



Gender and intersectionality workbook for security sector actors promoting equal access to security

About DCAF

DCAF – Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance is dedicated to improving the security of states and their people within a framework of democratic governance, the rule of law, respect for human rights, and gender equality. Since its founding in 2000, DCAF has contributed to making peace and development more sustainable by assisting partner states, and international actors supporting these states, to improve the governance of their security sector through inclusive and participatory reforms. It creates innovative knowledge products, promotes norms and good practices, provides legal and policy advice and supports capacity-building of both state and non-state security sector stakeholders.

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Promoting equal access to security

Who this workbook is for

Security sector personnel who shape policies, operations and institutional culture: military, police, gendarmerie, including patrol units, gender focal points, gender desks and gender units, human resources, finance, as well as personnel from Ministries of Defence, Ministries of Interior. Practitioners and NGOs working with security sector actors can also benefit and integrate the workbook in their capacity building activities.

What you will find

The workbook will guide you through understanding basic concepts related to gender and intersectionality, explain why they are essential to your mandate as a security actor and provide guidance and tips to practically integrate intersectional

approaches in your work. The workbook also features the NAPRI+ tool developed by DCAF to support you in performing a basic gender and intersectionality analysis.

How to use it

- Work through it alone (~120 minutes) or use it as material for a 1-day facilitated workshop (see Annex on page 16).
- The workbook is for your own use. Write directly in the boxes. There are no right answers – only honest ones.

What you will need

- A pen. A real example from your institution. Curiosity, and the willingness to learn and challenge yourself.

1 Why do we need to adopt an intersectional approach?



To start

A patrol team is dispatched to a domestic violence call in a low-income neighborhood on the edge of the city. When they arrive, a young female officer is already on scene, giving clear instructions and taking charge of the situation. One of the patrol officers radios in for confirmation and is told: “Follow her lead – she’s the ranking officer.” The patrol officer answers: “That can’t be right – there’s no senior officer assigned to this district.”

How do you explain the reaction of the patrol officer?

Answer: *The ranking officer is a young woman from this same neighborhood, wearing a hijab, who was promoted last year. The patrol officer’s mental image of “a senior officer in this district” had no room for her – even though she was standing right there. “Senior” is often associated with age and, universally, with men.*

➤ **Providing security for populations requires seeing everyone. Gender, age, ethnicity, disability, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, religion, language, rank, migration status, caregiving responsibilities – these factors intersect and influence who is heard, who is overlooked, who is protected, who patrols whom, as well as who is recruited and promoted within security institutions.**

DCAF positions gender equality as a core pillar of good security sector governance. This requires adopting an intersectional

approach as effective, accountable, and sustainable security sector governance (SSG) depends on understanding how people experience security differently.

Intersectionality is not about adding more boxes to tick. It is about asking why some people are kept marginalised or overlooked – inside our institutions and in the communities we serve – and what we can change in the policy, plan or operation to make everyone visible, heard and respected and, ultimately, safe.

Intersectionality allows us to make decisions based on facts, not assumptions.

Understanding and meaningfully engaging with communities is proven to build better trust with the population, better respond to their needs and foster stronger accountability. Adopting this lens is a moral and operational requirement for security institutions to fulfil their mandate.

This workbook uses **NAPRI+** – DCAF's Gender and Intersectionality Tool – as a simple analytical tool to add an intersectional lens to any decision: a shift roster, a use-of-force policy, resourcing a checkpoint and the composition of a negotiation team.

Five letters, honest questions, leading to smarter decisions.



Key Concepts

Intersectionality is a concept used to define how different social and identity markers intersect and overlap to shape people's access to power, resources, protection, and justice. The term was coined by scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw to explain how single-axis analysis of race or gender failed to capture the experiences of Black women facing overlapping forms of discrimination.

Gender is one of the key dimensions that intersectionality examines, but it is never experienced in isolation. Rather, gender is shaped through its interaction with other social, political, and economic dynamics. This perspective shifts the focus from individual identity alone to broader societal structures that perpetuate discrimination and inequalities.

Structural inequality refers to patterns of disadvantage of disadvantage embedded in institutions, laws, and norms – not simply individual prejudice. Structural inequality shapes who can access security services, who joins institutions, and whose expertise is recognised.

Single-axis approaches analyse inequality or discrimination through one factor at a time – for example gender, age, or ethnicity – without considering how these interact. In security and justice contexts, this can lead to policies and interventions that address the needs of some groups while overlooking those facing multiple and compounded barriers. Moving beyond single-axis approaches helps institutions better understand diverse experiences and design more effective and inclusive responses.



Before you go further: write down a decision you (or your organisation) have recently made that you suspect may affect different people differently. You will come back to it later.

2 Positionality check: Who am I and how does that affect the way I see the world?

➤ Before we explore forms of discrimination and engage in intersectional analysis, let's do a simple but important positionality check. Knowing our positionality equips us to intercept subconscious and unintentional biases and to reveal our blind spots.

The purpose of this quick check is to understand how our identities and experience shape what we see and do not see, so we can make better operational and policy decisions.

Let's anchor this in a real-life example:

A male urban officer from the majority ethnic group may think a night patrol is safe enough if there are lights and backup nearby, while a woman officer or a recruit from a minority ethnic group may see different risks in the same street. Neither of them are wrong; they just see the situation from different positions – that is positionality.



Now, let's apply this individually!

1. **What identities** do I bring to my work (profession, nationality, gender, class, ability, other)?

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2. What aspects of the security contexts I work in
do I find easy to see? What might I naturally overlook?

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3. Whose voices do I tend to rely on in my analysis?
Who is missing from my networks?

