

# OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN IN PEACEKEEPING: POLICY SERIES

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## Peace Operations Still Exclude Women, but A4P+ Can Change That

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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.*

## Introduction

“Women’s full, equal and meaningful participation” has become a buzz phrase for United Nations peacekeeping and an aim of the UN’s Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy<sup>1</sup>. The UN and its member states have made some progress toward these targets in terms of increasing the numbers of women deployed.

Research on uniformed women’s participation in peace operations undertaken within the framework of the Elsie Initiative has shown how myriad barriers and challenges to gender integration and gender-sensitive peacekeeping remain. This negatively affects uniformed women’s experience as peacekeepers, as well as peacekeepers’ gendered interactions with host communities where they are serving. Ultimately, this undermines the ability of UN peace missions to fulfil their mandates.

**Policymakers need to push both discourse and actions beyond just increasing absolute numbers of women. Rather, they must address the heavily masculinized and exclusionary structures that exist within security institutions and push for transformative approaches to integration.**

Since its launch in 2018, the Action for Peacekeeping (A4P) initiative<sup>2</sup> has become an effective framework for the UN Secretariat to organize internal peacekeeping reform, moving the needle in areas like improving safety and security, monitoring mission and unit performance, and capacity building of troop and police contributors.<sup>3</sup> Despite modest and uneven progress to date, the latest phase of the initiative, titled “A4P+”, presents the best opportunity for achieving the kinds of reforms needed to make real improvements in women’s meaningful participation in peace operations. This is because gender is no longer siloed within commitments related to the Women, Peace and Security Agenda. **Rather A4P+ understands gender as a “cross-cutting mode of analysis” to be applied to all seven of the initiative’s priority areas.**

Drawing on the research findings of DCAF, IPI and the Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security, this policy brief details how the UN and member states supporting A4P+ can bolster a cross-cutting gender approach to bring about lasting change to each of these areas, thus improving the effectiveness, efficiency, and relevance of UN Peacekeeping going forward.

## Threading Gender Throughout A4P+ Priorities

### Priority 1: Collective Coherence Behind a Political Strategy

*A4P+ calls on all stakeholders involved in peace operations to develop “common political strategies” and use their political leverage to achieve shared goals.*

Despite the strong political backing that efforts to increase women’s participation currently enjoy through both A4P+ and the UN Security Council,<sup>4</sup> there is often an over-reliance on gendered stereotypes and biased assumptions about political or protection risks. Ultimately, this fails to serve transformative aims in societies where peacekeeping operates as gender work becomes siloed. The burden of change falls either on women who are asked to do specialized gendered work that does not match their professional qualifications, or a small number of under-resourced and **overworked gender experts or key leadership figures in national and UN security institutions**. Change is thus personality-dependent and impermanent.<sup>5</sup> As a consequence, gendered work does not translate into medium- to long-term gains for UN peace missions when it comes to preventing violence, sustaining peace, and furthering development.

1 [www.un.org/gender/](http://www.un.org/gender/); [peacekeeping.un.org/en/uniformed-gender-parity-strategy-2018-2028-full-text](https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/uniformed-gender-parity-strategy-2018-2028-full-text)

2 [peacekeeping.un.org/en/action-for-peacekeeping-a4p](https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/action-for-peacekeeping-a4p)

3 [www.ipinst.org/2019/09/a4p-one-year-into-implementation-of-the-declaration-of-shared-commitments](https://www.ipinst.org/2019/09/a4p-one-year-into-implementation-of-the-declaration-of-shared-commitments); [https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/191101\\_a4p\\_achievements\\_one\\_pager.pdf](https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/191101_a4p_achievements_one_pager.pdf)

4 See, for example, UNSCR 2538 on women in peacekeeping. For more detail, see: [theglobalobservatory.org/2020/09/women-in-peacekeeping-signs-of-change-at-united-nations/](https://theglobalobservatory.org/2020/09/women-in-peacekeeping-signs-of-change-at-united-nations/)

5 Nagel et al 2021.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Member states should (and already do<sup>6</sup>) implement common political strategies that are based on evidence-based research. This can be achieved by, for example:

- supporting policy research agendas that amplify women’s voices in peacekeeping discourses;
- implementing the Measuring Opportunities for Women in Peace Operations (MOWIP) assessment<sup>7</sup> in their national security institutions and supporting other troop and police contributing countries (TPCCs) to do so too;
- leading by example in an open and accountable manner to ensure that national security institutions take transformative approaches to addressing challenges identified in peacekeeping-related assessments.

