering organizational change by demonstrating to all security personnel that women have the capability to undertake a full range of roles and ranks within security institutions and in the context of peace support operations.

4 See, Dunivin, K. (1994). “Military Culture: Change and Continuity,” *Armed Forces and Society* 20:531-548 in, Canadian Forces Leadership Institute, Canadian Forces Leadership Institute (2004). “Challenge and Change in the Military: Gender and Diversity Issues”, 12.

5 Canadian Forces Leadership Institute, Canadian Forces Leadership Institute (2004). “Challenge and Change in the Military: Gender and Diversity Issues”.

6 G.J. Hofstede, Pederson, P.B., and Hofstede, G. (2002). *Exploring Culture: Exercises, Stories and Synthetic Cultures*. Boston: Intercultural Press, in, Kvarving, Lena (2019), *Gender Perspectives in the Armed Forces and Military Operations: An uphill battle*. Diss. No. 755.

7 Woodward, R. and C. Duncanson (2017). An Introduction to Gender and the Military. In Woodward, R. and Duncanson, C. (Eds), *The Palgrave International Handbook of Gender and the Military*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, in, Kvarving, Lena (2019), *Gender Perspectives in the Armed Forces and Military Operations: An uphill battle*. Diss. No. 755.

8 Out of 855 previously deployed personnel who were asked whether they believe women are able to serve in special tactical operations in the course of the MOWIP survey, 703 (82%) answered in the affirmative (agree or strongly agree). See section 3.1.3, “Implementing the survey”, of the MOWIP methodology for more details on how this data was collected.

Box 3: Women trailblazers in the US Army Ranger School

In 2015 the first two women (out of 17) successfully completed Army Ranger school in the US and received their special forces tab. What is notable about this example is not that only two women succeeded, but rather, those two women succeeded when 286 of their male counterparts did not! This illustrates the importance of recognizing individual capacity and capability – rather than basing who is best suited for a specific rank, role, or unit on stereotypical gender roles.

(Calamur, K. (2015). "Women, History, and the Army Ranger School: This Friday, two female soldiers will graduate from the elite program.", *The Atlantic*, August 2015, available at: www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2015/08/women-army-ranger-school/401615/)

- 3 One means of producing organizational culture is through hero narratives of **women and men who embody the desired attitudes and values or character of the institution and symbolise a broad range of skills, knowledge and competence associated with the institution and its mandate** (see Box 3). It is critical that when women are heroized, however, it must be done in recognition of their skills, knowledge, competence, and character, and not their gender.⁹
- 4 **Leaders plays a vital role in the design of policy and doctrine** – the codified expression of organizational culture. Leaders have an even greater role in ensuring the effective implementation of policy and doctrine – the alignment between policy and practice – through their social influence.¹⁰ The MOWIP methodology identifies situations where the attitudes and behaviours of leaders do not align with institutional policies, and thus present a barrier to women's meaningful participation and mission effectiveness.
- 5 **Role modelling by leaders is essential.** Failure to hold individuals to account who engage in counter-productive behaviours (including jokes, comments, etc.) and other forms of misconduct effectively gives subordinates a social license to express attitudes and behaviours that should otherwise be condemned.¹¹
- 6 **Personnel at all levels have a role to play in upholding the values and mission of the institution** – to create, reproduce and reinforce an organizational culture that enables women's meaningful participation and advances mission effectiveness. Bystander intervention training programs have proven to be effective in achieving this by building the awareness and capacity of personnel to intervene when colleagues engage in conduct that undermines institutional values such as trust, cooperation, and social cohesion that enable an inclusive institutional culture.¹²

“Addressing attitudes to[wards] women at the individual level is easy. It is much harder to change collective perspectives. We need to confront people with the reality that women are not the problem – they can perform all the activities. The problem is men.”

Col Gonzalo Mila (ret), Uruguay Armed Forces

9 See, Harrell, Margaret C. and Laura L. Miller (1997). *New Opportunities for Military Women: Effects upon Readiness, Cohesion and Morale*, DAS-WO1-95-C-0059, Santa Monica: RAND, 95.

10 Blanchet, K. (2013). "How to Facilitate Social Contagion?," *International Journal of Health Policy and Management*, 1(3): 189-192.

11 See, Vukotich, G. (2011). "Military Sexual Assault Prevention and Response: The Bystander Intervention Training Approach," *Journal of Organizational Culture, Communications and Conflict*, 17(1): 19-35 and Mallett, Robyn K. and Margo J. Monteith. (2019). *Confronting Prejudice and Discrimination: The Science of Changing Minds and Behaviors*. London, UK/San Diego, US: Academic Press/Elsevier Inc., 1-371.

12 Vukotich, G. (2011). "Military Sexual Assault Prevention and Response: The Bystander Intervention Training Approach," *Journal of Organizational Culture, Communications and Conflict*, 17(1): 19-35.

Top Recommendations

An organizational reboot will require a **multifaceted approach aimed at creating and maintaining an inclusive and fit-for-purpose organizational culture**. This reboot must come from leaders at all levels, be manifested in both policy doctrine and practice, and be consistently reflected throughout the institution.

A reboot will include leaders taking responsibility for:

- 1** **ROLE MODELLING** that normalizes women personnel as fit for every rank, role, and unit based on skills, knowledge, competence, and character,
- 2** Institutionalized **BYSTANDER INTERVENTION** training to build the commitment and capacity of personnel to contribute to fostering an organizational culture based on trust, cooperation, and social cohesion,
- 3** Institutionalized **SOCIAL INCLUSION PROGRAMMING** that fosters women's meaningful participation and advances the skills and character needed for peace operations missions (e.g. mixed-gender activities like training, sports, cooking, dancing, singing, problem-solving games, etc.),
- 4** Implementation of **ROBUST POLICY FRAMEWORKS, AND ACCOUNTABILITY AND OVERSIGHT MECHANISMS** (non-discrimination policy, harassment/bullying complaints mechanism, employee climate surveys), and
- 5** Development of **PUBLIC RELATIONS MATERIAL, SOCIAL MEDIA, AND RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES** that avoid tokenism, target women specifically and valorise the character and skills, knowledge and competence needed for peace operations.



Launched by Canada in 2017, the Elsie Initiative for Women in Peace Operations is an innovative multilateral pilot project that is developing and testing a combination of approaches to help overcome barriers and increase the meaningful participation of uniformed women in UN peace operations, with a focus on police and military roles.



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