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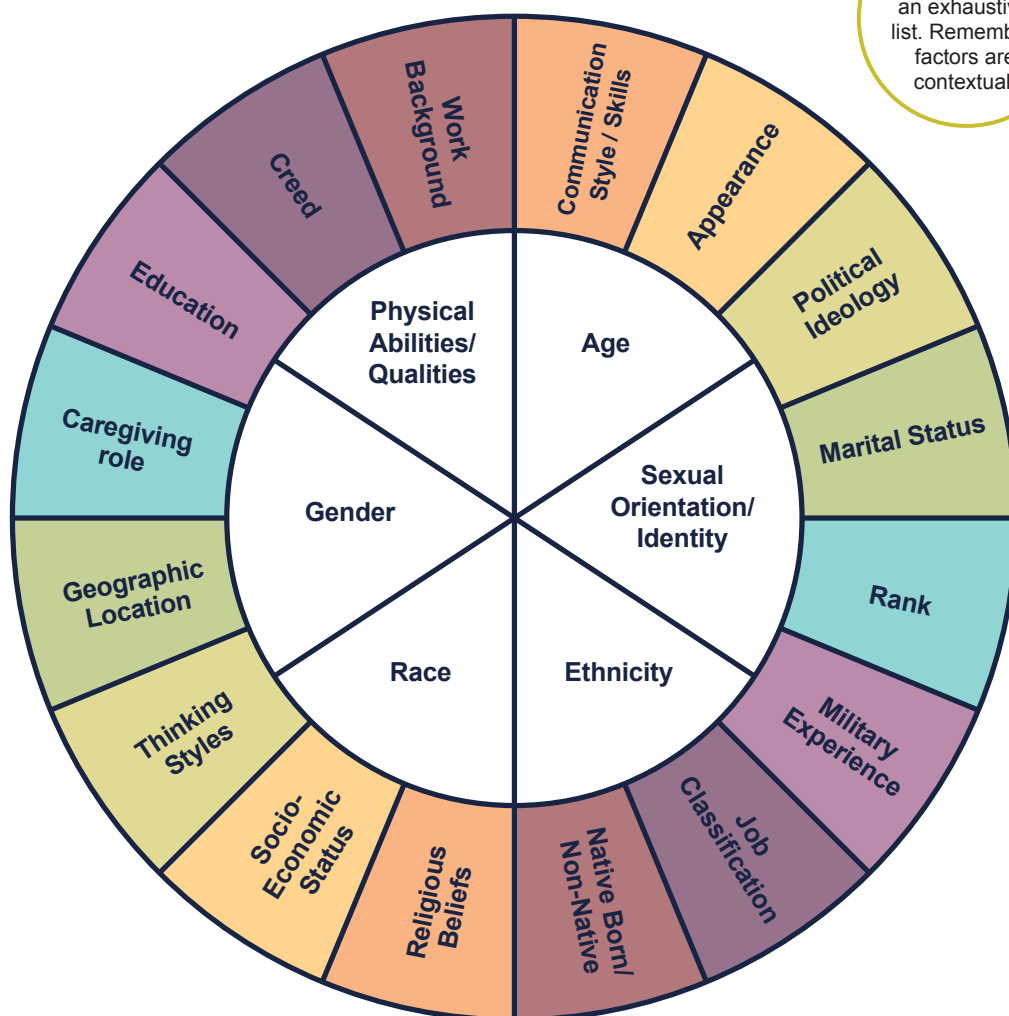
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3 Intersecting forms of discrimination

> No one's life is defined by one characteristic. People carry several identities at once, and institutional, historical and socio-economic circumstances they live in treat those combinations differently. Below are

some of the most common identity factors—they overlap, compound, and look different in every context. This is what an intersectional analysis aims to make visible.

Note!
This is not an exhaustive list. Remember, factors are contextual.





Reminder: overlap, not a complete list

Intersectionality is not a checklist of every identity. It is a way of seeing **how two or three most significant factors combine in a specific context** to keep some people unsafe, unheard or undervalued or that result in some people being overlooked.

A young woman of an ethnic minority in a rural posting will experience her job as police officer differently than an older man from the majority group in the capital – even if their rank is the same.

Likewise, protocols to respond to cases of domestic violence will need to be designed and applied differently based on who filed the complaint: are they part of an indigenous group? Are they men, women, or people of diverse gender identities? Are they minors? Do they speak the dominant language of the country? Do they have legal papers at hand? How do all these factors affect their right to be protected, and therefore, the job of the responding officer?



Which three of the factors above are most relevant to security in YOUR context – internally (within your institution) and externally (in the communities you serve)? Why those three? How do you know? Think about the ethnic, religious, historical and socio-economic factors in the country you work in.

Internal:

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External:

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4 Let's explore intersectionality in practice

APPLICATION 1.

Deciding on night shifts

➤ Now let's test what you learned above on an operational case.



Shift Rosters

A 2025 qualitative study of female police officers in Sweden documented a “double shift”: women in policing balance rotating night shifts with the bulk of unpaid caregiving and household work at home leading to chronic fatigue. This results in transfers out of frontline duty after pregnancy, and ultimately earlier attrition. Women from minority groups face a “triple burden” with higher burnout rates. Similarly, a 2025 UK study of 5,000+ police officers found mothers were significantly less likely to work night shifts than fathers (57% vs 76%), and far more likely to work flexibly (65% vs 36%) – patterns that directly but quietly disadvantage their promotion prospects.