## Priority 2: Strategic and Operational Integration

*This priority area calls for tangible progress on UN peace operations’ planning, reporting, monitoring, and use of data, as well as integration between mission components (e.g., military, police, civil affairs, human rights, political affairs) and cooperation between missions and their partners.*

A4P+ highlights the importance of incorporating gender data and expertise across peace operations’ planning, reporting, and monitoring to measure if and how conflict events as well as UN activities impact local populations differently on the basis of gender, or other identity characteristics.<sup>8</sup> Despite recent progress, **a more rigorous and systematic approach to gender analysis is needed to understand how the different contributions of uniformed women and men contribute to operational effectiveness and the fulfilment of mission mandates.**<sup>9</sup>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

To ensure that A4P+ meets its goal of making gender a cross-cutting mode of analysis, and thus enhancing credibility and operational effectiveness<sup>10</sup>, the UN Secretariat should seek to “de-silo” gender expertise by:

- prioritizing gender expertise when hiring against generic profiles for substantive areas like political affairs, civil affairs, and rule of law;
- ensuring that more staff are trained on gender analysis;
- ensuring that justifications for new gender-related positions in the UN Administrative and Budgetary (“Fifth”) Committee identify the link to operational effectiveness and member states’ own recommendations in the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations (“C34”) or Security Council mandates.

The UN should further integrate a gender perspective into standard data collection mechanisms by:

- incorporating sexual abuse and exploitation incidents into the existing SAGE system;<sup>11</sup>
- collecting data on peacekeeping patrols’ gender composition and the different perceptions of these peacekeepers;
- identifying, assessing, monitoring host communities’ gendered experiences.

6 [www.dfa.ie/media/dfa/ourrolepolicies/peaceandsecurity/21-016\\_WPS-Gender-Champions-Outcome-Documents\\_Final\\_Digital.pdf](http://www.dfa.ie/media/dfa/ourrolepolicies/peaceandsecurity/21-016_WPS-Gender-Champions-Outcome-Documents_Final_Digital.pdf)

7 [www.dcaf.ch/mowip-methodology](http://www.dcaf.ch/mowip-methodology)

8 [giwps.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Gendered-Impacts-on-Operational-Effectiveness-of-UN-Peace-Operations.pdf](http://giwps.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Gendered-Impacts-on-Operational-Effectiveness-of-UN-Peace-Operations.pdf)

9 Nagel et al 2021 : [giwps.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Gendered-Impacts-on-Operational-Effectiveness-of-UN-Peace-Operations.pdf](http://giwps.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Gendered-Impacts-on-Operational-Effectiveness-of-UN-Peace-Operations.pdf)

10 [giwps.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Gendered-Impacts-on-Operational-Effectiveness-of-UN-Peace-Operations.pdf](http://giwps.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Gendered-Impacts-on-Operational-Effectiveness-of-UN-Peace-Operations.pdf)

11 [giwps.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Gendered-Impacts-on-Operational-Effectiveness-of-UN-Peace-Operations.pdf](http://giwps.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Gendered-Impacts-on-Operational-Effectiveness-of-UN-Peace-Operations.pdf); Baldwin 2021 (forthcoming).

## Priority 3: Capabilities and Mindsets

*When speaking of capabilities, A4P+ focuses primarily on training, highlighting the need for collective efforts toward specialized trainings for all qualified peacekeepers regardless of gender, and increased investments to ensure all deploying contingents have the capabilities required for their mandate.*

**The Secretariat, member states, and mission personnel, regardless of their gender, must ask what they can do to build equitable and sustainable security institutions** as part of the UN’s shift towards community-focused and “people-centered” peacekeeping. Persistent misconceptions that “gender equals women” undermines this because, first, it often leads to situations where **uniformed women are assigned gender and protection-related roles based on assumptions that they have an innate ability to perform these roles.**<sup>12</sup> Second, it overlooks the fact that men have gender identities, and thus have a crucial role in ensuring mission success through the integration of a gender perspective.