Sources: Granholm Valmari et al., 2025 (PMC), Policing journal, OUP, 2025

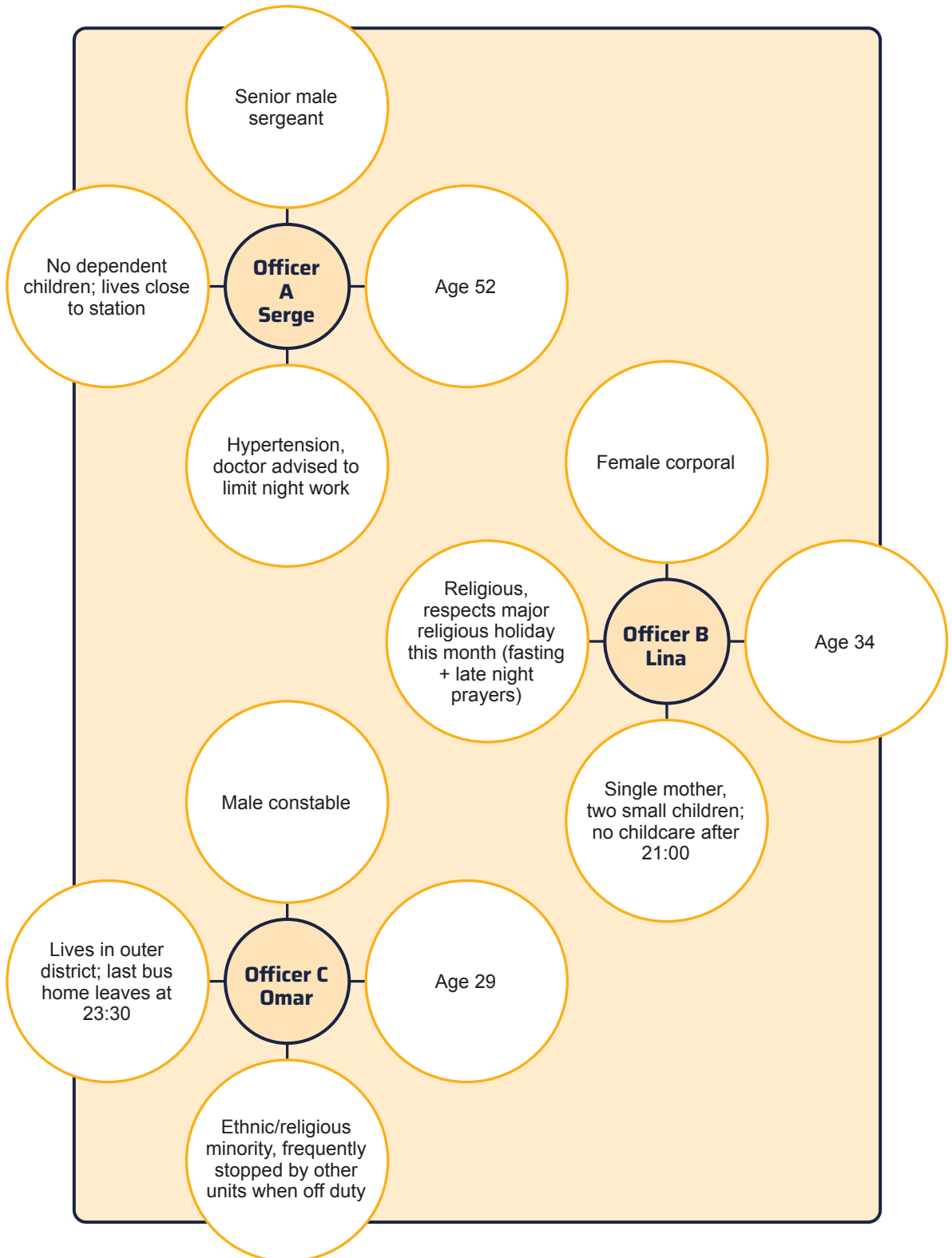
CASE STUDY 1.

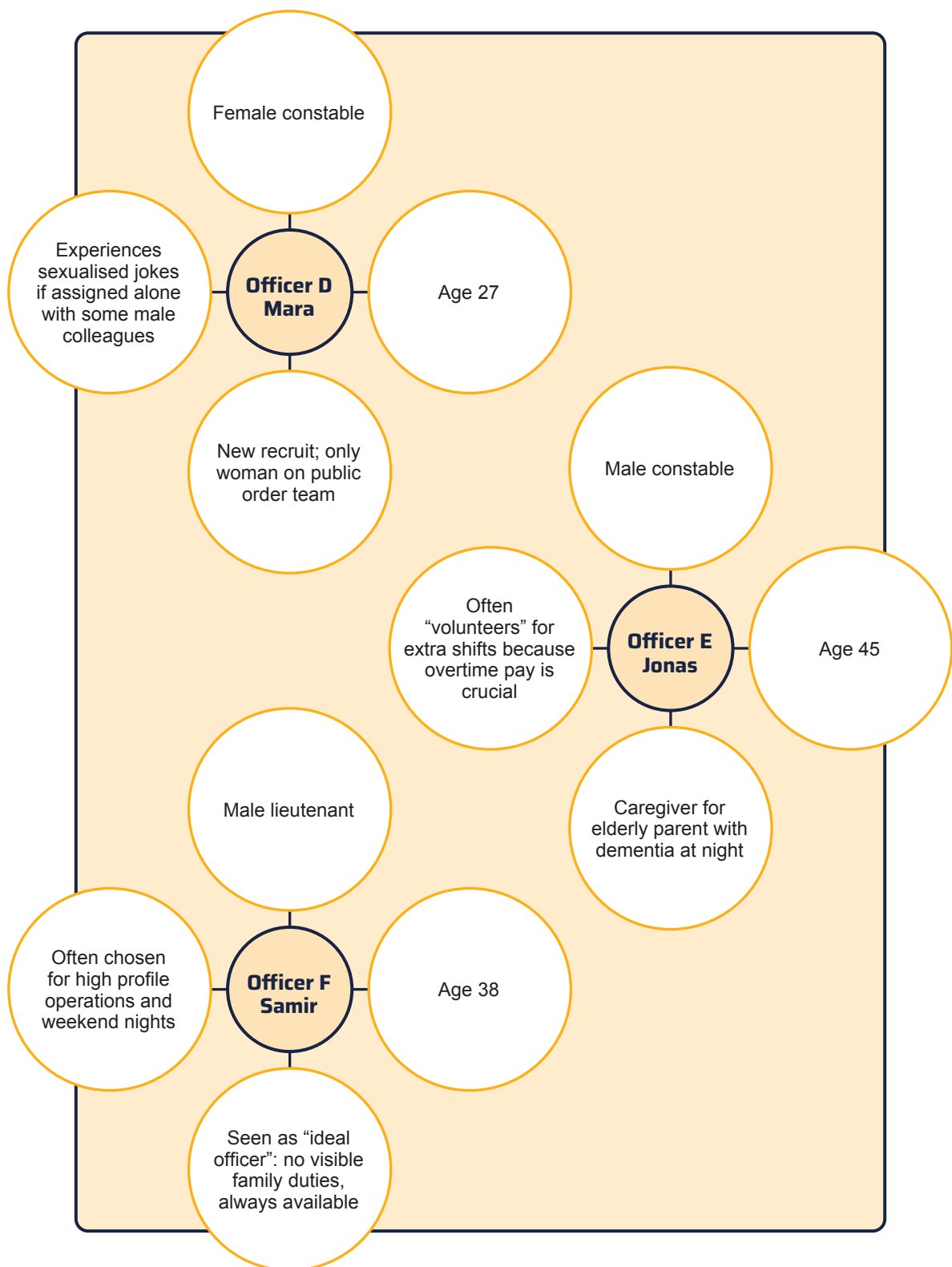
Intersectional shift roster for a patrol unit

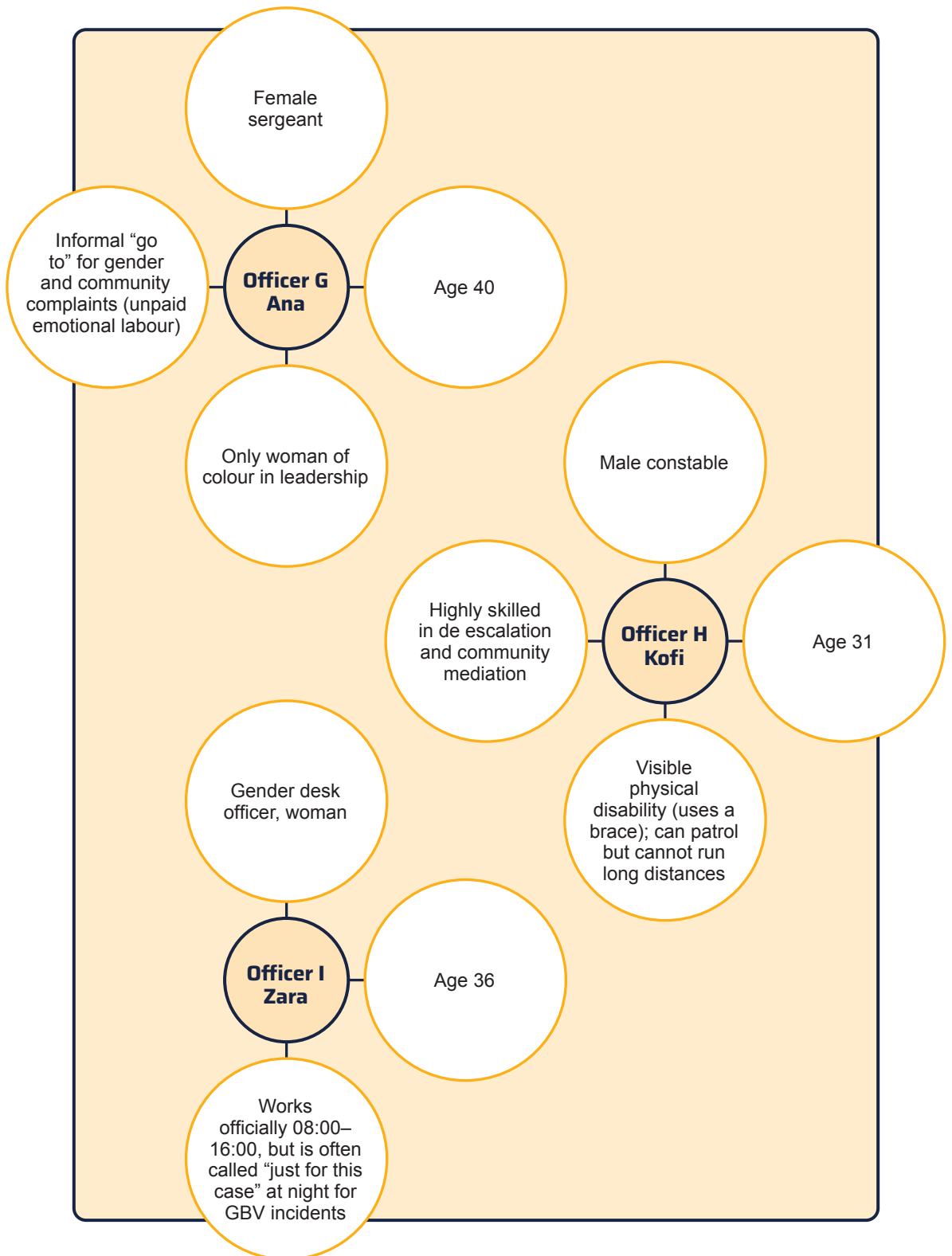
Scenario: You are the duty officer in charge of designing the night shift roster for a mixed urban–rural police patrol unit over one month. The unit must guarantee:

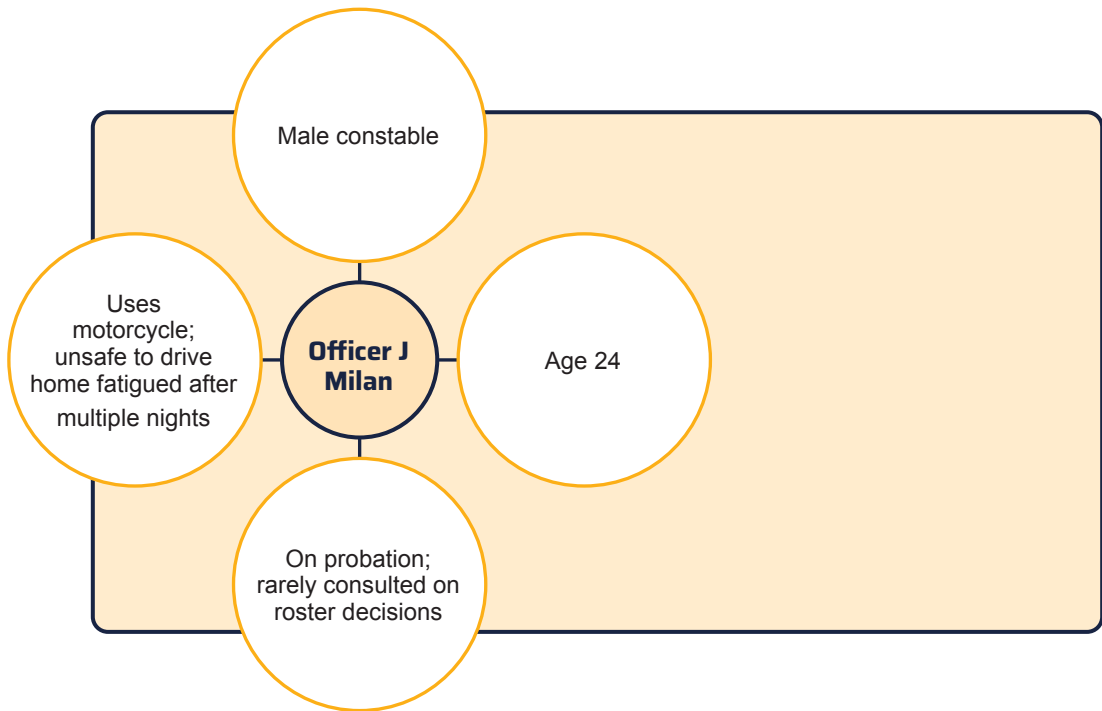
- Minimum 3 officers on each night shift (20:00–06:00)
- At least 1 licensed driver and 1 officer with first aid certification per shift
- “High risk” weekends (payday, football matches) staffed with at least 1 senior officer
- Rule from HQ: *All staff must do an equal number of night shifts each month. Requests for exemptions will be considered on ‘operational grounds’ only.*

Your team of 10 officers









Now consider:

Who is always seen as “available” for nights? Why?