### RECOMMENDATION

Efforts to prepare, train, and support uniformed personnel deployments must not create or exacerbate gender inequality within the UN. The UN and member states can take the following steps to avoid this:

- ensuring that leaders value “masculinized” “hard skills”—like weapons training and driving—equally with “feminized” “soft skills”—such as interviewing, interpersonal communication, cultural sensitivity in training, deployment selection and assessments of workplace performance.<sup>13 14</sup>
- ensuring that all personnel are trained on gender and racial bias prevention, community engagement as well as skills relevant to the roles they are deploying for, regardless of gender.<sup>15 16</sup>
- assigning roles to women and men based on their training and competencies rather than stereotypical assumptions about their innate abilities;<sup>17</sup>
- excising gender stereotyping from training materials and strategic communications.

## Priorities 4 and 5: Accountability to Peacekeepers and Accountability of Peacekeepers

*A4P+ acknowledges the importance of safety and security for peacekeepers, and emphasizes accountability for crimes against them, the mental health and wellbeing of personnel, reliable medical support (including women’s health), camp protection infrastructure, and environmental risk mitigation measures. It also reiterates the Security Council commitments on the UN’s accountability to host communities through preventing and responding to sexual exploitation and abuse and other human rights violations.*

Recent research indicates that peacekeepers across the gender spectrum experience, witness, or hear about sexual harassment and abuse at very high rates in both their home security institutions and on mission. **Threats of sexual harassment and assault (SHA) can preclude uniformed women from deploying or redeploying and can be detrimental to the congeniality and trust among contingents, and peacekeepers’ individual efficacy.**<sup>18</sup> **Despite this “open secret,” leadership responses and accountability and reporting mechanisms fall woefully short as calls for uniformed women’s participation increase.**<sup>19</sup> Paradoxically, some leaders suggest that uniformed women themselves should make their male peers accountable to better behavior.<sup>20</sup> Finally, UN and member state are also accountable to male and female peacekeepers when it comes to care responsibilities.<sup>21</sup>

12 See, for example, Georgina Holmes: [theconversation.com/female-military-peacekeepers-left-feeling-overwhelmed-after-inadequate-training-114887](https://theconversation.com/female-military-peacekeepers-left-feeling-overwhelmed-after-inadequate-training-114887)

13 MOWIP, Baldwin 2021; Holmes; Kumalo 2021

14 See policy brief 2 of this series, “Old expectations, new challenges: What we look for in a peacekeeper and why it matters”

15 Baldwin 2021.

16 See policy brief 5 of this series, “Saving the world, one gender training at a time”

17 MOWIP, Baldwin 2021; Holmes

18 Vermeij 2020.

19 See: Vermeij 2020; forthcoming research from Donnelly and Mazurana.

20 Kumalo 2021; Vermeij 2020; Baldwin 2021

21 See policy brief 1A of this series, “The Duty of Caring”

## RECOMMENDATIONS

UN leadership must be accountable to peacekeepers by ensuring a work environment free of SHA, while holding peacekeepers who bully, harass and abuse their colleagues to account. To this end, A4P+ can renew efforts to increase accountability to peacekeepers through:

- screening out known perpetrators from deployment selection;
- strengthening reporting mechanisms by ensuring that SHA and sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) reporting is open and accessible to all genders while destigmatizing the use of these mechanisms, including for male-on-male sexual violence;
- ensuring that camp design and layout enhance “working, living, and security conditions” based on disaggregated feedback from male and female personnel;<sup>22</sup>
- consulting current and future deployed women and men on how the UN can offer better support in meeting their needs related to healthcare and care responsibilities.