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Whose constraints are treated as “personal problems” rather than institutional issues?

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Which characteristics overlap (e.g., woman + caregiver + junior rank, or minority + night travel + junior rank) and increase exposure to harm?

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Now predict who usually ends up with:

The most night shifts:

The most dangerous shifts:

The most career advancing opportunities

(weekend operations, special teams):

Which 2 officers do you think will carry the hidden burden of night shifts, and which 2 will be informally protected? Why?

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Run the “apparently fair” roster

Use the blank monthly calendar on page 17 and apply the HQ rule: everyone gets, for example, 6 night shifts.

Then ask:

- What happens to Lina when she receives 2 consecutive night shifts plus one weekend night?
- What are the implications for Omar getting multiple late shifts when buses are not running?
- How does repeated weekend night allocation affect Samir’s reputation and promotion prospects compared to Ana’s?

Note down 3 concrete harms that result from this “fair” roster. Think about institutional, personnel and individual consequences, such as institutional efficiency, performance, career satisfaction and prospects, team spirit, health, safety, family life).

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Intersectional redesign of the roster:

Redesign the roster:

- Keep operational requirements (coverage, skills)
- Aim to reduce compounded harm for those with overlapping vulnerabilities
- Protect some career enhancing nights for staff with higher risk of exposure to harm (e.g., Mara or Kofi on high profile operations with support).

Prompt:

What explicit criteria will you use to guide a fair roster (e.g., maximum consecutive nights; protected days for carers; transport supported nights for those living far away; guaranteed operational experience for junior women officers)?

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Remember, it might seem that the easiest answer to the night shift roster issue is hiring personnel with no family responsibilities, health issues or who live close to the station. But a smart leader builds mixed teams because evidence shows diverse perspectives identify blind spots faster, design safer operations, and make more legitimate decisions for all communities. Personnel who are not “problematic” do not exist: it just means that institutional policies are were designed with them in mind form the start.

APPLICATION 2.

Reviewing the use-of-force policy



The UK Independent Police Complaints Commission, examining serious use-of-force investigations, found that one in five members of the population involved had a known mental health condition, and those individuals were four times more likely to die after force had been used. They were more likely to be restrained, to experience multiple uses of force, and to face force in custody. A peer reviewed US study from 2021 found that people with serious mental illness are about 11.6 times more likely to experience police use of force than people without such a diagnosis. In that sample, the ‘mental illness gap’ in exposure to force was even larger than the Black–White gap. The US Department of Justice’s 2015 investigation of the Ferguson Police Department found that nearly 90% of documented force was used against African Americans.

Sources: IPCC Use of Force Report (UK), Laniyonu & Goff, 2021 (PMC, US DOJ Ferguson Investigation (2015).

CASE STUDY 2.

Reviewing a use of force policy through an intersectional lens

Scenario: Your national police service has a standard use of force policy. It is framed as neutral and objective, aligned with national law and international standards.

There are four key elements of the policy:

1. Officers may use force when “strictly necessary and proportionate to achieve a legitimate policing objective”.

2. Graduated force continuum (verbal commands → soft control → hard control → non lethal weapons → firearms).
3. Officers must issue a clear verbal warning “where circumstances permit”.
4. Reporting is required for all incidents where force above soft control is used.

The policy **does not** mention gender, age, disability, race or ethnicity, migration status, or socio economic status. It assumes that “citizen” and “officer” are generic categories.

The Ministry of Interior wants to review this policy after several controversial incidents in low income neighborhoods and at protests. Complaints suggest that force is used more often, and more

harshly, against some groups more than others, including young men from a particular ethnic minority, street connected children, and people with psychosocial disabilities.



Write down 3 assumptions you think are hidden in this “neutral” policy about:

Who is “dangerous”?

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Who is “cooperative”?

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Whose complaint will be believed?

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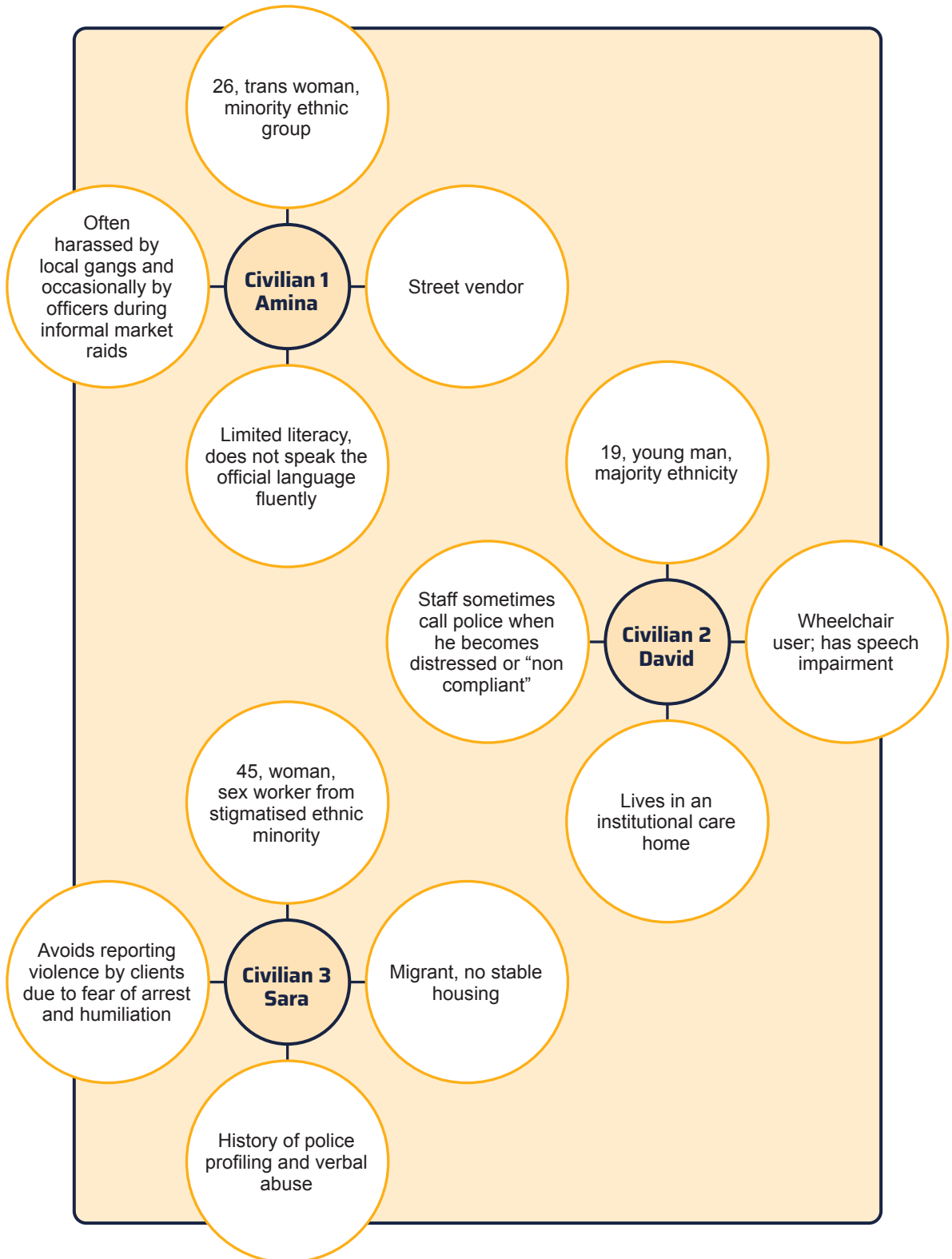
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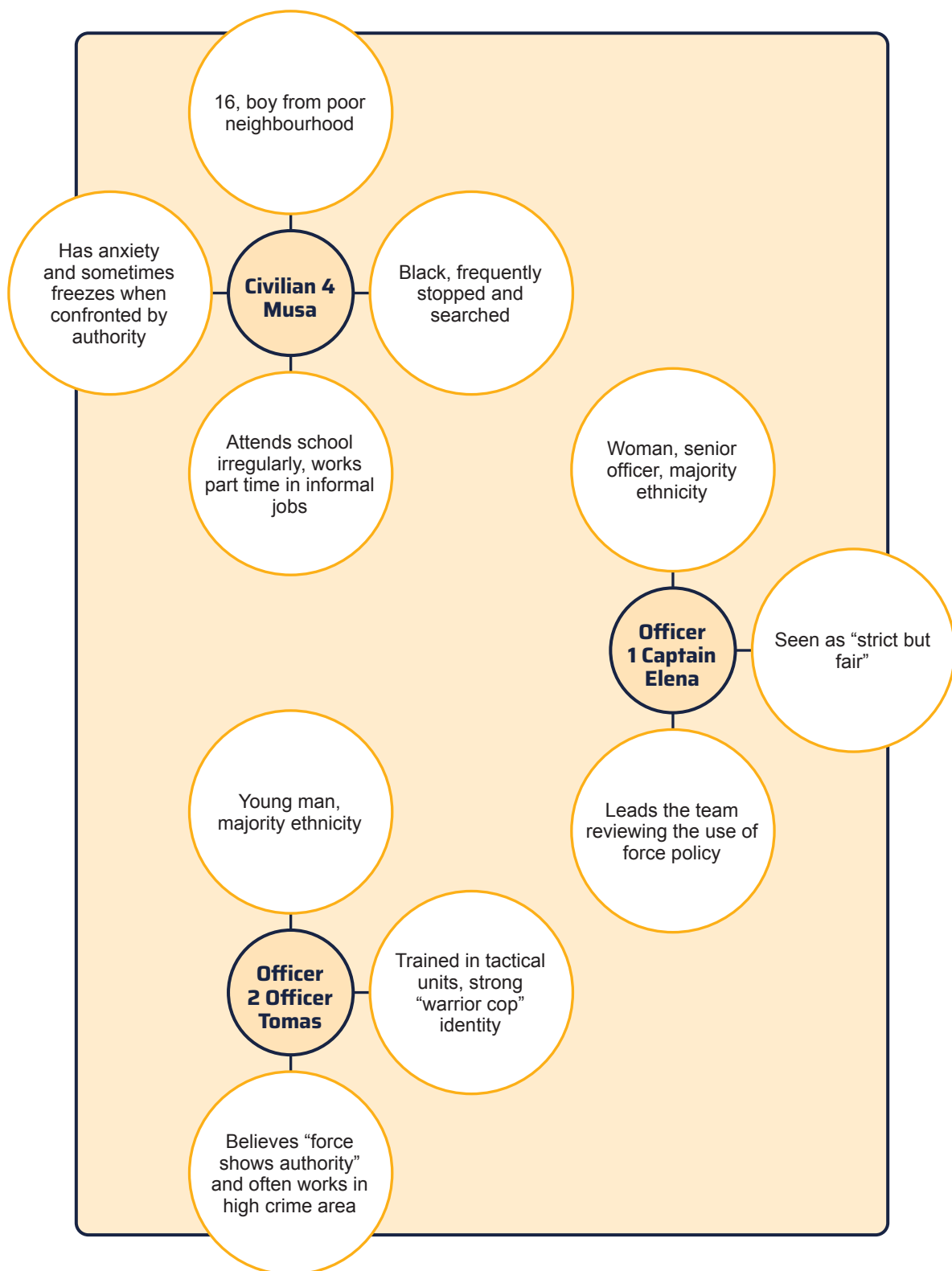
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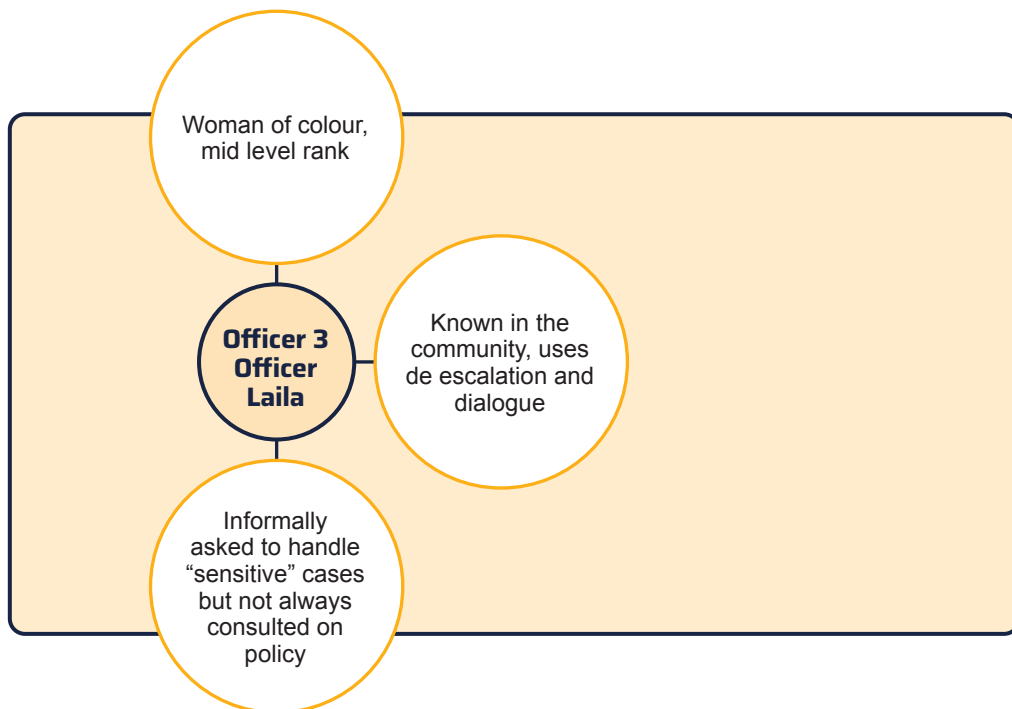
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Characters and overlapping identities