## Priority 6: Strategic Communication

*This priority area refers to the use of differentiated, two-way engagement and storytelling with diverse stakeholders. It aims to strengthen support for peacekeeping at all levels by publicly communicating successes, managing expectations, and addressing disinformation, misinformation, and hate speech.*

Progress on all of the A4P+ priorities depends on effective communication by UN mission and Secretariat leadership with peacekeepers, TPCC governments and their national security institutions, and host governments and communities, especially when it comes to overcoming misconceptions related to gender. **Targeting different groups of men and women with tailored gender-related messaging can help change gender norms, address certain issues related to gender-based violence, and promote women’s participation in political or public life.**<sup>23</sup> Strategic communications are also key to overcoming harmful gendered stereotypes about and among peacekeepers by illustrating uniformed women and men in “non-gendered” roles. They can also highlight their respective contributions to mandate implementation, and convey the mission’s zero tolerance for SEA and SHA.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

To ensure all internal and external communication is gender-sensitive, missions should:

- actively counter stereotypes related to gender and gender roles, which lead to female peacekeepers being “pigeon-holed” into certain roles and excluded from others;
- represent women and men equally, and portraying them in a variety of non-stereotypical roles, including in messaging that is not explicitly linked to gender;<sup>24</sup>
- take account of gender-related differences in access to information and tailor messaging to different target audiences by gender.

22 [www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/issues\\_development-enjeux\\_developpement/gender\\_equality-egalite\\_des\\_genres/elsie\\_initiative-initiative\\_elsie.aspx?lang=eng](http://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/issues_development-enjeux_developpement/gender_equality-egalite_des_genres/elsie_initiative-initiative_elsie.aspx?lang=eng) ; [minurso.unmissions.org/engineers-improving-field-missions-support-un-gender-parity](http://minurso.unmissions.org/engineers-improving-field-missions-support-un-gender-parity)

23 For an overview of research on gender-specific and gender-sensitive communications, see: Jenny Birchall, “Gender Sensitive Strategic Communications Interventions,” Knowledge, Evidence and Learning for Development, December 2018.

24 Trithart and Sherman, forthcoming IPI paper

## Priority 7: Cooperation with Host Countries

*This priority area addresses the importance of constructive engagement with the countries hosting peace operations, highlighting dialogue with government and communities and clear communication, to both clarify UN mandates and strategies and enable states to understand and uphold their own responsibilities, including for protection of civilians and peacekeepers.*

By definition, a "people-centered" approach to peacekeeping requires peacekeepers to engage with members of various communities and groups to understand the unique and differentiated protection needs of boys, girls, men and women, and how they are shaped by their race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, age, among other aspects. UN missions therefore need to create formal mechanisms for different groups within host communities to provide input into mission activities.<sup>25</sup> Currently, community input is sporadic and often dependent on contingent leadership, which TPCC is deploying the engagement teams or platoons, and whether or not patrol teams have received specialized community engagement trainings.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Through the lens of A4P+, TPCCs and the UN can better integrate a gender perspective into pre-deployment and in-mission activities by, for example:

- providing peacekeepers with skills in gendered conflict analysis and diverse community engagement;
- implementing formalized, consistent mechanisms for host community input that take account of gendered experiences;
- ensuring that engagement platoons' guidance by the UN Office of Military Affairs ensures that uniformed peacekeeping activities are responsive to the whole-of-community needs;
- actively challenging paternalistic, dismissive and discriminatory attitudes of peacekeepers towards host communities by recognizing them as partners with agency.

## Conclusion

Within the seven A4P+ priority areas, there is opportunity to better integrate gender as a cross-cutting issue, thus transforming the exclusionary culture of peacekeeping and make real progress towards enhancing the meaningful participation of women in peace operations. The research undertaken within the framework of the Elsie Initiative provides evidence-based insights which member states and the UN can leverage within the framework of A4P+ in order to ensure that UN peace missions remain operationally effective by actively contributing to peace, security and sustainable development in line with their mission objectives.

25 [giwps.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Gendered-Impacts-on-Operational-Effectiveness-of-UN-Peace-Operations.pdf](https://giwps.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Gendered-Impacts-on-Operational-Effectiveness-of-UN-Peace-Operations.pdf)



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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