Question: how can the various identity markers related to the officers and the civilians change the likelihood and severity of force being used or justified against them?

Key incident

Police are called to disperse an informal street market blocking a main road in a low income area. Officers Tomas and Laila respond under Captain Elena's supervision.

- Amina is selling goods without a licence. When officers arrive, she tries to pack up quickly. She does not immediately understand verbal commands in the official language.
- Musa is nearby with friends. He starts recording the police operation on his phone. He is tense and does not respond to commands to "step back" quickly.
- David's care home is across the street.

The commotion triggers his anxiety; he rolls towards the noise and waves his arms. His speech is slurred and difficult to understand. Staff are not yet on scene.

- Sara is negotiating with a client in a side alley. She has previously been roughly handled in raids and, seeing the police, starts to leave quickly, avoiding eye contact.

The **existing policy** only says officers must use "necessary and proportionate" force and give a warning "where circumstances permit". It does not guide officers on how stereotypes, language barriers, disability, or gender identity might shape perceptions of "threat" or "non compliance".



Reflection

Circle one civilian above:

- How might stereotypes about their gender, race/ethnicity, class, age, disability, or occupation influence whether officers jump quickly up the force continuum?
- Whose complaint about excessive force would be taken most seriously by internal oversight or the public prosecutor? Why?



From analysis to change

Propose one small, realistic adjustment to each of the policy's key elements in the case study.

Consider:

- A wording change
- A reporting change
- A resource change

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Reflection space:

In your own setting, when you think about recent use of force issues, which intersecting identities (for example, race and class, gender and disability, age and migration status) seem most clearly linked to those who suffer the harshest outcomes?

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5 NAPRI+ – For smarter decisions

➤ **NAPRI+ is an intersectional gender analysis tool developed by DCAF. It is a simple tool to be used to assess the effect of any action, policy or program on men, women, boys and girls and persons with diverse gender identities. In other terms, it is a way for you to assess the degree to which you have included a gender and intersectionality approach in a given activity.**

You can use it in various ways:

- as a mental exercise to remind yourself of what gender-responsive and intersectional initiatives should look like
- as a way to ensure your action/policy or program is gender responsive and

intersectional, either when you are designing it, monitoring or evaluating its impact.

- as a way to explain the basics of gender and intersectionality, best used in training sessions.

The tool analyses the gendered and intersectional effects by asking analytical questions in relation to Needs, Access, Participation, Resources and Impact on different people. NAPRI+ is not merely a checklist of questions – It is a tool that will make you pause and ask smarter questions to ensure your decision is well informed.

To answer the questions for each NAPRI letter you will work on two levels:

WHAT factors contribute to higher exposure to harm (what to look for?) and **WHY** do these factors exist (the structural drivers underneath).

For all questions: remember to think about women, men, girls, boys and people of diverse gender identities as nuanced and varied groups whose experience of the action/policy/program you are working on is defined by overlapping characteristics

and the context they live in. The exact questions will vary for each situation – you can adapt them to suit your case.

Important: the point of the NAPRI+ tool is to guide you through understanding how your work impacts gender equality and for you to then act upon this information: while answering the questions, make sure to think about what you and your institution can do to address overlooked forms of inequalities. Ask yourself: how can I do better? How can my institution/team do better?



Nneeds

What are the needs of different women, men, girls, boys and people of diverse gender identities that the action/policy/programme is trying to address?

Are there hidden vulnerabilities that are overlooked by the action/policy/program?

Access

How do women, men, girls, boys and people of diverse gender identities access the rights, services, protections, or benefits provided by the action/policy/program?

Do structural inequalities or social norms related to different identities limit access for particular people?

Participation

How do women, men, girls, boys and people of diverse gender identities participate in the planning and implementation of the action/policy/program?

Are there systemic inequalities and discrimination that limit meaningful participation?

Resources

What human, financial, material, or institutional resources are required to meet the needs of women, men, girls, boys and people of diverse gender identities equitably?

Are resource allocations sensitive to intersecting vulnerabilities, ensuring no group is systematically excluded or underserved? Can resources be used to dismantle some forms of inequality or discrimination?

Impact

What is the impact of the action/policy/program on women, men, girls, boys and people of diverse gender identities?

Does the action/policy/program reduce structural inequalities and barriers, or reinforce them for some people?

Exercise: let's tie all the learning together

> Let's look at an example where NAPRI can help us draw out gendered and intersectional aspects of an apparently simple initiative.

In order to boost staff morale and enhance career progression, your institution has decided to award three officers the opportunity to attend a two-month

management training program overseas. The training will be in English.

There are no formal barriers to applying, however you fear this initiative might end up benefiting some and excluding others. You go through the NAPRI to make sure. The text in italics are hints to answer the questions – try and come up with your own responses before reading them and go ahead and complete the answers with your own insights.



Needs

What are the needs of different staff members, including women, men and people of diverse gender identities that are eligible to the training program?

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Are there hidden vulnerabilities that are overlooked by the program?

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> *The training is meant to enhance specific skills needed for career progression: a lot of female staff may need career development opportunities that help address gender gaps in specialised operational experience and skills required for promotion and leadership positions. Junior staff may need practical operational experience. Staff from historically marginalised groups may need career progression opportunities due to potential bias in promotion decisions and lack of educational opportunities. Although open to all in theory, the program should consider the needs of those who are not usually favoured due to potential biases bases on rank, gender, sexual orientation, ethnic belonging etc. Those with caregiving responsibilities and with limited financial means also risk being overlooked. Staff without stronger academic education including for example knowledge of English may be at a disadvantage.*



Access

How do different staff members access the benefits provided by the program?

Do structural inequalities or social norms related to different identities limit access for particular people?

- *A broad communication campaign would enhance access to this opportunity: Different staff members may not hear about the program due to not being in the right meetings, not being included in decision making, not forming part of social circles or mentorship alliances, or not being valued as the correct candidate for not fitting the perfect “ideal” officer picture. Employees living in remote areas may also be at a disadvantage when accessing opportunities. Discriminations based on gender, sexual orientation, ethnic belonging may also influence who has access to the opportunity. Junior staff, or those who are not perceived as potential leaders, may not be able to actually gain access to the program.*



Participation

How do different staff members participate in the planning and implementation of the program?

Are there systemic inequalities and discrimination that limit meaningful participation?

- *Important to consider who decides on the how and to whom the opportunity is communicated to and who will decide which staff members will be awarded the opportunity, the decision making should be varied and represent the institution. There should be clear and transparent decision-making process based on specific criteria that allow a variety of personnel to benefit and avoid potential favouritism and racial and gender bias.*



Resources

What human, financial, material, or institutional resources are required to meet the needs of all staff equitably?

Are resource allocations sensitive to intersecting vulnerabilities, ensuring no group is systematically excluded or underserved? Can resources be used to dismantle some forms of inequality or discrimination?

- *There should be specific financial support for covering costs for living overseas, buying required equipment, clothes, and paying for accommodation. For those who do not speak English, the institution should offer language classes in advance. Staff with caregiving responsibilities may require flexible arrangements and additional financial support. Targeting resources towards promoting the opportunity in different staff networks is also important to avoid potential exclusion.*



Impact

What is the impact of the program on different staff?

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Does the program reduce structural inequalities and barriers, or reinforce them for some people?

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- *If the selection process and deployment arrangements do not take into account different circumstances and barriers, some officers may be less able to participate despite being qualified and the “usual” “default” officers who are already on the promotion path may end up benefiting the most. If the program takes a few steps to ensure communication, criteria for selection, selection panel and resources are allocated in a targeted manner, the program may end up contributing to greater access to opportunities for women, junior staff, staff working in remote areas, staff with caregiving responsibilities who may face other barriers for career progression. The institution will therefore be able to retain a greater pool of employees with diverse skills and backgrounds.*

Bonus NAPRI exercise

➤ The NAPRI process will assist you in analysing various operational and policy related situations/decisions from a gender and intersectional perspective. The steps and questions are not exhaustive – but key points for reflection and may also help you to identify the right questions for your case.

NAPRI	WHAT - what to look for	WHY - the structural driver underneath
N Needs	Sketch 3 distinct profiles of people who will be affected by the situation / decision – not the “average user”. For each profile, ask what they need that the others do not. Look for needs that are invisible in the current situation. Profile 1: _____ Profile 2: _____ Profile 3: _____	Ask which need is treated as “normal” here and which as a “special case” – and why. Whose experience is the unspoken default? Normal: Special case:
A Access	Trace the path each profile takes to reach the service: where they start, what they need to do, when, with whom. Ask where each profile drops off the path. Profile 1: _____ Profile 2: _____ Profile 3: _____	For every drop-off point, ask what built the barrier (geography, language, cost, paperwork, fear, past treatment) and who benefits from it staying in place.

TIP: Complete with another team to have more comprehensive analysis.

NAPRI	WHAT – what to look for	WHY – the structural driver underneath
P Participation	Map who is in the room when the decision is taken: who proposes, who decides, who implements, who is only consulted. Ask who is missing, and who is present but not heard. Profile 1: Profile 2: Profile 3:	For every silent or missing voice, ask what in our culture, (use of) language, meeting practices or promotion path keeps them out. Why does “consulted” never become “deciding”?
R Resources	List the resources needed to implement the decision (people, budget, time, equipment, attention). Ask how these resources are currently distributed across units, ranks, regions and communities. Profile 1: Profile 2: Profile 3:	For any imbalance, ask why it persists and who benefits from it. Could resources be redirected deliberately to reduce a form of inequality?
I Impact	Imagine 12 months after the decision lands: Who is measurably safer, who is more exposed, who has lost trust in your institution/ you as a leader? What data would inform you of that? Profile 1: Profile 2: Profile 3:	For every negative or uneven impact, ask whether the decision leaves structural inequality untouched, reinforces it, and how the decision could dismantle the identified structural inequality, – and whether you collect the disaggregated data to know.

Caution!

If your solution to any blind spot unveiled by the NAPRI+ letter is “we will include more women” or “we will ensure there is gender balance”, you have not used the tool yet. Push for the WHY column. That is where the change happens!



Reflection question:

Reflecting on NAPRI+, where in YOUR work do you most often answer with the WHAT and not the WHY questions? Why do you stop there? What can you do about it?

6 Closing reflection & commitment

➤ **At a check-point in a multi-ethnic district, a long queue forms. A pregnant woman in the line collapses. The most junior officer present rushes forward, takes off their cap, helps her sit, calls for an ambulance in a language nobody else on the team speaks, and stays with her until she is safe. Afterwards, the commander says: “Good work, sergeant – but you also broke procedure twice.”**

Answer: The sergeant violated two institutional rules by removing their cap (breaking uniform/discipline protocol) and by speaking a different language than the one prescribed for operations or radio communications.

The officer acted on empathy and common sense, but the system had not caught up. The real fix is to align who is on the team (skills, languages, diversity) with what they are actually trained and authorised to do, so that humane, context aware responses are no longer treated as exceptions.

What could the commander and the institution have done to better support the woman in this situation? What procedural rules did the sergeant violate?

- Language and community-knowledge and cultural competence built into staffing. If the team had been recruited, trained, or rostered to include relevant local language skills (or interpretation capacity), calling an ambulance in the right language wouldn't require improvisation. It would be standard procedure.
- Care / gender-responsive emergency protocol embedded in training and SOPs.

If procedures explicitly included responding to medical emergencies (including pregnancy-related situations) with a duty-of-care approach—prioritizing immediate assistance over rigid checkpoint rules—then helping her, pausing processing, and staying with the woman would be the expected action, not a breach.



Let's end our NAPRI journey with a commitment

My commitment: When I consider who I am in this institution (my role, rank and intersecting identities) and who is often left out, what is one concrete step I commit to taking to embed NAPRI+ thinking into at least one key process I influence?





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